

Catholic Charities Community Services

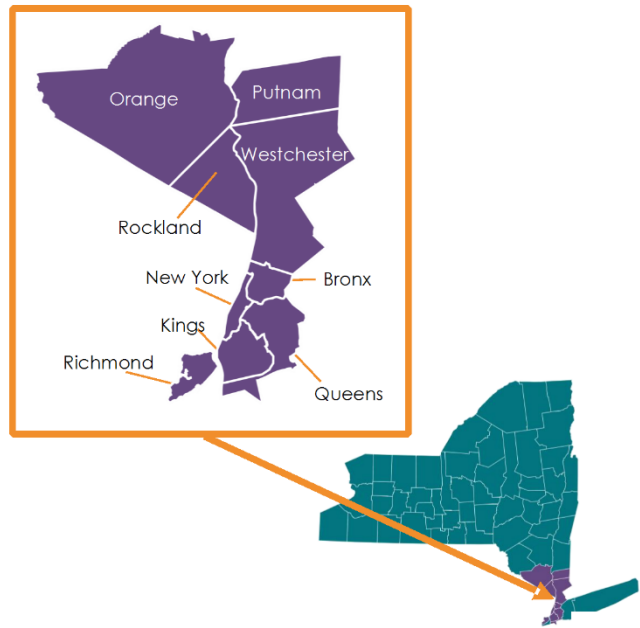
2023 – 2024

Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past year, the legal services programs in our Immigrant and Refugee Services Division have continued to work to ensure access to justice for thousands of immigrants. Through a variety of legal programs designed to meet community and individual needs, we assist immigrants who are long-term residents of New York State as well as those who arrived just days before seeking our assistance; and we serve documented and undocumented immigrants of all ages, including individual adults, families, and unaccompanied children. Our legal services are provided at locations where they can have the most impact, such as the immigration courts; community centers; public schools; churches; and our offices in lower Manhattan, the South Bronx, and throughout the Lower Hudson Valley.

With nearly 200,000 immigrants arriving in New York City since early 2022, our services have been in greater demand than ever, particularly for removal defense assistance. IOLA has helped us to meet the growing demand for legal assistance. Legal services provided during the reporting period include legal representation, Know Your Rights presentations, pro se case assistance, legal consultations, pro bono assignments, and community legal clinics. We help people understand, access, and navigate the complexities of the immigration legal system; avoid fraud by unscrupulous actors; and achieve stability, community integration, and economic self-sufficiency through access to immigration relief and benefits. The impact of this work is evident in our legal outcomes and the increased access to resources for those thousands of people each year who seek refuge in New York State.



Service Area: NYC & Lower Hudson Valley

Population Served: Low Income Immigrants & Refugees

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 143	Lawyers: 59
Paralegals: 39	Others: 54

During the reporting period, our impact included:

- Consultations provided to over 9,500 adults and children
- Representation initiated in 716 new immigration cases
- Pro se case services provided to 1,107 individuals
- Completed and closed 11,668 cases
- Presentations and trainings provided to more than 11,000 people

Among our services, we assist with work authorization filings for eligible individuals, resulting in immigrant New Yorkers' ability to seek legally-protected work. Also, for every asylum case granted during the reporting period, the client was referred for the refugee benefits to which they are entitled. Many clients we assist become eligible for federal student aid, healthcare coverage, or other benefits due to their new immigration status.

