Overview of Achievements

In the 12-month reporting period, NYLPI provided direct legal services, education, and training that benefited more than 150,000 people in New York and accomplished significant impact achievements improving the lives of more than 2.23 million New Yorkers. Where direct benefits and cost savings were measured, the value to clients topped $590,000. Our unique community lawyering model depends on our long-term relationships with community groups to build power for positive change through a wide range of legal services, community education, and organizing.

A state court approved a landmark class action settlement that will expand access to after-school sports for 220,000 Black and Latinx New York City public high school students and ensure that all students have equal access and opportunity to play the sports that they love. The settlement ends policies that systematically denied Black and Latinx students access to the same athletic opportunities as students of other races and ethnicities and requires the DOE and the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL) to launch 200 new teams in the next two years.

After sustained administrative advocacy by NYLPI and our coalition, New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) denied permits for NRG’s proposed gas turbine power plant in Astoria. The news comes as a significant victory for environmental activist groups who have been fighting against the proposed plant for months, citing the threats to environmental sustainability and livability — particularly in a borough that is no stranger to the impacts of environmental racism.

Five individuals with disabilities who use Access-A-Ride (AAR) filed a class action suit to end discrimination that excludes them from public transit fare discounts. Represented by NYLPI, Mobilization for Justice, and pro bono counsel Jenner & Block LLP, Plaintiffs have sued in New York Supreme Court to compel the MTA to offer the same discounts to AAR users as are available to subway and bus riders. The case also seeks to reimburse AAR riders for the financial harm they suffered due to the unavailability of these fare discounts.
Overview of Achievements

Queens residents and environmental advocates filed federal lawsuit against polluting waste transfer facilities. Pointing to decades of oppressive pollution impacting the community’s health and quality of life, longtime Jamaica residents joined NYLPI in filing a lawsuit under the Clean Water Act and state nuisance laws to hold the facilities accountable for the harms their operations have inflicted on neighboring residents for years.

NYLPI and a broad coalition of public interest groups and people with mental disabilities filed a class-action lawsuit against the City of New York and NYPD for violating New Yorkers’ constitutional and civil rights by sending police officers — rather than trained health professionals and peers with lived mental health experience — to respond to thousands of mental health crises each year.

NYLPI released “Doctors on Call: Telehealth and Accessibility During COVID-19,” a report documenting the results of a survey of New Yorkers who have used telehealth services during COVID-19. The report highlights New Yorkers’ experiences with telehealth at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and concludes that while people with disabilities benefitted from access to telehealth, there are significant problems with its accessibility.

We partnered with 870 attorneys and staff, who donated nearly 23,700 pro bono hours and represented 406 nonprofits serving 1.5 million low-income clients in need. We provide legal representation, capacity-building, extensive training, and resources to nonprofits across the City.

We trained and provided resources to nearly 150,000 community members and stakeholders on empowerment strategies to access healthcare, education, transportation, and housing. We partner with communities to build collective power and achieve their own vision of justice and equality.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Health:
In March of 2022, we successfully represented our client, Ms. Y, a 30-year-old transgender woman who fled from Kyrgyzstan, in her final hearing in immigration court where she was granted asylum. Ms. Y has survived egregious past harm, including medical torture and rape, and was terrified to be returned to her country of birth. She can now live in the United States permanently with the freedom to live her life as a woman, to express her true gender, and to access gender-affirming medical care. When Ms. Y was told she won asylum, she was overcome with emotion. She mentioned that she now feels the stability and safety needed to continue with her medical transition in the United States—something that she had been hesitant to do with the lingering fear that she may be forced to return if her asylum case was denied. NYLPI is also working with Ms. Y to enroll her in a more comprehensive health insurance plan. With asylum being granted, Ms. Y now meets a public benefits category that makes more health insurance options available to her.

