Overview of Achievements

Major Achievements: The Immigration Legal Services (ILS) Program at Journey’s End Refugee Services continues to dedicate our practice to U.S.-based immigration law, operating from four offices serving low-income immigrants across Upstate New York. This year, we closed 1154 cases, benefiting 1368 individuals; provided legal education to 1319 community members; provided 90 individuals with pro se assistance; and referred 193 individuals for appropriate services. A total of 19 volunteers helped us meet these critical needs. Significant efforts were made to meet the legal needs of Afghan arrivals after the 2021 evacuation.

Primary Target Population: Our primary target population remains immigrants and their families residing in the twenty-two counties we serve whose incomes are below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Included in our target population are refugees, asylees, pending asylees, immigrants with temporary status, SIVs (immigrants with Special Immigrant Visas), undocumented immigrants, lawful permanent residents (green card holders), naturalized U.S. citizens – and in 2021, Afghan evacuees paroled into the U.S. This year, we continued to assist members of impacted immigrant communities as they navigated still rapidly changing immigration policies. We focused efforts on immigrants who cannot afford access to counsel, cases of pressing humanitarian concern, and cases where attorney advocacy would significant impact case outcome.

Dollar or other benefits realized: Benefits from our services were substantial. This year, our ILS Program staff helped qualifying individuals seek: protection from persecution (asylum and withholding of removal); protection from torture; evacuation from humanitarian crises; temporary reprieve from returning to a country where conditions are unsafe; legal permanent resident status; and naturalization in order to become U.S. Citizens. Program staff petitioned for our clients’ overseas spouses, children, parents, and siblings in order to reunite their family units in the U.S. Many clients realized the additional benefit of work authorization due to their change in status, often crucial to obtaining sustainable employment, affording safe housing, and supporting a family. Clients were assisted in obtaining fee waivers where expensive government fees applied.

Population Served: Low Income Immigrants and Refugees

Area Served: Western Region of New York State

Total IOLA Grant: $75,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 22.5
- Lawyers: 13.75
- Paralegals: 2
- Other: 6.75
Direct Legal Services: Cases

The ILS Program provides direct immigration representation in proceedings before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for immigration benefits, and before Immigration Court where ILS Program attorneys defend immigrants in removal (deportation) proceedings.

Typical Case—
**Immigration, Humanitarian Parole:**
When the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, we filed humanitarian parole applications for the parents and siblings of a U.S. Citizen who had been born in Afghanistan and had worked with a U.S. law enforcement agency. In retaliation, his brother was killed and his father attacked. The Taliban released his brother’s murderer from prison, and the family received death threats. As the U.S. government moved to deny the majority of these applications, the ILS Program accepted the case for appeal when the client discovered those targeting his family were being led by a notorious crime leader who now ranked high with the Taliban. We worked with the U.S. government agency to obtain affidavits describing the client's assistance, provided evidence of threats including video footage, and provided news articles describing the atrocities of the crime leader. We also obtained an affidavit from a former military intelligence officer regarding the severe danger the client's family faced. Based on this evidence, our motion to reopen was approved, and our client has another opportunity to succeed in his application that could save his family members’ lives.
Other Services: Overview

In addition to direct representation on immigration cases, we also provided community legal education, legal clinics, legal consultation days, and pro se assistance. At community legal education events, we presented to community members—immigrants, civically engaged non-immigrants, social workers, students, DOJ Accredited Representatives, Pro Bono attorneys, and more at information sessions and trainings on topics including: New York State’s New Marijuana Law and Immigration; Asylum Basics for Afghan Parolees; Family Based Immigration; Adjustment of Status and Consular Processing; Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haiti; Humanitarian Parole for Afghans; Local Efforts for Afghan Evacuees and Parolees; Afghan Resettlement Issues and Concerns; Basics of Asylum and Interpreter Sensitivity; Immigration Protections for Children; Presenting Conclusions in Forensic Evaluations & Affidavits for Asylum Seekers; Immigration Under the Biden Administration; Vaccination and Immigration Law; Changes to Federal Immigration Policies; Constitutional Rights in Criminal and Immigration Proceedings; Rights When Stopped by ICE or Local Law Enforcement; Deportable Crimes; Applying for and Deriving U.S. Citizenship; Rights During an Immigration Raid or Criminal Arrest; and more. Pro Bono attorneys were trained on representing Afghan asylum seekers in immigration proceedings.

We also provided legal clinics and legal consultation days where individuals received an attorney’s counsel or referral – held weekly at our Buffalo office and monthly at Jericho Road, Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga, Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester, and the American Civic Association in Binghamton.

Our attorneys provided pro se assistance to individuals seeking adjustment of status, naturalization, employment authorization, family reunification, and asylum. After advising pro se applicants of the limited scope of assistance, our attorneys reviewed applications, explained any complicating issues, assisted in drafting addenda/cover letters, and advised on required evidence, filing deadlines, and submission protocol. This year, pro se efforts were expanded to assist Afghan evacuees in their asylum proceedings (with pro se clinics scheduled for May and June 2022, before most 1-year asylum deadlines).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
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1,409 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Journey’s End utilized Cerenade’s eImmigration platform, a cloud-based data-tracking software program, to record, organize and report all services provided by the ILS Program. The Cerenade software provided a platform for case management for each client and legal matter, generated case reports and client questionnaires, tracked USCIS and Department of State processing times, and was compatible with electronic filing. Cerenade employs multiple layers of security to ensure client data is confidential and secure. All data traveling between the platform’s servers and the computer where that information is being accessed is encrypted. In addition to utilizing this highly effective and comprehensive case and data management tool, we also continued utilization of AILALink and Westlaw, significantly effective database subscriptions available to immigration practitioners.

