

Her Justice

2023 – 2024

Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Her Justice stands with women living in poverty throughout New York City by recruiting and mentoring volunteer lawyers to provide free legal help to address individual and systemic legal barriers. Working with pro bono attorneys from over 100 law firms and corporations, Her Justice provides access to justice to women in all five boroughs of New York City who would otherwise be unrepresented. Most Her Justice clients are mothers (70%), survivors of domestic violence (80%), and women of color (90%).

During the grant period, our volunteers and staff provided legal assistance on 2,487 family, divorce, and immigration matters, including 1,014 closed cases that directly benefited 2,661 vulnerable women and children. We continue to provide services to our clients, who currently have 1,473 active and open matters. We also provided other information and legal assistance to legal and social service providers on 680 referrals.

For women living in poverty, especially victims of domestic violence, the assistance of trained, competent legal counsel can make the difference between long-term stability and extreme poverty and homelessness. The women Her Justice serves attain the legal remedies they need to assert their independence from their abusers—custody of their children, child support, divorce judgments, and immigration status, enabling them to work safely and legally so that they can provide for their families. During the grant period, Her Justice clients obtained financial awards and settlements totaling \$840,893 and monthly benefits totaling \$54,254.



Service Area: New York City

Population Served: Women living in poverty in NYC

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 36.83	Lawyers: 13
Paralegals: 8	Others: 15.83

We exceeded the anticipated goals for the reporting period for Pro Bono Services and Referrals due to the successful implementation of our online intake portal, which has streamlined our ability to facilitate referrals and provide other information and legal assistance. We also exceeded our goals in Online Outreach. We did not achieve our anticipated annual goals for Individual Case Services— Cases Closed, Individual Case Services—People Benefited, Community Legal Education, and Pro Se Assistance. Cases are remaining open longer due to delays in the courts and systems within which we work that are outside of our control. That has resulted in fewer cases being closed within the reporting period than anticipated, which also reflects the number of people benefitted, as that is measured when cases are closed. Our attorneys are committed to ensuring our current clients have the support they need throughout their cases, no matter how long it takes. A majority of our pro se services are delivered through website downloads of informational materials, which is not reflected in our reported number for pro se assistance because it is instead reflected in the Online Outreach section. We will adjust our goals accordingly going forward so as not to double-count overlapping activities.

As mentioned above, last year, we launched an online intake portal, available in English and Spanish, allowing those seeking legal assistance to apply for an intake online at any time that is convenient for them. Demonstrating the positive impact of this upgraded system, during the reporting period, we processed 1,526 intakes, which is nearly 1,000 more than we processed last year. To manage the increased number of intakes, we hired an Intake Coordinator this year to improve coordination, communication, and collaboration between clients and staff throughout the intake process.

In the past year, we have also significantly improved our capacity to deliver services by filling two staff attorney vacancies and adding an additional staff attorney. In September 2023, a new attorney joined to help us serve incarcerated women with their unique civil justice needs, and in November 2023, we hired two staff attorneys who previously worked at Her Justice and have ample experience working with women like our clients in legal settings. These hires have greatly increased our legal team's capacity to provide critical legal services to our clients.

During the grant period, Her Justice clients obtained financial awards and settlements totaling \$840,893 as well as monthly benefits totaling \$54,254. Staff track awards and settlements using LegalServer for each case. Our clients receive, on average, a 75% increase in their income post-representation, which means they can go on to live safe and self-sufficient lives. As The Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Services in New York concluded, the financial impact of civil legal services in matters like child and spousal support also greatly benefits the State and New York taxpayers.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

