Overview of Achievements

Number of People & Organizations Benefitted: Over the 12 months of the grant period, we closed 442 cases for 323 young people. We also partnered with 19 community-based organizations to deliver legal representation, Know Your Rights workshops, and capacity-building technical assistance.

Target Population: Our clients are primarily low-income young men and women of color under the age of 25 from New York City’s five boroughs who have had involvement with the criminal legal system. Many are enrolled in programs run by community-based organizations or the city. They often face court involvement that overlaps with other judicial systems, including Family Courts, school suspension hearings, or eviction proceedings.

Financial Benefits Realized by Target Populations: Youth Represent saved our clients $200 in lump sums. We also secured $4,183,312 in back pay and settlement awards and $2,016 in monthly payments. Our work removing obstacles to employment for clients provides significant value that is impossible to quantify.

Increased Access to Justice: We stand with clients facing cases in which they would not otherwise be entitled to an attorney. Traditionally, we have traveled directly to workforce development and youth services programs across the five boroughs to deliver our community-lawyering model where clients live. During the pandemic, we have made greater use of technology to provide services. Combining direct legal representation, Know Your Rights workshops, capacity-building technical assistance for youth services organizations, and leadership and engagement opportunities for young people, we target neighborhoods most harmed by over-policing. We also remedy mistreatment from institutions to which youth are particularly vulnerable.

Population Served: Youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system

Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area

Total IOLA Grant: $75,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 8.56
- Lawyers: 6.81
- Paralegals: 0.76
- Other: 0.99
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Employment:
“James” had successfully completed a six-month internship at an insurance company, and had been offered a full-time paid position through a third-party staffing company. However, shortly after receiving the offer, it was withdrawn due to his criminal record. When we heard James’ story, we identified a number of violations of both state and local law that the staffing company had violated. The employer had a) failed to affirmatively obtain James’ permission to run a background check; b) failed to provide him with a full copy of the report they ran; c) failed to provide him with a summary of his rights to obtain and dispute the report or a copy of Article 23-A; and d) failed to provide a Fair Chance Act notice or analysis of his criminal background as required by the Ban-the-Box law. Rather than engage in litigation, James preferred to seek financial damages for the violation of his rights, and so we settled with the company on James’s behalf, securing a $50,000 settlement for him. We then connected him with The Financial Clinic, which helps people manage their finances.

Improvements in Organizational Capacity: The pandemic required us to move a great deal of our outreach and intake process online, and consequently to increase our capacity to connect with clients remotely. We also broadened our outreach to include youth-serving organizations irrespective of their ability to pay for our services to their participants.

Further, over the course of the grant period, we developed several new areas of expertise. One such area was “HP actions,” proactive cases that clients can bring to force landlords to make necessary repairs and/or provide essential services. We received support for external trainings from private attorneys and have thus far successfully represented clients on four of these actions and provided advice to seven more young people.

Our staff also developed a comprehensive pro se practice to help transgender and gender nonconforming clients navigate the name change and/or gender marker changes process, which was changed by the courts during Covid-19. Through this, we have ensured that most clients receive their certified court orders within a few days instead of the several months it used to take.

The grant period also saw us expand our practice outside the five boroughs through a successful partnership with WestHab in Yonkers. At WestHab, we have been able to conduct voluntary surrenders, name changes, and criminal court representation.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

**Housing:**
“Marci” lives with a number of medical and mental health issues, among them asthma, severe anxiety, and depression. She resides with her mom and two siblings (all under the age of 13) in NYCHA housing in the Bronx.

They contacted us because their apartment was quickly becoming uninhabitable. In addition to holes in the walls and mold, they had not had a functional stove in nearly a year, and their tub and toilet had been clogged for months. Despite submitting numerous ticket requests to NYCHA to have these repaired, NYCHA had failed to act. The entire family had been travelling to and from Marci’s aunt’s apartment to bathe for months.

We first sought to resolve the matter with the site’s management office, but they could not help. As housing repair cases were outside our area of practice, we then sought to refer the family to a qualified attorney. However, despite our best efforts, we could not connect them with an attorney they could afford who had capacity to take on their case. We had noticed an uptick in clients who needed repairs on their cases, and so rather than advising Marci and her family to pursue the matter pro se, we conducted extensive research in “HP cases,” as they are known, and spoke with attorneys whose expertise is in this area.

After we represented Marci and her family at a hearing, the judge ordered NYCHA to make the much-needed repairs. Within two months, NYCHA had fixed the tub and toilet, plastered and painted the walls, and replaced the kitchen sink, cabinets, and stove. Marci said that as a result of all these upgrades, she and her family “feel peace” and are able to enjoy their home.
Other Services: Overview

Through our partnership model, we continued to provide Know Your Rights workshops for youth and technical assistance for staff at community-based organizations. Know Your Rights workshops educate young people on their legal rights and responsibilities, addressing specific situations such as interacting with the police; conducting a job search with a criminal history; responding to a school suspension; or facing exclusion from public housing.

