

# **SAFE HORIZON**

2022-2023



# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Safe Horizon is the nation’s largest victim service provider. During the period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023, the Safe Horizon Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) and the Immigration Law Project (ILP) provided high quality, comprehensive legal information, brief services, and representation to 1,324 survivors throughout New York City and benefiting 2,036 people. DVLP provide services in the areas of family law and matrimonial law, while ILP provided services in the areas of immigration and nationality law.

Specifically, DVLP litigated family law cases and provided brief services, including advice and counsel to 1,028 clients. DVLP/ILP also provided trainings to communities throughout New York City based on family law, housing law, and public assistance.

ILP conducted 725 telephonic consultations and screenings and represented 296 clients in humanitarian-based benefits, including U visas, VAWA self-petitions, asylum, battered spouse waivers, petitions for Special Immigrant Juvenile status (SIJS), as well as adjustment of status “green card” applications, naturalization applications and defense in removal proceedings.

IOLA funding allowed the DVLP/ILP to provide victims of domestic violence holistic services by ensuring legal services virtually at Safe Horizon’s numerous programs including our Community Programs, Domestic Violence Shelters, and Court Programs. The continuum of services received by victims helps make certain that their safety needs will be met. By providing legal services at Safe Horizon’s various programs, the DVLP/ILP ensures that victims are aware of their legal rights and remedies. Victims are then able to access the justice system in an informed manner.



**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Total Funding:** \$2,398,385

**Total IOLA Grant:** \$237,500

**Staffing Full Time Equivalent:**

- Total Staff: 12
- Paralegals: 1
- Lawyers: 10
- Other: 1

IOLA funding allows the DVLP/ILP to provide training to case managers and social workers throughout the city that work with victims of violence. These trainings provide social services staff with information about client's legal rights to ensure that clients are receiving competent information.

During this reporting period, DVLP provided virtual trainings to client-facing staff at the New York City Family Justice Centers, Safe Horizon Crime Victim Advocate Programs, and Safe Horizon shelter case managers and social workers. DVLP staff also provided trainings to community-based organizations around the various boroughs who serve victims of domestic violence.

ILP provided virtual trainings to the Manhattan Child Advocacy Center as well as the Brooklyn Nurse Family Partnership, a division of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, on forms of relief available to survivors of violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture, so potential referrals can be identified and made to ILP.

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## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

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### *Immigration:*

Lizbeth fled El Salvador in 2013 because her brother, a well-connected ex-military man, threatened her life after he had sexually abused her for most of her childhood. When Lizbeth arrived to the U.S. border with Mexico and was questioned by border officials about why she was scared to return to El Salvador, she was still scared and ashamed so instead of telling officers the truth, she told officers that she was gay.

**2,036**  
people  
benefitted from  
**1,324**  
legal cases closed

Lizbeth was released and came to NYC to attend her immigration proceedings and was connected with ILP. ILP agreed to represent her and helped Lizbeth file her asylum application. Lizbeth was still traumatized and not ready to tell her story in court, so ILP got adjournments in court so that Lizbeth could get the therapy she needed to emotionally heal and speak about why she fled El Salvador.

Throughout the years, ILP continued to collect evidence for Lizbeth's case while Lizbeth worked on healing in therapy. In 2019, her asylum hearing was adjourned to

July 2020 because the prosecutor did not have Lizbeth’s file. In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit New York City, the immigration courts closed and all cases were adjourned. Lizbeth’s hearing was rescheduled for August 2022. ILP submitted new legal arguments with updated law and prepped Lizbeth for her hearing.

