For 43 years, Human Rights First has provided free legal representation to indigent asylum seekers who come to the United States fleeing persecution, torture, and threats of death. If forced to return home, all face certain danger. And so, they endeavor to navigate the asylum process in the United States. But all too often, they do so alone. Having a lawyer greatly increases the odds of winning asylum or other relief—in 2021, only 19% of unrepresented asylum seekers secured legal protection in immigration courts, as opposed to 67% of represented asylum seekers, according to the Transnational Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC). This is because the process is long, complex, and predisposed to denying legal protection. A system with death penalty-like implications, burdened by delay, thus, yields traffic court-like consideration in a legally-complex environment. The deck is stacked against asylum seekers.

Thanks to the generous support of the Interest on Lawyer Account Fund, we were able to continue our life-saving work in the New York area despite challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. From April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, we closed 230 cases falling under this grant, benefiting 259 individuals. Almost half of these—106 cases benefiting 115 individuals—were successful applications for employment authorization. During this period, we won asylum in 28 cases in New York, benefiting 45 asylum seekers and their family members. We obtained lawful permanent resident status (“green cards”) for 50 individuals and assisted with filing many new applications for lawful permanent resident status. Two New York-based clients became U.S. citizens during this grant year. We were also able to terminate or administratively close removal proceedings of 28 individuals, 2 most of whom were Special Immigrant Juveniles whom we helped to file for adjustment of status.

In addition, we provided community legal education services to 474 people, and legal and social services referrals to 796 individuals. And we conducted virtual trainings to equip volunteer lawyers with the skills to provide pro bono representation to our clients. During this period, we provided ongoing mentoring to 842 pro bono attorneys working on asylum cases referred by Human Rights First.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Immigration:
Mr. N, a native of Tibet, suffered physical and psychological harm at the hands of Chinese authorities because of his ethnicity, actual and imputed political opinion, and religion. While on a religious pilgrimage in Tibet, Mr. N was arrested, interrogated, beaten, and threatened by Chinese police. As a Tibetan Buddhist monk, he was forced to attend weekly political “re-education” camps and renounce his core beliefs, including his belief in the Dalai Lama, which he experienced as torture. After participating in a peaceful pro-Tibetan demonstration which was violently suppressed by the police, Mr. N was forced to go into hiding before managing to flee to the U.S. with fake papers via Nepal and India. Human Rights First placed Mr. N’s case with a pro bono team that worked diligently to gather evidence of Mr. N’s identity and past harm and to overcome the charge that Mr. N had firmly resettled in India. An immigration judge granted Mr. N asylum.

Ms. G fled Honduras with her young daughter after Ms. G had suffered years of extreme violence at the hands of her ex-partner, a suspected gang member, from whom the Honduran government failed to protect her. Ms. G is still struggling with PTSD, major depressive disorder, and a likely traumatic brain injury directly resulting from the violence. For all these reasons, Ms. G found it very difficult to testify at her first individual hearing in immigration court, and made several statements that were inconsistent with her previously filed declaration. Another hearing was scheduled for a few months later but cancelled at the last moment and endless delays followed. Luckily, Ms. G found Human Rights First in the meantime, and her pro bono attorneys gathered, filed compelling evidence, and prepped Ms. G for the hearing. Volunteer attorneys also filed a SIJS-based adjustment application for Ms. G’s daughter, and convinced DHS to join in a motion to sever and dismiss removal proceedings against her. Ms. G was granted asylum, she can now safely stay in the US and focus on healing.
Other Services: Overview

We aim to empower asylum seekers by providing them with know-your-rights information, basics of asylum law, and important policy changes. We committed to providing this service to 500 people during our two-year IOLA grant. From April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, we served a total of 474 people.

Until mid-March 2020, we offered weekly walk-in hours at our New York office during which we screened potential clients regarding their immigration legal needs and asylum eligibility. During each of those screenings, we provided all participants with know-your-rights information relevant to their immigration status. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we have been conducting screenings and providing Know-Your-Rights information via telephone since March 2020.

Typically, twice per year, we hold asylum law trainings, which non-lawyers and community volunteers often attend. Attendees disseminate this information within the community. During this grant year, we conducted these trainings virtually.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|:---:|:---:|
| Community Legal Education | 474 |

474 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

To secure legal assistance for as many asylum seekers as possible, our NYC-based Refugee Representation team has spent years cultivating an extensive pro bono network with law firms, corporations, and law school clinics in New York and New Jersey. Through our pro bono mentorship model, our small team leverages its asylum expertise into big results by tapping the legal acumen of our pro bono network.

During the first grant year, a total of 842 pro bono attorneys were enrolled as volunteers in our New York Refugee Representation program. Of those, 639 pro bono attorneys actively worked on cases referred by Human Rights First.

We offer free asylum law trainings twice per year—typically in June and October—for attorneys and community leaders in both New York and New Jersey. Participants often contact us after the training and express willingness to take on a case. During this grant year, all our trainings were virtual. We also circulate an anonymized available case summary email to match clients whose cases we vetted and accepted into our program with pro bono counsel. We send these case-offer emails to pro bono coordinators at all of our partner firms (who disseminate internally) and to all volunteer attorneys who requested inclusion on our recipient list.

Once a pro bono team accepts a case, we assign them a Human Rights First mentoring attorney and legal services coordinator to guide them through the representation process. That Human Rights First team conducts an initial strategy call with the pro bono team and thereafter provides ongoing mentorship, support, and guidance. In doing so, we empower pro bono attorneys to become exceptional asylum advocates for our clients.

While our in-house team does tremendous direct work on these cases, our largest impact comes from mentoring the hundreds of attorneys with whom we partner on our cases throughout the New York metropolitan area.

842 Attorneys volunteered 22,792.58 hours

2 Law Students volunteered 300 hours

6 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,500 hours
Significant Collaborations

To secure legal assistance for as many asylum seekers as possible, our New York City-based Refugee Representation team has spent years cultivating an extensive pro bono network with law firms, corporations, and law school clinics in New York and New Jersey. Their resources and capacity act as a force-multiplier, significantly increasing our ability to provide quality representation to asylum seekers. During the first grant year, a total of 842 pro bono attorneys were enrolled as volunteers in our New York Refugee Representation program. Of those, 639 pro bono attorneys actively worked on cases referred by Human Rights First.

On a national level, we participate in coordinating the efforts of groups focused on improving and supporting pro bono representation of asylum seekers, such as the American Bar Association, American Immigration Lawyers Association, and the Association of Pro Bono Counsel. We are also engaged in the Study Group on Immigrant Representation in New York, formerly led by Chief Judge Robert Katzmann of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. This study group led to the creation of the New York Immigration Family Unity Project. In addition to working with faith-based and other resettlement organizations that are members of Refugee Council USA, Human Rights First coordinates the advocacy efforts of a growing coalition of organizations and advocates across the country working to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

We also work with advocates in the larger immigration and human rights communities, including We Are All America, to educate and mobilize them in response to attacks against refugees and asylum seekers. During this grant year, we were most actively involved in the Immigrant Advocates Response, which is made up of over 80 non-profit organizations providing or supporting legal services for New York’s immigrant communities. We are also members of ICARE.

Sources of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>$604,167</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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- **Foundations** contribute 74% of the total funding.
- **City** contributes 14%.
- **IOLA** contributes 9%.
- **Other** contributes 3%.