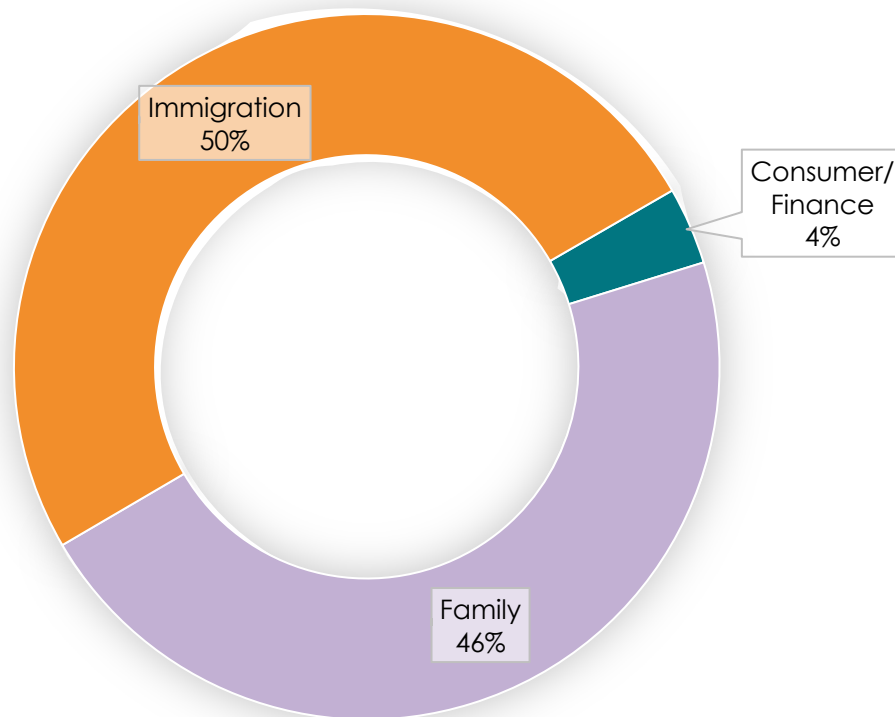
Her Justice aims to reduce barriers to access and ensure that women living in poverty in New York City are knowledgeable about their legal rights and the remedies available to them. To that end, we use a three-pronged strategy for targeted, culturally sensitive community outreach to underserved women throughout the City that entails informational and know-your-rights presentations, direct legal services through collaborations with community-based agencies, and capacity-building trainings for community-based not-for-profit organizations. Her Justice Staff attorneys, paralegals and volunteer lawyers provide community outreach and know-your rights presentations to our target population – women living in poverty, including victims of domestic violence, trafficking or other gender-based violence, and immigrants.



CASE EXAMPLES

Matrimonial: Madiha* came to Her Justice seeking a divorce from her abusive husband so that she could disentangle her life from his family's control and begin fresh. Born and raised in Pakistan, Madiha was a student with dreams of becoming a doctor when she came to the United States after marrying her husband, a U.S. citizen, in a marriage coordinated by their families. For five years, Madiha's husband was verbally, physically, and financially abusive. Madiha was connected to Her Justice through one of our referral partners. She learned her husband had filed for divorce and, additionally, that he had allowed her green card to expire. Her Justice stepped in to represent Madiha on both fronts. Madiha's Her Justice lawyers were dogged in pursuing every last cent to which she was entitled. In the end, she was awarded \$25,000 in combined spousal support, compensation for jewelry her husband's family had stolen from her, and money they had taken from her. Now, at 26, with this life-changing outcome, Madiha has a fresh start and is pursuing her original plan of a career in healthcare.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



CASE EXAMPLES

Immigration: After having separated from her abusive husband, Durene* came to Her Justice for help rebuilding her life. When Durene was 32, she met her husband while visiting New York City from her home country of Jamaica. Later that year, they married with plans to bring her five sons to the United States once they were settled. But soon after the wedding, Durene's husband turned violent. He was physically and sexually abusive. With her own safety at stake, she knew she could not bring her children into the home. Within 3 months, she had separated from him and moved in with her sister, obtaining an order of protection to keep herself safe. Durene connected with Her Justice as she sought to forge ahead in building a life for herself and her family in the United States. Ultimately, Her Justice lawyers helped Durene receive her work permit, allowing her to begin a career as a healthcare worker during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, Durene was thrilled to become a permanent U.S. resident. Her work permit and legal status gave Durene the security to pursue her initial dream of bringing her five children to the United States. Today, Her Justice continues to work with Durene to make that a reality for her whole family.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Her Justice continually works to identify and enhance areas of our work to meet the needs of our clients most effectively. We offer trainings to community-based organizations on rights and options available to women like our clients, expanding the reach of our efforts. We also expanded our Trafficking Survivors Resiliency Project and launched our Civil Justice for Incarcerated Women Project. The Trafficking Resiliency Project has now been incorporated into our pro bono leverage model so we can serve more survivors of sex and labor trafficking, and the Civil Justice for Incarcerated Women Project provides tailored legal services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women.