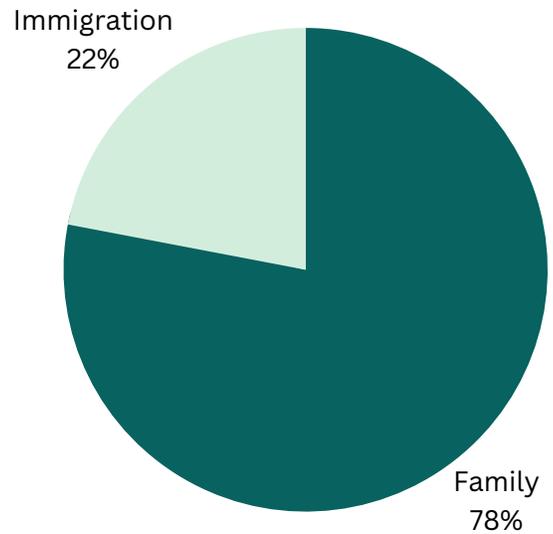
The day of Lizbeth’s hearing finally arrived. A few more hours of delay by the court, another postponement and the hearing was continued for two weeks later. Following more hours of testimony and a government attorney seeking to discredit Lizbeth, the judge granted Lizbeth asylum. Lizbeth had waited almost a decade to hear that her future in the United States was secure.

The next day ILP immediately filed a petition to bring her teenage son to the United States. He is experiencing gang-threats in El Salvador. The prosecutor stated during an off-the-record conference before the hearing that without the massive record compiled by Lizbeth’s legal team, a grant would never be possible. Lizbeth now plans to raise her young U.S-Citizen daughter and her teenage son, once he legally migrates from El Salvador, in Brooklyn, New York.

**Family:**

Deanna was connected with DVLP via the Queens County District Attorney’s office after her abuser was arrested for strangling Deanna while she was nursing her 4-month-old son. Deanna was heavily trauma-bonded to her abuser and was concerned about cooperating with the criminal prosecution of her abuser, fearing the loss of the relationship if she were to cause him to have a criminal record. Having dropped the criminal matter, Deanna was encouraged to speak with DVLP about her options in Family Court and ways she could protect herself in civil court proceedings.

When DVLP conducted an initial intake with Deanna, she was so fearful of punishing the abuser that she was not certain she wanted to file for a Family Court Order of Protection, despite the escalating pattern of physical violence her baby’s father was perpetrating against her. DVLP counseled Deanna on her rights regarding custody, options for limiting the terms of the father’s visitation with the baby, and the ways an



**Cases by  
Legal Problem  
Area**

Order of Protection could help protect her and the child. Though the client was hesitant to take court action, during the first week in which DVLP was involved with Deanna after the strangulation incident, the abuser resumed verbal harassment, and threatened to cause Deanna further physical harm if she were to withhold the child from him. DVLP sat with the client and her feelings and fears, aligning her concerns with real options, and counseling her about the dwindling likelihood she could manage this abuser without court intervention.

Deanna was finally convinced to take steps to protect herself and the baby and DVLP was able to provide in-court representation services. Leaving a relationship where DV is a factor can be so daunting for a survivor who is trauma-bonded to the abuser; often the survivor needs time in therapy to sort out the psychological reasons why she is connected to the person causing harm. In Deanna's case, the violence had escalated to such a serious degree that her life was at risk. DVLP filed for and ultimately obtained a full stay-away Order of Protection on behalf of Deanna and her baby, along with full legal and physical custody of the child for Deanna. DVLP also negotiated with the abuser's attorney to arrange safe exchange of the child at visitation which was court-ordered to be supervised, only. Because of the court orders, and the ability to enforce them, Deanna was able to begin breaking free of the psychological factors which kept her engaged in a relationship with such a violent man.

## OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

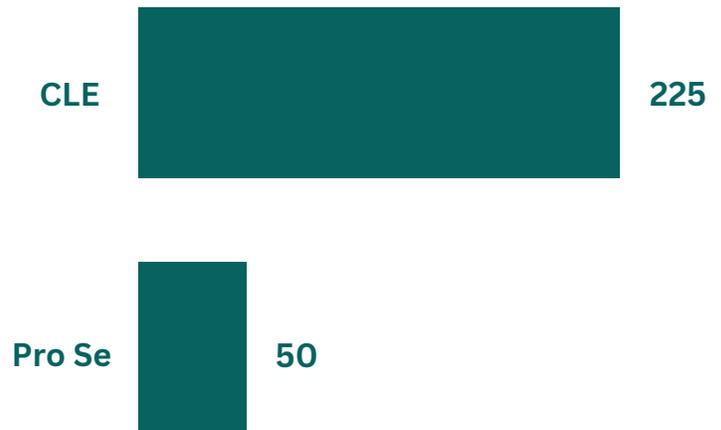
The DVLP/ILP routinely presents at community meetings throughout various New York City communities to provide information on domestic violence and the services provided by DVLP/ILP. Safe Horizon is the largest provider of victim services throughout New York City. DVLP/ILP utilizes this established infrastructure to reach people in need of services. DVLP/ILP staff Attorneys regularly provide trainings at Safe Horizon's community programs, precinct programs, shelters and child advocacy centers.

Safe Horizon DVLP has continued to receive referrals from the family courts throughout

**275**  
people  
benefitted from  
Services  
Other Than Direct  
Legal Services

New York City for the past year to assist the courts in providing services to litigants throughout New York City. Safe Horizon DVLP continues to assist in the drafting of family offense, custody and child support petitions throughout New York City in the last year. These petitions include: orders of protection, writs of habeas corpus and any emergency motion a litigant requests. Safe Horizon DVLP continues to provide this assistance to the courts as the court clerks capacity has greatly diminished over the past several years.

### Number of People Benefitted from Other Services



## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

DVLP/ILP continues to use email, Skype, Microsoft Teams and Zoom to communicate with other Safe Horizon programs and social services organizations. When it is safe, DVLP/ILP often can communicate with clients through email or text as well. DVLP/ILP staff attorneys have access to online legal research programs and services such as LexisNexis and the New York Law Journal. Access to such services dramatically increases the ability of DVLP/ILP attorneys to effectively represent clients.

All DVLP/ILP staff and interns have an individual computer with access to the internet and LexisNexis. All computers contain the Microsoft Office Suite, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Access and are used daily. The staff uses PowerPoint presentations to conduct trainings for advocates, attorneys, and clients. Adobe Acrobat Reader has allowed staff to create, edit and collaborate PDF files more effectively and utilize features such as electronic signatures.

Further, the Safe Horizon website provides detailed information about the various services the agency provides, as well as program-specific descriptions organization-wide.

DVLP/ILP use a client management and data collection system specifically designed for the program. This allows DVLP/ILP to keep more accurate and comprehensive data.

Additionally, all communication for DVLP and the courts has been done primarily on

the Microsoft Teams application which each attorney has access to. Our attorneys have also ensured that our clients have access to this application on their phones and/or computers. For ILP, immigration court hearings have been conducted on WebEx and ILP staff have ensured that our clients can seamlessly access the courts through this system. DVLP continues to attend Family Court preliminary appearances via Microsoft Teams in courts where individual jurists have elected to continue offering virtual appearances, primarily Bronx, New York, and Kings Counties.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

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DVLP/ILP attorneys regularly attend trainings for continuing legal education credit and to increase their knowledge and expertise in family and immigration law, which is constantly and rapidly changing. DVLP attorneys and staff engaged in a two-part training offered internally: “Race, Racism, Power and Privilege: Concepts and Action series that focused on discussions about microaggressions, racial harm, and racial healing, conversations about power, privilege and oppression related to race and ethnicity and how to apply an anti-racist lens to the work we do. In August 2022, DVLP also attended a two-day American Bar Association Custody Litigation Institute which focused on detailed strategies for litigating complex custody matters where issues of domestic violence pervade the nature of the relationship.

Most of the trainings attended by ILP attorneys are targeted at experienced attorneys and discuss the latest immigration law and policy changes as well as the best practices and strategies in responding to them. ILP attorneys attended the virtual two-day annual PLI Immigration Law Conference in December 2022.