We assisted immigrants with USCIS fee waiver applications, resulting in a savings of approximately \$181,000. The calculated savings reflect the average cost per application in the current USCIS fee schedule. USCIS fees for many immigration applications make it difficult for many people seeking immigration benefits to apply for them; fee waivers help ensure that immigration benefits are accessible to everyone regardless of economic status. Also, the more than 1,000 people we helped in the period to apply for work authorization are eligible for legally-protected work opportunities, which will help many become more self-sufficient and less reliant on benefits from the City and State.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

We continue to use various methods of outreach ranging from traditional community-based outreach in isolated areas in the Hudson Valley, to frequent tabling and speaking at community events. We also conduct more wide-reaching outreach using technology, disseminating announcements and event flyers via listservs and on platforms such as Facebook community groups. Our programs include a regular rotation of community workshops, Know Your Rights presentations, and Train the Trainer presentations that serve as outreach, provide accurate information to immigrant communities, and give access to referrals for our legal intake programs. We conduct individual intakes at legal clinics, community events, the immigration courts, and our offices, to analyze eligibility for legal relief, providing legal information, and determine whether we can assist further or provide an appropriate referral. Our intakes are conducted in-person, with videoconferencing technology, and by telephone.

All of our legal intakes use detailed screening tools to gather comprehensive information from participants, enabling our programs to tailor our services to meet individual needs and provide quality legal assistance. Examples of our outreach and intake process include our ActionNYC program, which conducts outreach to NYC Department of Education (DOE) schools in the five boroughs. Once per quarter, we meet with the DOE to share legal and program updates and best practices for directed referrals for intakes, which come from social workers, guidance counselors, and other school staff. We additionally partner with the DOE through our

Know Your Rights and Train the Trainer outreach presentations, which provide accurate and valuable information about relevant immigration topics to immigrant communities. Presentation attendees can access individualized intakes or be added to a waitlist for an intake.

As examples of our services, three of our many legal programs are: Our Haitian Response Initiative (HRI) conducts outreach through the HRI Coalition, which includes seven community-based organizations (CBOs) and us. The CBOs also conduct outreach on our behalf to community members. We prioritize referrals from the CBOs for intakes with our legal team. Regular HRI coalition meetings include legal updates and best practices for referrals. The Community Legal Clinics program in the Lower Hudson Valley uses diverse outreach strategies to connect directly with individuals needing legal assistance. We engage local organizations, distribute informational flyers, leverage volunteer networks, and provide a call service for community members. We also give intakes to people who call for appointments, attend one of our community clinics, or are referred to us by partners.

We prioritize accessibility, quality of service, and the provision of valuable information to those in need of legal immigration assistance. Since 2020, ActionNYC in Schools has offered remote services – legal clinics and individual consultations – in addition to our in-person clinics at New York City schools.



Our *ICI Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative* team provides phone consultations twice a month for previous walk-ins and referrals from partner organizations. Also, to expand our capacity to serve unrepresented individuals in the immigration court system, we have implemented weekly telephonic consultations with attorneys through our Immigration Court HelpDesk and Family Group Orientation Program for people we are not able to serve in person. We continue to offer some remote options for our pro se workshops, which we hold at least once per month to provide individualized help with asylum and other applications for people in removal proceedings. In February and April 2024, we provided remote services through a Queens Family Court pro se pilot project, enabling SIJS-eligible youth to begin family court processes quickly; we will represent these children before USCIS. For children in ORR custody, we conduct both on-site and remote screenings and Know Your Rights presentations for some children and locations, to ensure that children do not need to wait for our staff to travel before receiving legal help. Finally, all of our hotline information and referral services are provided remotely.

CASE EXAMPLES

Example 1: In January, we won a significant victory in an asylum case in immigration court. The client is an HIV-positive Garifuna woman from Honduras, whose persecution included sterilization without informed consent and whose case had been pending with the court for many years. Based on the record our attorney prepared, the government attorney agreed to stipulate to asylum eligibility. The judge then granted the cases on the written record alone, which is very unusual. The judge told the attorney that her record was "extraordinarily compelling."