Health:
With the worsening conditions in immigration detention, more people are resorting to hunger strikes to protest their confinement, and NYLPI and our volunteer Medical Provider Network has successfully advocated for their release. For example, Ms. Jo had been on hunger strike for over 25 days, her underlying health conditions already worsened during detention, and she was not provided proper mental health care or a Spanish speaking healthcare provider. Our medical providers found Ms. Jo did not feel safe using her preferred name and gender pronouns, which is detrimental to her health. Within hours of our medical advocacy letter being submitted, Ms. Jo was released.
Other Services: Overview

We have an extensive community education program, supported in part by IOLA funds. NYLPI’s attorneys, and community organizers, social workers, and other advocates regularly provide trainings to community groups and stakeholders to empower them to better advocate for themselves. In the past 12 months, we trained and provided resources to more than 150,000 community members on empowerment strategies to access healthcare, education, transportation, and housing. Service delivery included 118,000 special education and pandemic resource guides distributed to people subscribed to our disability justice email list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
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146,582 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

We continue to deepen our use of Microsoft 365, Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, Facebook Live, and other tools that increase our reach with client communities. NYLPI continues to develop and enhance our case management database, Case Management Pro. NYLPI subscribes to Westlaw, making case research fast and effective, and all NYLPI staff have access to e-mail and the Internet. Attorneys are beta-testing a new artificial intelligence legal research tool, CaseText, provided for free by a pro bono partner. NYLPI has a video remote interpreting and a relay service so that we can provide intake and technical assistance services to people who are hearing impaired both in person and through the phone, as well as having TTY. NYLPI also uses a “Language Line” phone system for communicating with clients who have limited English proficiency. The Clearinghouse distributes the cases it is seeking to place with pro bono attorneys through a weekly email. NYLPI regularly updates its website and social media channels to provide information on our programs, as well as resources we have available. NYLPI also maintains the critical portions of our website in multiple languages.
Other Services: Trainings

- NYLPI Lawyers continued to access unlimited Continuing Legal Education sessions through the Practising Law Institute and NYLPI continued to pay for a bar membership for each attorney, and attorney members of the New York City Bar Association accessed CLE in-person and remotely through the Association.

- The entire staff attended multi-segment workshops on conflict resolution and ethical storytelling.

- Two senior managers participated in intensive cohorts for leadership development and executive coaching.

- Leadership Team members regularly attended workshops offered by the Executives Undoing Racism Collective and shared notes and resources with team members.

Impact Cases

NYC Ferry Accessibility

In a victory for New York City’s Deaf and hard of hearing community and our client Paola B, with a pre-litigation demand NYLPI convinced NYC Ferry to install a new sign at its East 34th Street landing that will improve accessibility for riders who cannot hear or understand verbal boarding instructions. Prior to the installation of the new sign, NYC Ferry only provided verbal announcements of slip information, which caused riders who are Deaf or hard of hearing to miss out on critical boarding instructions. Now, passengers waiting for their ferry to arrive will be notified by both verbal announcements from NYC Ferry employees and the new signage, which will provide real-time information about at which slip to board. NYC Ferry employees affix magnetic strips to the sign indicating which slips are in use for each route and direction. The NYC Ferry’s East 34th Street landing is one of the busiest hubs in the ferry system, servicing three separate NYC Ferry routes as well as the Seastreak and New York Water Taxi services and more than 650,000 riders each year. The East 34th Street landing is made up of two boarding gates and multiple boat slips for docking. With this new signage, riders who are Deaf or hard of hearing will no longer need to seek special accommodations to comfortably ride the ferries at the East 34th Street landing.
Impact Cases

Mental Health Crises Litigation
In December NYLPI, people with mental disabilities, coalition partners and pro bono counsel filed a class action lawsuit against the City of New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio, and Police Commissioner Dermot Shea for violating New Yorkers’ constitutional and civil rights by sending police officers — rather than trained health professionals and peers with lived mental health experience — to respond to thousands of mental health crises each year. The case challenges the legality and constitutionality of the City’s policies, which have resulted in unlawful detentions, excessive force, serious injuries, forced hospitalizations, and 19 deaths of people with disabilities at the hands of the police in the last six years alone.

At the core of the lawsuit is the New York City policy of assigning police officers to respond to mental health crises. The plaintiffs include people who were arrested simply for having a mental health diagnosis – or even just being perceived as having a mental health diagnosis – and who were not a harm to themselves or others but were nevertheless forcibly strapped to gurneys or otherwise restrained and taken against their will to a hospital. The lawsuit requests that the court require the City to replace its harmful policies with ones that ensure the safety of people experiencing mental health crises. NYLPI also produced a report based on a survey by the organization and coalition partners of 154 New Yorkers who experienced mental health crises; it confirmed that NYPD responses routinely cause trauma and undermine health care.