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## IMPACT CASE

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### ***Safe Horizon, Inc. and ASISTA Immigration Assistance v. USCIS and USDHS:***

For the case listed above, we are engaged in impact litigation (FOIA lawsuit) to compel DHS and USCIS to disclose records concerning a shift in practice in its adjudication of U visa petitions and U visa-related applications. We retained the law firm, Gibson Dunn, to assist us in this matter pro bono. We first filed a FOIA request, requesting the records and when DHS and USCIS failed to comply, we filed a complaint in March 2021 in the Southern District of New York to compel compliance. DHS/USCIS has been releasing records in tranches, which we have been analyzing. Any responsive records we obtain as a result of this FOIA could impact hundreds of U visa applicants and their advocates across the country.

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

In addition to the collaboration described above, DVLP/ILP maintains strong relationships with all of New York City's law schools and utilizes law students to meet the needs of domestic violence victims. During the summer, four law student interns volunteer full time for ten weeks at DVLP and two law students volunteer full time at ILP, averaging thirty-five hours per week. The DVLP summer program in 2022 was virtual with student interns working remotely and meeting / collaborating with one another virtually, with several in-person meetings scheduled throughout the summer to foster connection and collaboration. ILP law student interns maintained the same hybrid work model as the rest of the ILP staff.

At the beginning of the internship program, interns are provided with a DVLP/ILP training manual created by staff. The manual includes office policies, how to operate the Legal Helpline, and detailed information on family law matters. The internship begins with a three-day intensive training provided by different legal service organizations in the city covering relevant areas, including family law, criminal law, immigration law, domestic violence, housing, and other related topics. Also, in order to help interns understand other issues that affect clients' lives, DVLP provides ongoing training with an emphasis on implicit bias and trauma-informed interviewing along with a weekly brownbag lunch discussion which addresses other relevant areas. Examples of brownbag lunches include presentations in Government Affairs,



**1 Attorney volunteered 52 hours**

**4 Law Students volunteered 1,120 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 1 volunteer.  
Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.  
Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

issues addressing violence in the LGBT Community, Consumer Debt/Credit, trafficking, the New York District Attorney's Office Sex Crimes Unit, the Legal Aid Juvenile Rights Division, the Bronx County District Attorney's office, and a mental health counselor discussed the possible mental health implications subsequent to a domestic violence incident. One of the brownbag lunch discussions is allocated to a session on career development, including what an ideal resume and cover letter would look like.

At the DVLP, each attorney supervises one or two interns and serves as a mentor. At ILP, the interns are managed by a staff attorney coordinator, who also supervises and mentors the interns. At both DVLP and ILP, the mentors meet with the interns on a regular basis to review their progress and address any issues that may arise. Attorneys closely monitor interns during the internship and two formal evaluations are conducted at the midpoint and final point of the internship program. The DVLP/ILP attorneys complete an evaluation form on each intern's performance for the intern's work to their corresponding law school professor.

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## SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

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Safe Horizon DVLP has collaborated with many community-based organizations in Queens and Richmond Counties to ensure that survivor needs beyond just legal needs were being met during the last year. Additionally, Safe Horizon has collaborated with all of the New York City Courts to ensure that every survivor who wants access to justice is afforded that opportunity.

During the past year, DVLP collaborated with the New York City Bar Association and The Fund for Modern Courts in providing recommendations to the New York City Family Courts and the Office of Court Administration in ways in which the family court could improve operations to better service clients going forward.