Efforts to Provide Access to Services:

As part of our strategy to ensure that underserved women living in poverty in New York City receive accurate, reliable information about their legal rights and the remedies available to them, Her Justice strengthened relationships with community-based organizations, providing trainings on rights and options available to women living in poverty, including:

- Working with Survivors of Trauma: Incorporating Trauma-Informed Approach for 40 participants of a virtual training
- Creating Safe Space: Talking about Vicarious Trauma, Vicarious Resiliency & True Self-Care for 30 Queens Defenders staff members
- Orders of Protection Training for 20 DoVE advocates at NY Presbyterian

1,375

people
benefited
from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Her Justice has also developed and published 11 easy-to-read booklets covering a wide array of family law and matrimonial topics, providing pro se litigants with detailed information and instructions on how to proceed in Family and Supreme Court. These Legal Information Guides are available in English and Spanish on our website and via links on the LawHelpNY.org and WomensLaw.org websites. During the reporting period, the guides and other legal resources and information were downloaded on our website 3,538 times.

40
people
benefited
from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

Trafficking Survivors Resiliency Project:

In September 2021, Her Justice launched the Trafficking Survivors Resiliency Project, which aims to increase protection for trafficking survivors through legal status and benefits, educate survivors about their legal rights, prevent conditions that allow trafficking, and remove barriers to access to justice for immigrants. The Project provides direct legal services and policy advocacy for trafficking survivors, as well as placement of cases under our pro bono model, targeted community-based know-your-rights trainings, and translation of materials. By initially focusing part of the pilot project on meeting the needs of a specific population, undocumented Mandarin-speaking survivors, we have been able to expand our services more intentionally through a culturally responsive approach, creating an institutional framework to serve all clients better, centering inclusion, equity, and access across all programmatic work.

Civil Justice for Incarcerated Women Project:

This past year, we launched the Civil Justice for Incarcerated Women Project, which aims to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women in achieving personal freedom and stability by providing free civil legal services in the areas of family and matrimonial law. We've begun with a focus on divorce matters as divorce can legally end an abusive relationship (75% of incarcerated women have experienced domestic violence); formally sever ties to an accomplice in the activity that led to an arrest; free women from debt incurred by their partner; empower them to take control of their family structure and relationships; and enable them to find a healthy, stable relationship with a new partner. This project expands our capacity to provide incarcerated women with a clear pathway to personal freedom through the civil legal services that help to ensure safety, financial stability and autonomy upon reentry.

3,538
people
benefited
from
**Web-Based
Assistance**

TECHNOLOGY

Her Justice uses technology to enhance the quality and delivery of legal services to clients, as well as to recruit, train, and mentor volunteers. The legal department continually refines system configuration to improve workflow and data management effectiveness. LegalServer, a web-based application, enables staff to interview clients and provide legal services at sites convenient to clients and advocates. Staff use the Ring Central telephone application and various applications, including Zoom, Slack and Microsoft Suite. Attorneys also have access to legal resources and treatises from Lexis and other publications to keep them well-informed of developments in the law, and the Family & Matrimonial practice now has access to MatLaw software. The Operations department is also beta testing the Litera software with a pool of attorneys to improve productivity with pro bono attorney mentoring. The Operations department is rolling out various technology training for staff, covering topics such as Excel knowledge, cybersecurity, and project management tools.

Her Justice has provided every staff member with a business laptop for off-site access to the database and to facilitate intakes and client engagement. Staff can now request technological accessories to support their ability to work from home. We also conduct annual organizational technology surveys to ensure our technology systems meet staff needs. The results of this survey also guide us in performing annual health checks on our hardware. The Operations department is in the process of replacing outdated laptops and has replaced 23 computers as of this month and intends to replace the remaining 17 laptops by the end of December 2024. We enhanced our cybersecurity insurance to protect against ransomware attacks. We also migrated Her Justice's website to a different provider in August 2023 and intend to improve users' accessibility to the website as the second phase of the migration.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The additional IOLA discretionary funding from the 2023 Technology Grant helped support the replacement and upgrade of RAM for all legal services program staff laptops, improving the computers' performance and ability to simultaneously handle multiple applications and platforms to facilitate client intake calls, mentoring, and virtual court appearances. This upgrade allowed Her Justice staff to maintain their current laptops while the Operations department prepares to replace all staff laptops by the coming winter.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Her Justice specializes in offering pro bono assistance—connecting volunteer lawyers from 100 firms with women living in poverty who desperately need a lawyer. By engaging the talent and resources of private firms, Her Justice leverages its small legal staff, exponentially increasing the number of women who go to court with their own lawyers and obtain the legal protections that they and their children need and deserve.