Transit Fare Disability Discrimination
In February 2022 NYLPI and co-counsel filed a class action in New York Supreme Court to end discrimination that excludes them from public transit fare discounts, representing five individuals with disabilities who use Access-A-Ride paratransit. Access-A-Ride is the MTA’s paratransit service for people with disabilities who cannot use or are substantially limited in their ability to use subways or buses. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the New York City Transit Authority offer substantial fare discounts, including half-fares for people with disabilities and seniors, as well as 30-day and 7-day unlimited fares, for bus and subway riders -- but not for Access-A-Ride riders, whose disabilities prevent them from riding buses and subways. Though the MTA is legally required to provide people with disabilities public transit service comparable to what is available to subway and bus riders, Access-A-Ride has long been plagued by unreliable and inflexible service -- even as riders must pay the full fare for every trip, no matter how many trips they take per month and no matter whether they would qualify for a reduced fare because of their disability or age. The suit seeks to compel the MTA to offer the same discounts to AAR users as are available to subway and bus riders, and to reimburse AAR riders for financial harm suffered due to the unavailability of these fare discounts.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

NYLPI promotes a legal culture where pro bono involvement is valued and prioritized. NYLPI’s staff regularly meet with key partners at law firms and corporate legal departments to encourage and facilitate pro bono opportunities, and when possible, tailor pro bono projects.

We work to foster a lifetime commitment to pro bono through our annual summer program. In addition, NYLPI hosts summer interns from law schools, providing an organized twelve-week program that introduces them to community lawyering and affords the opportunity to work on a range of issues.

During the grant period, our Clearinghouse engaged 870 pro bono attorneys and staff from nearly 80 law firms, who donated over 23,700 pro bono hours and represented 406 nonprofits and community groups by providing counsel on matters such as corporate structure, contract negotiations, litigations, and more. These nonprofits are then able to focus on serving their communities by utilizing their resources for their missions rather than on costly legal services.

The Clearinghouse has expanded its client services by organizing workshops for nonprofit leaders, using pro bono attorneys as teachers on topics including starting a nonprofit, diversity, equity and inclusion, and digital privacy and cybersecurity. Over 600 nonprofit representatives have attended these courses during the grant period.

842 Attorneys volunteered 16,560 hours

18 Law Students volunteered 5,920 hours

26 Other Volunteers volunteered 7,040 hours
Significant Collaborations

Nonprofit New York is a capacity-building organization that works to build a thriving community of extraordinary nonprofits through training and educational programs, policy, and legislative advocacy on behalf of the nonprofit sector and offering expert resources and guidance to its members. NYLPI collaborated with Nonprofit New York to produce innovative and impactful webinars to quickly respond to the crisis nonprofits were facing under COVID-19. These webinars were launched swiftly to answer the urgent questions and needs of nonprofits around federal relief programs, employment law, contracts and more. During the reporting period, the webinars were attended by 274 representatives from nonprofit organizations.

In a partnership with multiple pro bono law firms, we published a series of resource guides for nonprofits and small businesses as they navigated the pandemic and economic crisis, available online through the NYLPI Nonprofit Toolkit. We also provided live workshops on each guides, attended by 601 individuals.

Catholic Migration Services (CMS), a not-for-profit legal services provider affiliated with Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, provides free legal services and Know Your Rights education to low-income individuals regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, or immigration status. NYLPI has successfully partnered with CMS for many years to run a series of naturalization clinics, which offer legal permanent residents the opportunity to meet with a volunteer attorney to help them complete their application for US citizenship. Volunteer attorneys also help clients apply for fee waivers where appropriate. While this work was halted by the pandemic, the partnership held its first successful in-person clinic again, serving 25 clients.

NYLPI continues to work closely with LEAP, a legal advocacy network of 18 NYC civil legal services providers who came together in 2004 to expand the availability of quality legal services. Collectively, we employ over 600 lawyers, advocates, organizers, and other staff, who provide critical assistance to over 130,000 low-income individuals annually via innovative legal services delivery models. NYLPI has also collaborated to provide representation to immigrants and people with disabilities facing harassment or discrimination in their housing. We are also members of and work closely with the New York Legal Services Coalition.
Sources of Funding

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