Overview of Achievements, 2018-2019

From April 1, 2018 through March 31, 2019, the Civil Division of the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo (LABB) provided advice or representation to a total of 6,668 men, women, and children in 4,643 different cases in Western New York. Of these, 4,772 persons in 2,116 cases were assisted in general civil matters and 1,896 children in 2,527 cases were represented in Erie County Family Court. and provided hotline and referral services for 3,654 matters. Community legal education was provided to 7536 individuals, and pro se assistance was provided to 1980 persons.

LABB maintains a daily presence at the Erie County Supreme Court Help Desk, where we provide pro se litigants with assistance in completing and filing applications, petitions, motions and other forms covering a wide range of Erie and Niagara Supreme Court and Buffalo City Court litigation matters. For matters which cannot be handled through the Help Desk, information is provided on other resources available. LABB holds an on-site Walk-In Clinic every Friday at our Buffalo office to serve the more complicated issues that arise at the Erie County Help Desk and offer assistance to pro se litigants with more correcting incorrect paperwork and filings. In addition to the Erie County Supreme Court Help Desk, and our Buffalo Walk-In Clinic, LABB, with the assistance of the Eighth Judicial District Director, has increased the hours of our clinical presence in Cattaraugus, Allegany, Chautauqua, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties.

LABB also expanded its services for immigrant, refugee and asylee families with the assistance of an Equal Justice Works Fellow. Together with our New Americans Project team, we were able to greatly expand our ability to consult and give legal advice on a wide range of civil legal services. Through community outreach and our weekly walk in day for New Americans we have been able increase the number of clients receiving holistic civil legal services.

Population Served: General Low Income Population

Area Served: Erie County

Total Funding: $5,134,651

Total IOLA Grant: $260,159

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 47.84
- Lawyers: 28.22
- Others : 6.62
- Paralegal: 13.00
Family

Jennifer’s mother came to our agency seeking help for her 12 year old daughter who had a number of medical, mental health, and educational needs. Although she was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, Jennifer was in a school program that was for children with general disabilities; she was not receiving autism and other educational supports that she needed and that she was entitled to under special education laws.

At times, Jennifer would run out of the classroom, become agitated, and, on occasion, get aggressive. Although these were manifestations of her disabilities, she was suspended from school on a long-term basis. In addition, Jennifer’s mother was often called to come get Jennifer because the school felt that she was engaging in unsafe behaviors and they could not calm and/or control her. The school district had recognized that Jennifer’s school program was inadequate to meet her needs, but had not been able to offer an alternative placement. Jennifer was no longer being educated at her placement—the school tried, but resources were unavailable to do more than attempt to maintain her.

Jennifer’s mother was exhausted, worried about her daughter’s safety and where she would ultimately end up, and uncertain of where to turn. She was referred to our office for assistance.

We helped to file a due process hearing request which re-established lines of communication and assisted in getting Jennifer into a temporary placement in a new program with various services for children on the autism spectrum. We also assisted in getting her linked with outside resources, obtaining independent evaluations, and establishing a team to work with Jennifer and her mother on finding a more permanent solution. After many meetings with the school district, NYSTART, care coordinators, People, Inc, and other team members, we were able to assist in Jennifer getting accepted into a newly created intensive treatment program for children with a dual diagnosis of behavioral and medical challenges, including autism. This program was specifically developed to serve youth with complex challenges who would previously have been placed out of state due to a lack of available programs in New York. Jennifer’s mother was relieved and excited that her daughter would be in a safe environment that would provide her with the opportunity to learn new life skills and behaviors.
Other Services...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

The Reentry Project offered workshops and site clinics at the following local community organizations: Federal Probation services, Northland Development Center, Ready, Set Work; Parole Orientation, Say Yes Buffalo; the Training to Work Program; Project Homeless Connect; the Buffalo Urban League; the Matt Urban Center; various City of Buffalo events; and the Salvation Army. This year we met with 975 individuals. Reentry Project members also provide educational sessions for community advocates and service professionals to raise awareness of pro se actions from which Reentry clients may benefit. Last year we helped 241 such individuals.

The Family Justice Project provided pro se legal assistance five days per week at the Erie County Supreme Court Help Desk and several days a month in each of the other counties of the Eighth Judicial District. Legal assistance included, but was not limited to, matters regarding name changes, divorce, eviction judgment challenges, consumer issues, and post-matrimonial enforcement. Last year we helped 1370 such individuals.

The Family Justice Project also provided regular presentations to parents on legal strategies to reunify with their children. The presentations include developing a legal plan to improve income, shelter, family safety, and health needs to achieve family reunification. Attendees were offered individual one hour consultation sessions following presentations. Last year we helped 519 such individuals.

The New Americans Project provided legal education in several different settings. We attended thirteen community events to share legal information, assisting roughly 500 Individual attendees. We also published news articles in three different languages, reaching an estimated 4,500 individuals.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

Our staff provides trainings and participates in informational outreach events throughout Western New York in order to reach clients and educate other service providers regarding our services. We continue our collaboration with organizations such as Project Homeless Connect, the Erie County Coalition on Hoarding, the Federal Job Readiness Program, the New York State Attorney General Foreclosure Prevention Initiative, Journey’s End, International Institute, Vive, Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services, Jericho Road, Buffalo Urban League, Gloria Parks Community Center, Parolee meetings, Federal Re-entry Court, Matt Urban Center, EPIC, Family Justice Center, the Center for Elder Law and Justice, Neighborhood Legal Services, Western New York Veterans Housing Coalition, Volunteer Lawyers Project, Saving Grace Ministries, and the University of Buffalo Law School. We continue to strengthen such organizational relationships in order to better serve those populations that have lacked access to civil legal services for social, linguistic, or geographical reasons.
Trainings