Example 2: In a case for a child who was about to age out of eligibility for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), the attorney prepared and filed the necessary family court petitions and motions within one week of beginning representation. The attorney was able to schedule a family court hearing and get the requisite guardianship and special findings orders just twenty days later. She filed the child's petition for SIJS with USCIS within a month of accepting representation and just one week before the client's 21st birthday. This case exemplifies many we encounter through our legal programs for SIJS-eligible youth who are close to turning 21 and thus losing the opportunity for lawful status. Because there are not enough attorneys in the City and State with capacity to take on the multi-jurisdictional representation SIJS cases require, our programs prioritize age-out SIJS cases, and we regularly file these cases on tight deadlines.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Immigration Hotlines: We manage three confidential, multilingual, immigration hotlines that support New Yorkers. In partnership with the Office of New Americans (ONA) we operate a statewide phone service that provides referrals to a network of legal providers and other helpful programs and resources; we also help report fraud or scams perpetrated against immigrant communities. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), our ActionNYC Hotline schedules appointments for legal screenings with community-based navigators for New York City residents. The Legal Orientation Program for Custodians National Call Center helps facilitate the release of unaccompanied children from ORR custody by scheduling legal orientations with designated providers, providing certain callers with telephonic orientations, and sending information about assisting a child in removal proceedings.

Pro Se Assistance: Throughout the reporting period, our community engagement programs, including the Immigration Court Helpdesk (ICH), Family Group Legal Orientation Program (FGLOP), Community Legal Clinics, Haitian Response Initiative, New York City Community Trust, and New York Legal Response, provided pro se assistance to 1,107 participants through our workshops or clinics. This individualized assistance encompassed a range of services, including help and follow-up with Asylum applications, Temporary Protected Status applications, corresponding Employment Authorization applications, and procedural motions such as Change of Venue and Change of Address. Through our ICH and FGLOP programs, we provided individual and family sessions to 1,310 individuals at the three New York City immigration courts, empowering individuals with the knowledge and tools necessary for navigating the complex immigration system, which is particularly important for those who are unrepresented. Moreover, we distributed over 26,000 self-help printed materials to give broad access to essential legal information, bringing the total number of people receiving pro se assistance services to 29,029.

29,029
people
benefited from
Pro Se
Assistance

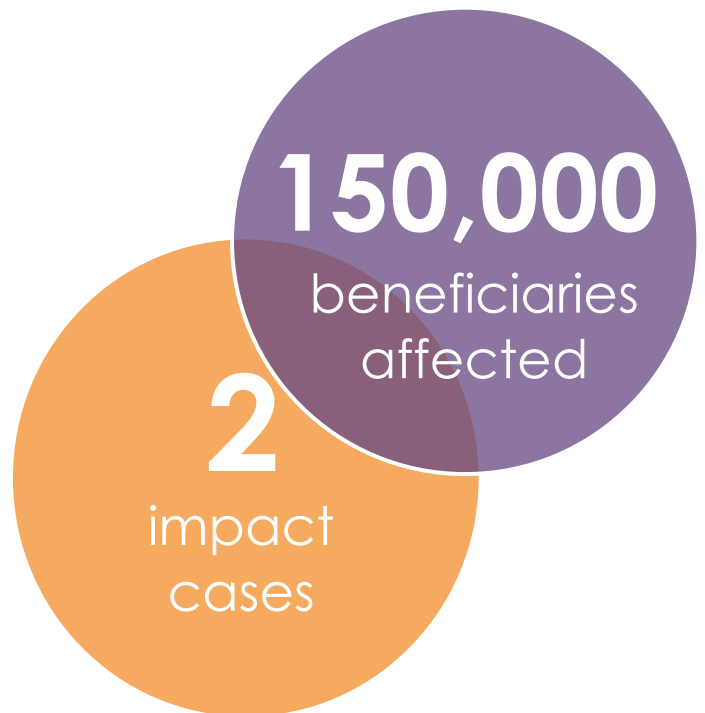
11,156
people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Community Legal Education:

The commitment to providing Community Legal Education is highly commendable, with a significant impact evident through the engagement of 1,908 participants in presentations. The distribution of 1,739 brochures further extends the reach of these vital resources. Interactive online presentations have successfully reached 5,724 individuals. The Legal Orientation Program for 1,785 custodians represents a targeted approach to empower those responsible for minors in legal proceedings. Overall, the service has positively impacted 11,156 people. Our program for unaccompanied children provides Know Your Rights presentations for thousands of children each year who are in ORR custody.

