Catholic Migration Services (CMS) increased access to justice for thousands of low-income immigrant households in Brooklyn and Queens. Our target population, low-income immigrants, face numerous barriers to accessing justice, including language barriers, fear of deportation, unfamiliarity with the U.S. legal system, and inability to pay legal fees. During the pandemic, these barriers were heightened. We worked with our clients to overcome these barriers by providing multi-lingual free legal services including holding virtual confidential client meetings when the pandemic made in-person meetings near possible. We also significantly increased our community education activities to reach our target population and inform them of their rights. Our accomplishments include:

- Closed 2086 cases which benefitted approximately 4057 individuals;
- Conducted 2691 new intakes; in our program priority areas of immigration, housing, and employment;
- Helped 85 young immigrants renew DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), thereby preventing their removal from the US and enabling them to work lawfully;
- Helped 67 immigrants become naturalized U.S. citizens in addition to filing 101 new naturalization applications;
- Assisted 33 immigrants to adjust their legal status and 14 immigrants to seek asylum thus keeping families intact for some or ensuring the personal safety of others;
- Defended 45 immigrants in their removal proceedings;
- Prevented 4 evictions, delayed the eviction of an additional 5 households, and obtained access to their apartment for 3 other households after the end of the eviction moratoria;
- Helped 5 workers address wrongful discharges, among other accomplishments.

Population Served: Low Income Immigrant Populations

Area Served: Kings and Queens Counties

Total IOLA Grant: $110,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 35
- Lawyers: 17
- Paralegals: 9
- Other Staff: 9
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Immigration:
J originally came to the US from Mexico over 30 years ago. He married, had three daughters, and worked at an autobody shop for decades with hopes that he would one day gain legal status in the U.S. When CMS met the family, we learned that J’s 18-year-old U.S. Citizen daughter, Jess had joined the Marine Corps after high school graduation. Serving her country abroad, Jess was concerned that her parents were at risk of deportation because they had no legal status in the U.S. She worried who would care for her two younger sisters, one of whom is epileptic. We informed J that because of his daughter’s service in the Marines, we could apply for “Parole in Place” - a program that would legally admit them to the US. Jess, as a US citizen, could petition for her parents to receive green cards. Finally, in September of 2021, we were able to file the necessary petitions and applications and José is now a legal permanent resident. His wife’s application is in process.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Housing:
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, low-income New York City communities endured financial and other hardships which were exacerbated by their poor living conditions. During this pandemic, CMS community organizers supported Queens tenant associations in their efforts to improve their living conditions. At 94-25 57th, for example, our organizers helped the tenants compel their landlord to address leaks, broken windows, and roach and rat infestations. When their landlord responded with harassment, CMS organizers were there to stand by the tenants’ side and ensure the harassment ended.

Other Services: Overview

Community legal education. We provided know-your-rights education through livestreamed videos, prerecorded videos, fact sheets, Zoom meetings, and other means. The goals of our community education activities are to inform low-income immigrants, tenants, and workers of their rights and the availability of our services to help them enforce those rights. While the pandemic limited the scope and type of Other Legal Related Services that we conducted in past year, we still reached 6,147 people using our various community education methods including some in-person outreach with community-based organizations.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
| :------------------ | :------------------ |
| Community Legal Education | 6,147 |
| Pro Se Assistance | 46 |

6,193 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

CMS expanded use of technology that was initially in response to COVID-19 challenges continued in this fiscal year. Staff have become more adept as using the technology need to provide legal services while working from home. This has gradual increased our abilities to serve clients. We also continue our efforts to increase our target population’s access to our services by:

- Continuing to use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams videoconferencing for client meetings, internal meetings and conferences;
- Providing legal consultations and other legal services through telephone, Skype, Facetime, and similar means; and
- Providing KYR presentations via livestreaming and videos on our Facebook page and the Facebook pages of collaborators.

We currently are exploring updating our primary case management system, Legal Server, to allows us to automate client forms and other documents/

Other Services: Trainings

We provide ongoing internal training to all staff. Our managing attorneys provide ongoing training to program staff regarding legal developments. The immigration program provides training at biweekly meetings due to the many changes in immigration law. In response to the many regulatory and administrative changes over the past few years, our housing and employment programs provide training as needed on topics such as the eviction moratoria, the emergency rental assistance program and enhanced unemployment insurance benefits. These trainings are supplemented by ongoing updates sent via email and reviewed at later meetings. These regular updates include practice advisories from collaborating legal services, proposed rule changes, impactful legal decisions, and scheduled CLEs.

We provide internal training to new staff. All new program hires receive training and reference materials on substantive law and procedure in their program area. They also receive training on our case management systems. This initial training is followed by close supervision by supervising attorneys and coupled with regular one-on-one check-ins between program manager and staff member.

Our staff have participated in external trainings provided by Catholic Legal Immigration Network, New York Immigration Coalition, Immigrant Defense Project, Immigration Advocates Network, The Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development, New York Employment Lawyers Association, PLI Institute, and many other bar associations, collaborators, and others.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Catholic Migration Services has an extensive network of pro bono attorneys, law student and other volunteers. We recruit through our collaborators such as NYPLI, existing service programs, OCA’s Attorney Emeritus Program, our former employee network, and our website.