Other Services: Trainings

This year, significant and mandatory training efforts focused on understanding trauma, trauma-informed care, and trauma stewardship for all staff of the ILS Program. Attendant to the needs of trauma-affected immigrant populations, program staff were trained on bringing cultural sensitivity and trauma consciousness to their practice of immigration law. This included the study and understanding of trauma as an experience that overwhelms normal systems of functioning that can impact cognitive processing, memory, behavior, and sense of self. All staff were trained on recognizing the signs of trauma, developing appropriate responses, communicating compassionately, and developing trust. Listening meaningfully to someone’s experience is a pillar of our daily work, and regular effort surrounds avoiding judgment and potential retraumatization of clients. Staff were trained to access Crisis Services, the International Institute’s Survivor Support Program, and the Survivor of Torture Program in instances where clients needed immediate support during appointments, or throughout the course of the professional relationship. Specifically this year, ILS Program staff underwent specialized training in trauma stewardship – a sustainable and compassionate approach to recognizing someone else’s trauma, being present with their pain, but managing our own trauma exposure response as advocates in challenging roles. Training around these matters will be prioritized on an ongoing basis for all new and current staff. Several additional trainings in immigration law and social service topics were made mandatory for ILS Program staff, as well as mandatory agency-wide trainings that included topics in Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence, Cybersecurity Awareness, Preventing and Managing Secondary Trauma, Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue, as well as Buffalo Niagara Partnership’s Diversity & Inclusion Virtual Learning Series on unconscious bias, microaggression, and allyship. Leadership staff were trained on Supervisor Responsibilities & Complaint Procedures.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Traditionally, we recruit volunteers and interns through our website, university job postings, and multiple legal service career events at the University at Buffalo Law School. This year, we hosted 4 volunteer attorneys, 14 law students, and 1 undergraduate intern. To equip interns and volunteers for service, we substantially invest through internship orientation, substantive training on immigration law, and opportunities to shadow staff. Once trained, volunteers and interns are assigned tasks including assisting with intakes, evidence collection, assembly of filings, and file management. Interns and volunteers assist with direct representation cases under the guidance and close supervision of assigned Staff Attorneys.

This reporting period, we were again selected for student placement with the New York State Pro Bono Scholars Program. Our designated full-time third-year law student was an invaluable asset to the ILS Program, and was specifically assigned work on the APA resettlement and legal project. Under the supervision of an attorney, she helped coordinate intakes across the agency for Afghan arrivals, as well as the intakes of resettlement partner agency Catholic Charities of Buffalo. She assisted attorneys on the direct representation of many of these cases, including asylum, family reunification, and Special Immigrant Visas. Her direct casework specifically included researching relevant case law, organizing exhibits for evidentiary filings, and preparing extensive reports on country conditions as they related to clients’ claims for immigration relief. She is actively involved in the planning of several pro se legal clinics and referrals to pro bono attorneys for cases that cannot be accepted directly due to capacity restraints.

This year, additional volunteer training efforts were made to recruit and train Pro Bono attorneys to accept referrals of Afghan asylum cases from Journey’s End, including experienced business immigration attorneys at Berardi Immigration Law in Buffalo.

4 Attorneys volunteered 47 hours

14 Law Students volunteered 2,451 hours

1 Other Volunteer volunteered 30 hours
Significant Collaborations

Collaborations are among our most valuable resources, helping us holistically address client needs through our own services and those of our partners. Our most significant collaborations come through our continued designation as NYS Office for New Americans Legal Counsel for Upstate New York, and in that capacity, our work with ONA Opportunity Centers. Partnerships under this project are maintained across Western New York, the Finger Lakes, and the Southern Tier, and include American Civic Association in Binghamton (physical location of our Southern Tier office); Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester (physical location of our Finger Lakes office); Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga in Ithaca; and Buffalo-based Jericho Road projects Hope Refugee Drop-In Center and VIVE (an asylum shelter and physical location of our second Buffalo office). Our collaborative efforts with these partners include: the provision of technical legal assistance; program development; mentoring of DOJ Accredited Representatives; annual review of naturalization policies and procedures; monthly legal consultation days; pro se assistance; community information and Know Your Rights (KYR) programming; intakes on cases for potential direct representation; and ongoing availability for assistance with immigration inquiries. By these efforts, we expand access to immigration legal services from qualified representatives in our service area.

In addition to these efforts, we have also continued our commitment to local partners, including the Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) where we provide monthly legal clinics, Justice for Migrant Families, and the Survivors of Torture Program, where we provide survivors of torture with legal representation, case management, mental health services, and medical and forensic evaluations in partnership with Jewish Family Services (JFS), and University at Buffalo Family Medicine. Most recently, we expanded and relied heavily on the our partnership with and role in Western New York Refugee and Asylee Consortium (WNYRAC), a partnership with Catholic Charities of Buffalo, Jericho Road, International Institute of Buffalo, and JFS where our “Buffalo United for Afghan Evacuees” collaboration focused on providing services and support for the city’s 500 Afghan evacuees.

Sources of Funding

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State 82%
IOLA 7%
Foundations 2%
Other 5%
Federal 4%