IMPACT CASES

Our primary focus is individual representation and legal assistance. However, in this reporting period, we had significant victories in two cases, in Bronx and Dutchess Family Courts, that expanded access for children in government custody who are seeking the required predicate orders for SIJS cases. New York family courts typically assume jurisdiction over children in foster care only in cases filed by government attorneys; however, in these two cases we successfully argued that the courts should interpret the statute to allow us to represent those children. Without these victories, those children would not have a pathway to legal status. These decisions should pave the way for other children in government custody to seek Family Court orders with a private attorney.



TECHNOLOGY

Our strategic investment in upgrading our communications infrastructure was and will continue to be a significant advancement in service quality and operational efficiency. We implemented a new online call center platform, Ring Central, during the reporting period to enhance connectivity and ensure clearer communications with the communities we serve. This has been particularly relevant to our Hotline, which receives over 100,000 calls per year. The new platform includes a call-back feature that is helping us to optimize caller experience. Furthermore, we have been providing comprehensive training to the hotline and other operations staff on using the new system and maintaining the equipment. We have begun to implement an ECM technology system for data capture and management on the hotlines; we hope to integrate this with our existing systems over the next reporting period in order to minimize the number of data management systems our hotline counselors need to use so that they can spend more time helping callers. Additionally, our data management team is currently evaluating legal case management systems to determine whether there is a system that is more user-friendly for attorneys than our current system and also includes more robust options for efficient and accurate reporting, both of which have become critically important with the significantly increased case volume. We expect any new system to have form-uploading capabilities that comply with USCIS and EOIR online filing requirements.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The acquisition of new equipment through the IOLA Technology Grant has enhanced our operational capabilities. The fund enabled us to purchase 25 monitors, docking stations, and keyboards for staff in our Manhattan and Bronx offices, which are upgrades that we otherwise would not have made this year. This upgrade improves the work environment, equips staff to handle their daily work with greater efficiency, allows for a more seamless integration of technology into our work, and facilitates more collaboration among team members. The grant allowed us to prioritize technological advancements without reallocating resources from other critical areas. Furthermore, the grant encouraged us to initiate a project to improve digital literacy for our staff. This initiative will equip staff with advanced tools while improving their proficiency in utilizing technology and related tools. By investing in technology, we are better positioned to respond to the evolving needs of the communities we serve, ensuring that our services remain accessible and effective.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Our Pro Bono Project continues to increase the capacity of our legal practice through the recruitment and strong mentorship of volunteer lawyers. We placed 56 new cases with pro bono attorneys and recruited more than 30 additional attorneys to join our network. In addition to individual case representation, volunteer attorneys are crucial to our pro se workshops and community clinics, providing supervised, individualized assistance to immigrants throughout the year. We hosted six trainings for pro bono attorneys during the reporting period, including four trainings for pro bono counsel on SIJS, one on attorney well-being, and one on how medical professionals can support asylum seekers in New York State. We expect to begin offering CLE credit to pro bono attorneys in the near future, as we expect to complete our CLE accreditation requirements this summer.



A recent highlight involved a team of pro bono attorneys from Goldman Sachs who represented a young Honduran woman and her four children in their asylum application. The client was fleeing domestic violence, and her case was assigned to an immigration judge with a high denial rate. While preparing the asylum case, it became clear to the attorneys that the client's new, U.S. citizen husband had been abusing her. The attorneys changed strategies to submit a Violence Against Women Act petition, based on the abuse by the client's husband. They filed the petition in December, and requested that DHS join a motion to dismiss the case in immigration court and obviate the need to retraumatize the client by requiring her to testify about the persecution before a harsh judge. The judge dismissed the proceedings, and the client is now on track to get her green card. She is working on finding a safe place to live for herself and her children.