Technical assistance gives organizations the tools necessary to prepare clients for questions about criminal backgrounds on job applications and in interviews. We teach staff how to identify and respond to the unique needs of court-involved youth, and we explain how various convictions or plea deals will appear on criminal background checks. We also highlight obstacles that can impede a young person’s chance at success: e.g., licensing bars, housing evictions, family court issues, school suspensions, employment discrimination, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender non-conformity.

Our model pairs a single attorney with a community-partner organization. Our attorney goes on site at least once a year to deliver staff trainings (excluding the past two pandemic years, when these were conducted remotely).

Our goal was to reach 1,750 participants through our workshops and trainings. We reached a total of 1,376 participants. Workshops are contingent on the requests from our partners: requests were lower than we expected, but this spring they have increased significantly as more of our partners are back in-person.

Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

| Community Legal Education | 1,376 |
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

As referenced above, Youth Represent adapted to the pandemic by increasing capacity to connect with clients remotely to ensure safety for our clients and our staff members. We have utilized Zoom intakes, the Chatbot function on our website, emails, phone calls, and texting. Clients are thus now able to access legal help in a manner in which many are most comfortable communicating: digitally. Our Legal Hotline enables youth across the city to call in for a legal needs assessment right away, no matter their location.

We also continue to leverage technologies such as Docusign to take on new clients and cases by having young people sign retainers remotely. Likewise, our RAP App tool provides instant access to review clients’ criminal histories.

Over the grant period, our legal team came together and began to experiment with new presentation platforms, such a Mentimeter, for our Know Your Rights workshops. Through this platform, we have been able to develop workshops that are no longer passive and top-down. Our presentations are now more engaging and fun, providing active interaction through visually appealing polls and quizzes.

Caseloads of all legal staff are tracked using our customized Salesforce database. All staff record work and advice in the database, which can be accessed remotely on-site at our community-based partners and on staff’s mobile phones using a secure app. In combination, our numerous technologies enable us to reach and serve youth in need despite Covid-19.

Other Services: Trainings

We conducted trainings as part of the process of onboarding a new paralegal and a new staff attorney. Because of the pandemic, we had to modify the trainings so that they could be delivered remotely. Substantive parts of the trainings also had to be modified and changed, as courts were operating remotely as well. We also were trained on a new area of law, HP Actions. We also trained staff on our new virtual platform, Mentimeter.

Additionally, we worked with the Lineage Project to undertake a two-part Somatics training for staff, which focused on mindfulness, stress reduction, and resilience.
Impact Cases

We have focused our work on bringing closure to a few of our larger cases this past year. We have settled four cases and continue to litigate three cases. For the closed cases, we settled the matters against large employers for job discrimination against individuals with criminal histories. These cases secured substantial financial payments to thousands of system-involved New Yorkers; included class members’ access to securing employment; and required employers to undergo significant hiring practice changes to ensure applicants who apply for a job in the future will be fairly evaluated.

For our continued active cases this year, we have focused most heavily on our national class action matter against Walmart, the largest private employer in the world. As unemployment among our target population remains high, and major corporate employers continue to engage in discriminatory hiring practices, the work of our impact litigation is more important than ever.

Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Youth Represent operates a Youth Reentry Clinic at Brooklyn Law School, which places two interns with us each semester, and we hired a summer legal intern last year. One client who benefitted from volunteer involvement was Kevin, who has been incarcerated since he was just nineteen. We have been working with Kevin to submit an updated clemency petition with the state pardon and commutations Board. Kevin’s original petition failed to include a personal statement. One of our Brooklyn Law School interns worked closely with him, establishing a rapport to help him craft a narrative that will be compelling to the Board. This included a series of conversations where they spoke about the client’s lived experience, personal growth, and transformation since being incarcerated. With the help of the intern, we have a finalized version of the client’s personal statement that we will submit with his petition.

5 Law Students volunteered 705 hours
Significant Collaborations

We have contracted fee-for-service partnerships with these nonprofits and agencies to deliver workshops and staff trainings, and provide legal representation and advice to participants: Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services, Catholic Charities, Safe Passage, The Door, the Department of Education, the Department of Probation, the Department of Youth and Community Development, Drive Change, Friends of Island Academy, Getting Out and Staying Out, Henry Street Settlement, Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center, Marsha’s House, Streetworks, Per Scholas, Queens Community House, Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, and Year Up.

We also receive referrals from many other nonprofits to represent clients on an informal basis, and partner with a number of other agencies and organizations on our policy reform work, which is often conducted through coalitions.

Sources of Funding

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- Fundraising: 16%
- IOLA: 7%
- State: 11%
- City: 7%
- Other: 2%
- Foundations: 57%