As well, this past October, Safe Horizon DVLP was also a co-host alongside Sanctuary for Families, Gibson Dunn Proskauer Rose LLP, NYLAG and Her Justice in hosting a two-day Family Law legal conference October 13 -14, 2022 called "Justice for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence" which brought together family law practitioners, survivor leaders, social service professionals, members of the judiciary, and advocates to address systemic injustices faced by survivors of intimate partner

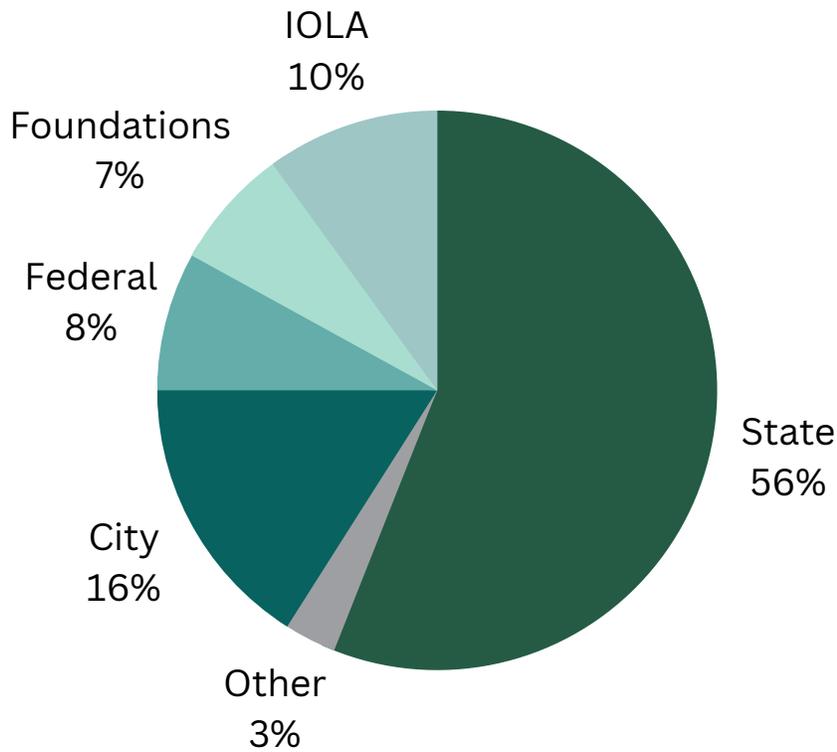
violence within New York State's family law system. The conference was in-person and also offered a virtual viewing option for those who could not attend physically; this conference provided an opportunity to examine the significant challenges for survivors in family law cases, learn about key legal developments, engage and collaborate with practitioners and advocates across organizations, and develop meaningful solutions. Safe Horizon DVLP not only worked for six months to organize the conference logistics and obtain guest speakers and panel members, but also formally participated as part of numerous panels during the two-day conference.

As described above, ILP collaborated with BLS's Safe Harbor Clinic and Catholic Migration Services (CMS), to provide legal assistance at three (3) Ukraine Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Application Assistance clinics in May 2022. At these clinics, we served over 50 Ukrainians currently residing in New York City. At the Immigrant Resource Fair in October 2022, ILP collaborated with community-based organizations and elected officials to provide resources and immigration legal consultations at the event to asylum seekers currently residing in a shelter in Brooklyn. At the virtual training, ILP collaborated with WIN, a shelter serving domestic violence survivors, to provide training to their staff on intimate partner violence (IPV) and immigration options for survivors of IPV. Resources and information on how to refer potential clients to ILP and Safe Horizon were also provided. The training was conducted virtually to over 50 staff members and recorded so that it could be available for staff who could not attend. The Immigrant Resource Fair served over 60 immigrants and their families. At the Immigrant Families Resource Fair in March 2023, ILP again collaborated with community-based organizations, including Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans, Queens Public Library, Voces Latinas, Urban Upbound, Hunger Free NYC, New Immigrant Community Empowerment, and many others, as well as with elected officials, including Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly member Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, to provide information and resources about the services we provide to members of the community. A Resource Fair was attended by over 200 participants from the community.

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Safe Horizon received  
**\$2,398,385**  
 in total funding this past year



<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$153,500</b>
<b>IOLA Grant</b>	<b>\$237,500</b>
<b>City and County Funding</b>	<b>\$390,453</b>
<b>Federal</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$1,341,932</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,398,385</b>