In this grant period, of April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022, Neighbors Link Community Law Practice (NLCLP) closed 461 cases, directly benefitting 826 people (clients and their family members). Neighbors Link Community Law Practice, the legal department of Neighbors Link that is housed in Ossining, NY (Westchester County), provides direct representation, community legal education, consultation and legal advocacy for low-income immigrants throughout the lower- and mid- Hudson Valley regions.

Members of the low-income immigrant population we serve find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position; a lack of English-language skills and low levels of literacy can make scams by unqualified lawyers more likely and living on a low income makes it impossible to afford costly legal fees required by for-profit immigration lawyers. The legal services this population seeks can be confusing at best and disastrous for one’s life and wellbeing at the worst. Affordable, trustworthy and language-accommodating services are essential to avoid detention or deportation for these individuals. Therefore, the benefit of the services to NLCLP clients that improve access to justice include: A) Low or no cost services for those who are living in poverty; B) Services that accommodate language needs and effectively overcome communication barriers; C) Trustworthy services from a reputable source with a client’s best interest at the center of the work increases the likelihood of favorable case completion.

Additionally, because we are a not-for-profit organization serving the needs of the low-income immigrant community, we are able to provide filing fee waivers, which help low-income clients save money. During this grant period, clients successfully obtained $20,595 in immigration filing fee waivers.

Constantly improving NLCLP’s capacity to deliver services is a priority so that we can better meet the needs of the community we serve. This year, we: increased capacity by hiring two additional immigration attorneys to our staff; implemented a weekly telephone-based 12-hour legal helpline; entered a contract with GLOBO interpretation and translation services; and expanded our use of secure online formats to aid in the delivery of services and increase access to justice.

**Population Served:** Low-Income Immigrant Population

**Area Served:** Westchester County

**Total IOLA Grant:** $75,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**
- Total Staff: 10.6
- Lawyers: 6
- Paralegals: 4
- Other: 0.6
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Neighbors Link Community Law Practice is an immigration law practice that provides critically important legal services that are the difference between a family staying together or being broken apart with detention or deportation. NLCLP provides high-quality, free immigration legal services to clients such as “Ana” and Nilsa:

Nilsa’s Story: (publicly shared story in news article and consented to sharing name) Nilisa came to the U.S. from Paraguay in August 2011. She moved to Westchester County in 2013 and began spending time at the local library, where she learned about Neighbors Link and its various program offerings. She began attending Neighbors Link English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and other programs in 2014. When Nilisa came to America, she had left her mother behind in Paraguay and after her first trip here, she had to wait 5 years before she could return to Paraguay to visit her mother. Upon her return to the U.S., she spent the following 5 years pursuing citizenship through the help of Neighbors Link Community Law Practice. After a 10-year journey, in November 2021, Nilisa had her Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States, officially granting her citizenship. She says she now plans to apply for a U.S. passport so that she can travel back to Paraguay to visit with her mother again.
Ana’s Story: (client name changed for privacy) In Guatemala, Ana and her husband opened a small bakery to support their family, but quickly began receiving threats from local gangs demanding payment. They did not pay the ransom and soon after that, Ana’s husband was murdered by a known gang member. She tried to find other ways to support her young children but eventually had to reopen her bakery. Once again, she received threats and demands for payment from gangs. Fearing for her life, Ana fled with her youngest son but was forced to leave her daughters with her parents in Guatemala.

Once she arrived in the U.S., Ana applied for asylum status for herself and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) for her son. Ana’s asylum application was denied in 2018 and both were ordered deported. During the Trump administration, regulations were changed so that very few people were eligible for asylum protection, even if they were fleeing violence and persecution. NLCLP appealed that decision. Since then, the Central American Minor Refugee Program (CAM) has been reinstated by the Biden administration. This program provides certain children and family members from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras an opportunity to apply for refugee status and possible resettlement in the U.S. With help from NLCLP, Ana applied for the CAM program for her two daughters.

In 2022, Ana’s asylum appeal was decided, her removal order was reopened and an immigration judge can now redetermine her ability to seek protection from the US government. Additionally, her son’s deportation order was removed and he can move forward with obtaining his green card through the SIJS program. NLCLP will continue to work with Ana so that eventually her family can be reunited and safe.

Other Services: Overview

In addition to direct legal services, NLCLP works to disseminate accurate and current immigration legal information to the community through various community legal education efforts. In this grant period of April 1, 2021 though March 31, 2022, we served a total of 6,621 individuals through legal education presentations of various formats, some of which were presentations given to audiences convened through community groups and some of which were presented directly to our constituents. We served 2,732 individuals in interactive online presentations; these took place in online forums such as through Facebook Live educational events and/or Zoom presentations. We served an additional 3,740 individuals in pre-recorded/static online content; this content included videos that we pre-recorded and posted through our YouTube page and then shared widely across our social media platforms.
Other Services: Overview

Lastly, we served an additional 149 individuals through in-person, face-to-face community legal education events. The COVID-19 pandemic has made online-based community legal education more common, but with the decrease in case numbers, we are making sure to provide education opportunities in person again. At our community legal education events, our attorneys dispense accurate information on immigration law and policy. In recognizing that different populations have varying needs and interests, we have developed specialized Know Your Rights workshops. Examples include: Notario Fraud, Driving While Intoxicated, Driver’s Licenses/Green Light Law, and Public Charge. Neighbors Link also has experience providing Know Your Rights Train-the-Trainer workshops, where we train school staff and community leaders on the rights of new Americans in their communities.