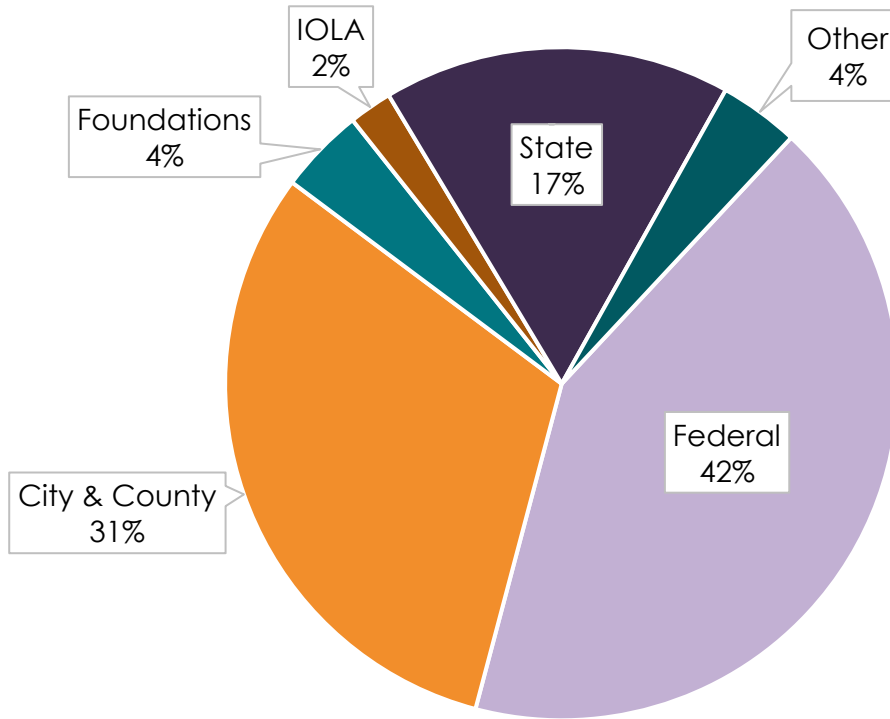
SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

We are involved in many significant collaborations with stakeholders including legal services organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), advocacy groups, and government entities; these efforts include formal and informal coalitions and referral networks. For example, HRI is a member of a formal coalition with CBOs through which we collaborate on best practices and outreach, receive legal referrals, and make referrals for clients in need of social services or other non-legal assistance. Our ICH and FGLOP collaborate closely with the immigration court judges and staff; they also receive referrals from nonprofit organizations throughout the U.S. and from the immigration courts (when they encounter especially vulnerable immigrants in need of additional assistance). Our IOI CILEC and IOI LAS programs are members of New York City coalitions that collaborate to provide legal services for vulnerable and/or isolated New York City immigrant communities. The ICARE program similarly collaborates with other ICARE providers on best practices, advocacy, and referrals for unaccompanied children and families.

Our New York Legal Response Program receives referrals from agencies throughout the state for services including intake, pro se assistance, and direct representation. Our Pro Bono Program partners with law firms, private bar associations, and CBOs to provide trainings and increase capacity to represent immigrants. We focus pro bono efforts particularly on the Lower Hudson Valley, where the need for legal assistance is particularly acute. Our hotlines collaborate with legal service providers across the state to make targeted referrals; the hotlines also work with government agencies on best practices and referrals for registering complaints against fraudulent attorneys and notarios. Our program for unaccompanied children works regularly with other providers to make and receive referrals for children being released from ORR custody; we also collaborate on best practices and advocacy. Finally, we partner closely with government agencies – particularly in New York City and State – on program design and best practices across multiple programs.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$17,819,834



IOLA Funding	\$370,000
City & County Funding	\$5,538,954
State Funding	\$2,976,390
Federal Funding	\$7,516,846
Foundations	\$733,564
Other Funding	\$684,080