Overview of Achievements, 2018-2019

My Sisters' Place (MSP) is a progressive not for profit organization that provides holistic services to survivors of intimate partner violence and human trafficking in Westchester County. The Center for Legal Services (CLS) at MSP delivers high quality, free legal services to victims of domestic violence and human trafficking throughout Westchester County, New York (the County). Our service area is the entire County, located north of New York City, and has a population of almost one million residents. The southern half of the County is part of NYS’s 16th Congressional District, the poorest congressional district in the entire country. Although the majority of MSP’s clients are low income and eligible for public benefits, MSP accepts victims of domestic violence and human trafficking who are in need of services regardless of their socioeconomic background.

MSP made huge strides to upgrade the many facets of our technology platform during this reporting period. We moved our White Plains Office to a new location that was designed to support the services that we provide and enhance our technological capabilities. We started using a new phone system and we are in the process of making video conferencing available to staff in all four of our office and shelter cites in Westchester County. Funding for these improvements were made possible by a grant from “Impact 100” and private donations.

We are also the recent recipients of a three year Office of Victims of Services Persons with Disabilities grant. MSP is collaborating with the New York School for the Deaf and New York Presbyterian Hospital to provide education, outreach and services to the Deaf community. This funding will also enable us to develop our capacity to provide accessible services and comprehensive education, training and outreach to effectively serve the Deaf community and Deaf individuals who are victims of gender-based violence in Westchester County, New York.

During this reporting period the Westchester County Office for Women received funding from the Office of Victim Services to re-open the Family Justice Center in the Westchester County Courthouse. MSP is collaborating in this project with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, Victim Assistance Services, Hope’s Door and the Westchester County Office for Women. This co-located, multi-agency service center for victims of family violence and their children is founded on shared training, technical assistance and a collaborative learning processes.

The Center for Legal Services (CLS) at MSP continues to provide vital legal services to victims of domestic violence and human trafficking in Westchester County. We provide legal referrals, legal advice, counsel and representation by qualified attorneys who understand the complex legal and psychosocial elements of domestic violence and human trafficking cases, and who are able to identify and seek appropriate judicial remedies.

CLS has provided legal assistance to approximately 972 clients during this reporting period. We continue to provide victims of domestic violence and human trafficking with legal services that include but are not limited to T-Visas, U-Visas, Self- Petitions, Uncontested Divorces, Child Support, Custody, Visitation, Orders of Protection and Spousal Support. Our immigration practice provided direct representation on 102 cases. Our family law practice provided direct representation on 142 cases. We provided advise and counsel to hundreds of other survivors.

Population Served: Low Income Battered Women

Area Served: Westchester County

Total Funding: $1,201,686

Total IOLA Grant: $130,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 14.00
- Lawyers: 10.00
- Paralegals: 4.00
“Alma” came to the United States using a group of smugglers to cross the Mexican border. During the process she was raped and later gave birth to a son born with developmental delays, learning disabilities and autism. She named him Ben. Alma was able to make it to New York and was reunited with her sister who left Mexico 2 years before her. She worked long hours doing whatever menial work she could find. When she wasn’t working she was taking care of Ben with the help of her sister. After spending five years in Westchester County Alma met a man at work named Rafael. He was polite and kind. Rafael would give her treats for Ben and sometimes they would all go out together. After a year of dating Alma and Rafael moved in together. Alma began to notice that Rafael drank a lot at the end of the week. Friday nights he would usually come home drunk. He would go straight to bed but was back to his usual self by Saturday afternoon. Two years into their relationship Alma became pregnant. Rafael was happy when he learned it would be a boy. During the last term of her pregnancy Alma’s doctor told her that she had to rest more and work fewer hours. Rafael began to drink more as the financial pressure increased. He was spending more time out of the house and drinking throughout the weekend. When Rafael was home he was frequently criticizing Alma and complaining about Ben. Once Rafael grabbed Alma by the shoulders and shook her. Another time he slammed the bathroom door on her arm. One Sunday night he cursed at Ben. Alma yelled at Rafael and insulted him. He threw Alma against the wall and grabbed her by the throat. Ben began to scream and cry. Alma told her doctor what happened at her next appointment. The police were notified and Rafael was arrested.

Alma’s sister and the police told her to contact MSP. She entered the shelter with Ben. An immigration attorney helped her complete a U Visa application. A family law attorney helped her get an order of child support for her new baby. Eventually Alma was able to obtain working papers from an immigration attorney and support her two sons with the help of her sister and child support payments from Rafael.
Other Services...

Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>109</td>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

During this reporting period CLS provided community legal education to approximately 706 people. Our community education took place in schools, hospitals and neighborhood community centers. We also provide training within our agency to staff and clients about their legal options.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

- CLS has a Sister-In-Law Court Accompaniment Program (SILS) made up of volunteers who accompany survivors to court. During this reporting period we assisted 262 survivors who did not have an attorney at their court appearance. This program is especially useful for people who have learned from our attorneys about their basic child support case but do not have family or friends available to lend support when they face the abuser in court.

- During this reporting period an MSP attorney and an MSP counselor went to an adult vocational training program to explain legal remedies for survivors of intimate partner violence and human trafficking. “Yonkers Pathway to Success” had 269 students present and eager to learn about their legal rights.

- We also partnered with Westchester Medical Center to provide training for their sexual assault advocates. During this reporting period attorneys trained 48 sexual assault advocates on some of the legal remedies available to survivors of sexual assault.

Dollar Benefits Achieved for Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Support</td>
<td>$2,014,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spousal Support</td>
<td>$362,160</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,376,686</strong></td>
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Significant Collaborations

Gender-based violence is troublingly prevalent in the lives of Deaf people, and despite MSP’s status as a highly regarded local victim services provider, the agency sees few if any Deaf clients seeking assistance, suggesting that Deaf victims do not come forward in numbers that would reflect their higher levels of victimization. Through our process of strategic planning, MSP rededicated ourselves to community outreach, education, and collaboration and established a set of guiding principles which include offering a consistent standard of care to all clients regardless of ability/disability.

We are collaborating on this project with two local partners who are eminent leaders within the Deaf community - the New York School for the Deaf (NYSD) and NewYork-Presbyterian Westchester Division’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program (NYP-DHHP) and working closely with the Vera Institute of Justice and Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women to ensure that program goals are met. Our use of “Deaf” is intended to represent the entirety of the Deaf community including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, late-deafened, have other types of hearing losses, or have additional disabilities.

MSP leads a regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force comprised of leaders in law enforcement and community-based organizations dedicated to combatting human trafficking in the lower Hudson Valley. MSP works tirelessly throughout the seven county region to which our trafficking services extend to train law enforcement, county district attorneys, and victim assistance agencies on the identification of human trafficking cases and referring cases to MSP. This, in turn, has resulted in increased numbers of trafficking victims, many of whom are immigrants in need of legal services. Our human trafficking attorney, in collaboration with our two human trafficking case managers, provide holistic services to survivors of sex and labor trafficking.

MSP also works closely with several key victim services agencies and government agencies that serve victims and look to CLS to provide consultation, direct legal assistance and training. Some of the organizations served include: Legal Services of the Hudson Valley; Hope’s Door; Westchester Hispanic Coalition; Pace Women’s Justice Center; the Empire Justice Center; Victims Assistance Services; Open Door Family Medical Centers, Inc.; Westchester Jewish Community Services; Office of the Westchester County District Attorney; Office of the Rockland County District Attorney; Westchester Family Justice Center, Mount Vernon Police Department, White Plains Police Department and the Yonkers Police Department.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Throughout the year we hold U-Visa clinics with to support the work of our immigration practice. The associates and summer interns at these firms are able to provide direct services to a population in great need. This is a partnership has proven to be rewarding to both the client and attorney. Last year we held clinics with the law firm Clifford Chance and XL Catlin.

CLS also uses the Sister-in-Law Program (SIL), a lay legal advocacy program that recruits and trains volunteers to provide advocacy and support to victims during court appearances and interactions with government agencies. The SIL program provides two week long trainings per year to volunteers interested in supporting victims of intimate partner violence and/or human trafficking. The main function of a SIL volunteer is to help empower a client during a difficult time; this can mean listening to and believing the client, helping to organize client documents, and sometimes just quietly sitting side by side while clients collect their thoughts for an upcoming hearing. SILs are trained to provide emotional support to our clients. SILs provide encouragement to clients during court hearings, medical appointments, department of social services appointments as well as other appointments where a client may be in need of support.

Pro Bono Statistics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attorneys</th>
<th>Law Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>60</td>
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Sources Of Funding

- **IOLA Grant**: $87,500
- **City & County Funding**: $169,903
- **State Funding**: $406,407
- **Other Federal Funding**: $299,766
- **Other**: $238,110
- **Total**: $1,201,686