Advanced JD Practice in the Era of Raise the Age; Get Fit: Using the Family Court Information Tool; Introduction to Effective Representation of Children: 4th Dept. Attorneys for Children Topical Seminar Child Welfare; Courtroom Skills-Cross Evidence Workshop; Planning for Older Youth in Foster Care; LSC’s Innovations in Technology Conference; NYSBA 2018 Annual Meeting; 21st Annual Special Education Task Force Conference; 2018 Equal Justice Conference; Support Collection Unit: Advance Course; Critical Areas of Matrimonial Law; IOLA Technology Conference; A Primer on VA Disability Law & Veteran’s Legal Issues; 15th Annual Bankruptcy Conference; Recognizing Mental Illness in Clients and your Ethical Obligations; 2018 Partnership Conference; 2019 NYSBA Annual Meeting; Fam. Court Practice Skills Support, Custody, Family Offense Proceedings & Diversity; NYLSC Coalition Leadership for Justice Cohort.

Technology

In this fiscal year we built-out five new workstations to accommodate interns/volunteers; setup desktop computers, necessary programs, monitors and telephones in each new workstation, and installed and configured a new firewall for our main office that includes improved security and to better handle network traffic. We purchased and installed Adobe Acrobat Pro 2017 licenses for all Civil Legal Services employees so that PDF forms are more manageable. This enables us to better comply with e-filing requirements of the courts where we practice allowing us to better serve our clients. We purchased two new laptops and ten Surface Pro tablets with all necessary software for staff attorneys & social workers who routinely travel outside to meet with clients. These computers will enable attorneys and social workers to meet with clients in the community to gather information and documentation digitally, which will help us better serve clients who can’t reach our office. Seven new network switches were purchased for the server room to improve network traffic within our office and to provide better telephone connections. We have entered into a contract to implement Wi-Fi with the network upgrade allowing staff to use computers in interview rooms with clients. We also began the process to upgrade our case management system which will enable us to better identify conflicts of interest across all practice areas and better track outcomes for our clients.
Significant Collaborations

The Family Justice Project partners with: The Family Justice Center; Cattaraugus Community Action; Center for Psychosexual Health; Every Person Influences Children.

The Education Law has established a large network of community partners including: Buffalo Public Schools; Erie 1 BOCES; NYS Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS TEACHS); Erie County Department of Probation; Oishei Healthy Kids; Parent Network of Western New York; Say Yes to Education in Buffalo; Catholic Charities New Directions; Endeavor ; Baker Victory Services; Gateway-Longview ; Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition; Family Voices; Families Child Advocacy Network (Families CAN); APIC (Accessing Psychiatric Intermediate Care); Erie County DSS, Child Protective Services and Children’s Services, Adoption Unit and Independent Living Unit; NYS Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD); NY START (NY Systemic, Therapeutic, Assessment, Resources and Treatment); and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

The Veterans and Military Families Project works primarily with the following organizations: The Veteran’s One Stop Center; County of Erie Veterans Services; Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court; Catholic Charities; and Spectrum Health and Human Services.

The Reentry Project concentrates on employment, financial well-being, family reunification, and a range of barriers faced by individuals who have a criminal record. Client planning regularly involves these organizations: NYS Department of Labor; NYSDMV; US Attorney’s Office; Federal Public Defenders; Cazenovia Recovery; Northland Workforce Development; Restoration Society; Buffalo Employment and Training Center; Peace Prints; The Community Foundation; Houghton College; Buffalo Steps to Success Academy; NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision; and the Buffalo Community Supervision Orientation Project.

The New American Project, which includes the Coordinated Refugee/Asylee Services Project, relies heavily on well integrated community collaboration. Our main community partners are: RAHAMA - Resources and Help Against Marital Abuse; ACCESS of WNY, Inc.; Journey’s End Refugee Services, Inc.; Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.; The Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.; Center for Elder Law & Justice; The Western New York Law Center, Inc.; Burmese Community Services, Inc.; BestSelf Behavioral Health, Inc.; Karen Society of Buffalo, Inc.; Iraqi American Society, Inc.; Bhutanese-Nepali Community of Buffalo, Inc.; Jericho Road Community Health Center; Hope Refugee Services; Sister Care Center at Response to Love Center; Buffalo Chin Community, Inc.; Zomi Innkuan Buffalo NY Inc.; Afghan New Generation; Buffalo Public Schools; School of Social Work, University at Buffalo; School of Medicine, University at Buffalo; The City of Buffalo Office of New Americans; International Institute of Buffalo, Inc.; Jewish Family Services, Inc.; Catholic Charities of Buffalo; and Hispanics United of Buffalo.

The Foreclosure Prevention Project of Western New York involves central intake distributed among three legal providers with the housing counseling covered by certified housing agencies. The members of this collaborative effort are: Belmont Housing Resources; Buffalo Urban League; Westside Neighborhood Housing Services; Center for Elder Law and Justice; Western New York Law Center; and Consumer Credit Counseling Services of WNY.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

We welcome the assistance of volunteer students and attorneys. In the past year a total of 28 individuals donated their time to help us better serve our community. Of these, 18 were law students, 1 were attorneys, and 9 were college or paralegal students. Their work ranged from direct client contact, such as intake or scheduling, to research and direct assistance in court. The volunteer component of the annual tax foreclosure defense project played a huge role, at every step of the way, towards successfully preventing more than 120 tax foreclosures affecting 290 persons.

We assign law students to work directly with an attorney and also obtain a practice order that allows them to be the attorney on the case. We have interns who observe court proceedings and assist with tasks such as client intake, data management, and making copies.

Pro Bono Statistics

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Sources Of Funding

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