Overview of Achievements

The New York City Anti-Violence Project’s Department of Legal Services provides free holistic, direct legal services to underserved LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of violence in all five of New York City’s boroughs. The Legal Department is co-located with AVP’s existing Client Services Department, which provides direct social services. This co-location model is intentional and evidence-based, allowing our clients - who are all low-income survivors of violence - to receive the critical social services they need along with the necessary legal services. This model has also proven to increase the number of clients successfully engaging with legal services because their needs are met comprehensively in one location. Ease of comprehensive service delivery is especially important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that has disproportionately affected already vulnerable populations, such as under resourced LGBTQ and HIV-affected New Yorkers.

Holistic legal services range from intake, advice, and representation in multiple issue areas, including:

- Family Law: orders of protection, child/spousal support, child custody, divorce;
- Public Benefits: representation to those who have been denied or improperly terminated from SNAP, cash assistance or rental assistance;
- Immigration: affirmative and defensive asylum, U & T Visas, VAWA self-petitions, work authorization, adjustment of status and naturalization;
- Housing: eviction and HP proceedings;
- Legal Name and ID Document changes: civil Court name change for transgender and gender non-conforming survivors and associated name and gender marker changes on ID documents (Social Security Card, NYS birth certificates, state identification, etc.);
- Criminal Court: representation of complaining witnesses in criminal court (AVP does not do criminal defense work).

**Population Served:** Low Income Populations

**Area Served:** New York City Metropolitan Area

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

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 6
- Lawyers: 3
- Paralegals: 2
- Other: 1
At present, most of our caseload is still immigration cases. We have been responding to continued demand from LGBTQ populations for free immigration assistance, especially from those fleeing persecution based on their sexual or gender identities in their home countries, and from IPV survivors. Here are two case stories (names and identifying details have been changed to protect client confidentiality):

KR is a human rights activist from Uganda. He continues to participate in human rights activism for the Ugandan LGBTQ diaspora in the US and in Kenya. KR successfully received asylum in the United States because of the harm he suffered in Uganda as a result of his activism. When it was time for him to become a US Citizen, KR came to AVP seeking legal assistance to naturalize. KR knew about AVP through community members and only felt comfortable seeking legal assistance from an organization that exclusively serves LGBTQ people. AVP’s legal team prepared and filed KR’s naturalization documents during the COVID-19 pandemic. KR was naturalized as a US citizen in August of 2021 and now considers himself a proud Ugandan-American.
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Currently, AVP Legal uses TIME Case Management System, developed and supported through the Western NY Law Center. Only Legal staff have passwords and access to this system, to ensure a solid firewall between the departments. The Legal Director has access to TIME Maintenance, which allows her to add additional Legal staff or legal interns as users with access to information.

However, TIME is an older software that is no longer supported or updated. Therefore, the Legal department will be updating its database to SalesForce in the next fiscal year. The same firewalls between departments, confidentiality of client information, case notes, and court documents will be in place. SalesForce will allow the Legal department to modernize and streamline its case management capabilities.

Other Services: Trainings

AVP prioritizes consistent, high-quality training and supervision as an organizational value. The Legal department currently has six staff members. In the Legal department, the Director is supervised by AVP’s Deputy Executive Director of Programs (DED), who specializes in LGBTQ-specific violence issues. The Director and the DED meet weekly, but more frequently as necessary for assistance in the growth of the Legal Program and overall management. The Director supervises the Deputy Director of Legal Services, and the senior paralegal. The Deputy Director of Legal Services supervises the staff attorney and DOJ Accredited Representative. The senior paralegal supervises the part-time paralegal. Each supervisor meets weekly with their supervisees, and more frequently as necessary.

Supervision, technical support, and case review are key elements of our supervision and training model. In addition to weekly meetings with their assigned supervisor, paralegals, law students and other non-attorneys involved in legal services delivery have access to all the skilled staff in the department for immediate support, including the Director and Deputy, who work collaboratively to ensure coverage and availability to directly provide supervision and technical support to non-attorney staff, as needed.

Legal team members frequently attend legal subject matter training sessions like continuing legal education sessions (CLEs). The legal team prioritizes training and continuing legal education for all team members. For example, the part-time paralegal participated in a 40-hour training hosted by the New York Immigration Coalition and will prepare her for DOJ Accreditation. In addition, both our Director and Deputy Director participated in the Management Center’s BIPOC cohort management training.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

AVP partners with corporate law firms whose attorneys provide pro bono representation to our clients with immigration matters, legal name changes, and more. Client’s cases have been placed with Proskauer, Cravath, Bloomberg, and Arnold & Porter. Additionally, we partner with firms to assist in providing trainings, as well as sponsoring legal clinics for LGBTQ survivors of violence. AVP Legal is in the process of planning our next legal clinic, which will be a pro se family law clinic, in partnership with Bloomberg.

AVP has hosted law student interns consistently since its inception in 2013. For example, since 2015, NYU Law School’s LGBT Rights Externship places a law student for the Spring semester with AVP. Additionally, each summer 1-2 summer law school interns are hired. The law students draft legal memos and court documents, complete extensive research, complete legal intakes, and shadow the attorneys in court proceedings.

AVP has also consistently hosted Pro Bono Scholars. The third Pro Bono Scholar was hosted beginning in March 2021. This program allows those who have excelled in law school and have an interest in practicing non-profit law to work with a non-profit organization in their last semester of law school, after sitting for the February NYS bar exam. These Scholars work closely with the attorneys to learn all aspects of practicing non-profit law. They draft court pleadings, conduct legal research, interview clients, and prepare cases under strict supervision.

19 Attorneys volunteered 564 hours

6 Law Students volunteered 656 hours
Significant Collaborations

AVP has historically worked with social and legal service providers, bar organizations, law firms, and other community groups. AVP’s Legal Services Department continues this tradition and has expanded the number of partner organizations.

For example, one AVP Legal Services collaborator, Immigration Equality, provides representation in asylum proceedings for LGBTQ and HIV-positive individuals who have fled their homeland because they were not safe as a LGBTQ or HIV-positive individual. Because they have an excellent reputation and receive many calls from people who might be eligible for other legal services or immigration relief that they do not handle, we receive referrals from them. Referrals include public benefits, housing, name changes and LGBTQ people who are crime victims and may be eligible for a U-visa. When they have a client who needs services other than immigration relief, they are referred to AVP for consultation.

AVP’s Legal Department understands the importance of working with students and law schools to help shape the next generation of lawyers. AVP has hosted law students from NYU School of Law, CUNY School of Law, and Columbia School of Law, among others. In March of 2022, AVP’s Legal Department hosted five Columbia law students who were members of Columbia’s OUTLaws. Additionally, our Director of Legal Services has guest recently lectured at Columbia Law School on LGBTQ-specific intimate partner violence issues and presented a CLE on the same topic in conjunction with Empire Justice Center.

Sources of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<td>City and County</td>
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- IOLA: 14%
- Federal: 37%
- City: 29%
- State: 20%