NLCLP has provided pro se assistance to 17 individuals through naturalization pro bono clinics in this grant year. We benefit from pro bono work donated to us by three large, for-profit law firms with immigration practices: Davis Polk & Wardwell, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. 44 attorneys have volunteered their time, resulting in 1,277 volunteer hours.

Independent of the 17 cases through our pro bono clinics, we also had 6 pro se applications/motions.

<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
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6,644 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

The most significant technological innovations we have made to the work of NLCLP during this grant period include the Helpline, our contract with GOLBO, and our increased utilization of the Zoom and WhatsApp platforms. The 12-hour telephone-based Helpline, which runs weekly on Thursday from 8am to 8pm, has drastically improved NLCLP’s ability to perform screenings for potential clients. Our new contract with GLOBO allows NLCLP staff and clients to access on-demand interpretation and translation services via audio and visual formats in over 250 languages. This allows us to ensure that we can always meet the language needs of our clients, especially as we see more clients from Haiti, Afghanistan and soon Ukraine. Our use of Zoom and WhatsApp has been incredibly effective at improving communication with clients. Depending on the transportation challenges and/or other needs of our clients, we can meet virtually via Zoom to discuss case matters face-to-face in a secure platform, just as if we were sitting with them in an office. WhatsApp has become a tool for communicating with clients about upcoming appointments and reminders about documentation they should gather and bring with them.

Other Services: Trainings

Neighbors Link’s goal is to provide opportunities for professional development for all staff members to encourage them to explore personal growth and to enable them to perform their responsibilities at Neighbors Link as effectively as possible. With each new hire to NLCLP, we assess the level of the employee’s prior experience with immigration law and tailor training to their specific background. For basic immigration law training, we utilize programming provided by legal services nonprofits such as the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) Immigrant Concerns Training Institute, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC). We also cover the cost of participation in annual conferences based upon the employee’s work and professional development interests. These include the American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual Conference and the New York Law School Annual Conference. Additionally, Neighbors Link covers the cost of membership and supports participation in relevant professional organizations in which employees gain access to additional resources and professional development opportunities. Such professional organizations include the Westchester County Bar Association, the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

The capacity of NLCLP is expanded by using highly-qualified volunteer attorneys and paralegals. NLCLP benefits from pro bono work donated by three large, for-profit law firms with immigration practices: Davis Polk & Wardwell, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. The total pro bono time donated by 44 volunteer attorneys providing case services during this grant period totaled 1,277.6 hours of volunteered case work time. We also had 1 Law Student who worked with us for a total of 136 hours, providing support in case-related matters.

During this grant period, we had an additional 15 volunteers (including non-practicing, or retired attorneys) who contributed a total of 1,395.5 volunteer hours. These volunteers helped NLCLP with document preparation and translation, facilitating transportation, obtaining underlying documents, assistance with naturalization-related guardianship arrangements and alternatives to guardianship, accompanying individuals to check-ins, and getting disability accommodations including through USCIS. All pro bono and volunteer work is closely supervised by our Managing Attorney for NLCLP.

44 Attorneys volunteered 1,278 hours

1 Law Student volunteered 136 hours

15 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,396 hours
Significant Collaborations

HNLCLP has engaged in significant collaborations during this grant period in an effort to streamline legal services and minimize duplication of efforts. We have worked closely with Westchester Women’s Bar Association (WWBA) and our Director of Legal Services and Managing Attorney serve on their ad-hoc immigration rights committee. Through this partnership, we co-sponsored a continuing legal education (CLE) course on the intersection of immigration on immigrant law and ethical considerations. We also collaborated with WWBA by having one of our senior attorneys join their panel discussion entitled “Immigration Law: Perspectives of a Judge, a District Attorney, and Immigration Practitioners.”

We also partner with other legal service organizations including: I-ARC (Immigration ARC) as a member organization and through which our Director of Legal Services serves on the steering committee of Immigration Advocates Resource Collaborate; the New York State Bar Association, through which we participate in creating CLE programs and advocacy on budget issues; the Westchester County Bar Association, to which we are able to provide reliable legal referrals for cases we cannot take on at NLCLP; and we have served on the conference committee and as a panelist for the 9th judicial district Immigration Rights and Services Sub-committee’s “Access to Justice” conference. Additionally, our Director of Legal Services and Managing Attorney play leadership roles in the Westchester County Steering Committee of the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC).

In addition, we also partner with the Westchester County Police Department, Putnam and Northern Westchester BOCES, and local School districts to conduct Know Your Rights workshops and other community education events to allies and other service providers.

Sources of Funding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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- **State** 62%
- **Fundraising** 25%
- **IOLA** 13%