Twenty-three attorneys provided pro bono services to CMS clients during the past year including four private attorneys who co-counseled a workers’ rights case which was one of our greatest recent victories. Supervising Attorney Alice Davis and four co-counsels from Wilmer Hale, LLC filed a federal suit on behalf of three workers at a Flushing restaurant. Our clients worked long hours, were paid below the minimum wage, and were never compensated with overtime pay. After an extended litigation that included their employer filing for bankruptcy to avoid paying the workers, the workers recovered $40,000 in settlement of their claims. In addition, although we were only able to hold one naturalization workshop, 11 pro bono attorneys participated.

One of our housing pro bono attorney provided extensive service in a landlord harassment case where the landlord removed and refusing to reinstall a balcony screen that the prior landlord had authorized the tenant to install and had been in place for 20 years. The hearings regarding the tenant's balcony screen claim ended in 12/21. The court issued a decision/order in favor of our client directing the landlord to reinstall a balcony screen within 35 days; assessed the landlord a fine of $2,000 and directed the landlord to pay the tenant $1,000.

All our programs had law school interns, all ten of whom provided legal services under the supervision of our program staff. In Summer 2021, our removal defense team hosted four law interns who assisted with cases for 8 – 10 weeks. Their summer internship launched with an intensive in-house training on asylum law and special immigrant juvenile visas. A college student also volunteered 1-2 days per week in February and March 2022 to assist with research and mailings.

23 Attorneys volunteered 315 hours

11 Law Students volunteered 2,075 hours

4 Other Volunteers volunteered 5,040 hours
**Significant Collaborations**

- We are a member of the LEAP Coalition, which links 18 legal services providers in initiatives to increase the visibility of our work, share best practices, and develop collaborative trainings and other programming to improve the quality and reach of civil legal services for the poor.

- We belong to Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a team of six civil legal services providers and various immigrant-based CBOs. Through this collaboration, the legal services providers provide coordinated non-redundant legal services to underserved immigrant groups. The immigrant-based CBOs include African Communities Together; Chinese Staff & Workers’ Association; Damayan Migrant Workers; and DRUM – Desis Rising Up and Moving.

- We are an active participant in Stabilizing New York Coalition (SNYC), a citywide coalition of civil legal services providers that combats the loss of affordable housing at the hands of predatory equity companies. It organizes low-income tenants in predatory equity buildings to stop eviction and harassment by landlords. Through this collaboration and others, we were able to inform other civil legal services providers of the recent legal successes and thus help them in their fight on the same legal issue.

- Together with New York Lawyers for Public Interest, we collaborate with various private law firms on naturalization application assistance. Due to the pandemic, we paused the workshop, but this March resumed with a hybrid workshop where we met with 26 clients including five who came into our office. We continue to stay in touch with attorneys from private law firms who participated in the workshops in the past and -recently provided training via Zoom to AIG attorneys.

- Catholic Migration Services is very active in the Right to Counsel Coalition which is made up of NYC tenant organizing groups, tenant advocates, law schools and other legal services organizations who work together to ensure safe and affordable housing for all New Yorkers. We have led the organizing work in Queens by hosting the Borough-wide Town Hall, participating in hearings at City Hall and taking active part in other activities and actions. This work has developed the leadership skills of many of our tenant partner

- LaGuardia Community College (LGCC) continues its collaboration with CMS to provide integrated citizenship services to Legal Permanent Residents. During the pandemic, we also provided KYR community education to LGCC staff and students about our services via Zoom.
Significant Collaborations

- AIG has been a partner throughout the pandemic, volunteering attorneys to complete applications. Starting in February 2022, we expanded the scope of our partnership, adding volunteer interpretation/translation services, and assistance with TPS applications.

- Hebrew Free Loan Society provides interest-free loans to our naturalization clients for USCIS application fees. Our collaboration continues to be highly successful in helping LPRs obtain the funding they need to naturalize.

- Moving Forward program is a collaboration between Catholic Charities Brooklyn & Queens and Catholic Migration Services which supports immigrant families who have experienced separation or who are at risk of separation due to immigration enforcement.

- New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) and Catholic Migration Services continue to collaborate to provide workers’ rights legal services to low-income immigrant workers.

- We collaborate with National Domestic Workers Alliance and National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, both of which are workers’ rights organizations.

- Queens Public Library invited us to upload know-your-rights presentations on their Facebook page. These livestreamed presentations and videos have enabled us to broaden our outreach and provide much needed KYR community education to Queens.

- We collaborate with parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn to bring KYR education and legal services to low-income immigrants.

Impact Cases

**Bernandez v. Alternate Staffing**
This case is a class action case with approximate 200 members. CMS represents the plaintiffs, a group of home attendants who were required to work multiple 24 hours shifts each week but paid for only thirteen hours per day and not paid overtime premiums despite work weeks of 100 hours or more. We have entered into settlement negotiations with the staffing agency.
Sources of Funding

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