During this reporting period, Her Justice had 4,511 enrolled volunteers. Our 13 staff attorneys actively trained and mentored 1,265 pro bono attorneys and non-attorneys (summer associates or paralegals) who worked on 914 closed cases with Her Justice clients during the grant period. The other 100 closed cases during the reporting period were worked on in-house by Her Justice staff attorneys.

Her Justice conducts CLE accredited live and video streaming trainings year-round—providing detailed manuals containing case law and sample documents. CLE credit is also available for pro bono hours worked on referred matters. Our trainings, which we enhanced to reflect trauma-informed practices for both our clients and attorneys, focus on the impact domestic violence and poverty have on our clients in all case areas of our practice. This past year, we conducted 16 live, in-person or webinar Continuing Legal Educations (CLE) training webinars in each substantive area of the relevant law we practice.

1,624attorneys volunteered **49,451** hours**81**law students volunteered **3,485** hours**41**other volunteers volunteered **7,694** hours

Volunteer lawyers are assigned a staff attorney mentor who is available to strategize, answer questions, review documents and provide referrals. Four firm attorneys work full-time as externs, providing immediate in-court representation in complex or emergency matters. Non-attorney volunteers translate or interpret for non-English-speaking clients. Law student interns and paralegals volunteer throughout the year in our main office and remotely. Volunteer forensic accountants and investigators compile and analyze the documentation necessary to obtain fair financial awards. Our Summer Associate Program provides summer associates at our Corporate Partner firms with hands-on legal experience and helps to recruit future lawyers to represent women living in poverty. During summer 2023, 105 attorneys with 75 Summer Associates (law students) from 20 firms worked on 55 legal matters.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

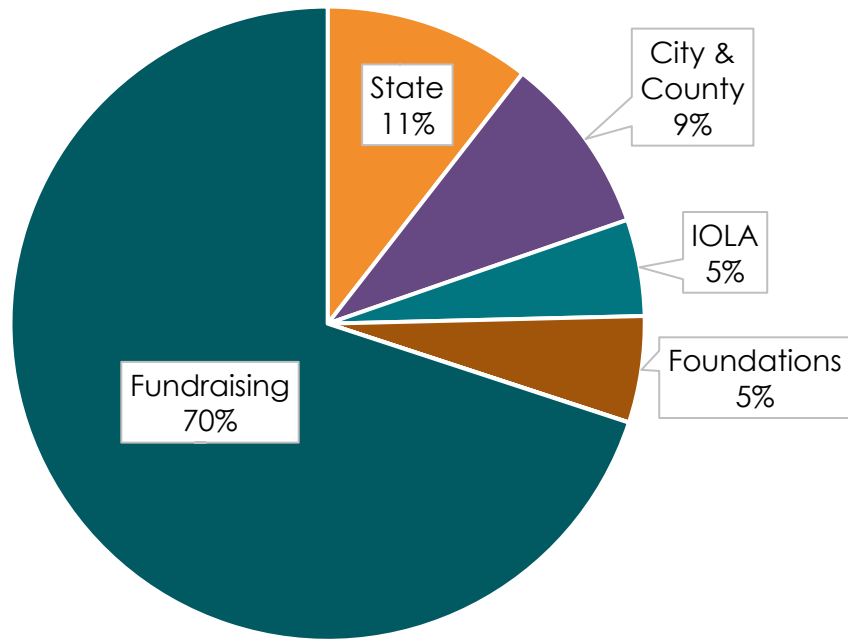
Her Justice collaborates with over 100 law firms, connecting volunteer lawyers with women living in poverty who desperately need a lawyer. By providing expert training, advice and mentoring to the private bar, Her Justice leverages our small legal staff, exponentially increasing the number of women who go to court with their own lawyers and obtain the legal protections they and their children need and deserve.

We are also an offsite partner with all five FJCs and regularly receive referrals for all our practice areas. We work closely with more than 20 other on-site and off-site social service and civil legal partners to provide comprehensive service to FJC clients. Her Justice staff conduct intake and provide a full range of information, advice and counsel, brief services and representation. The FJCs are a particularly effective way to connect with women who are in the greatest need of our services.

During the grant period, Her Justice continued to conduct know-your-rights legal presentations with community-based partners who do not have legal services on-site and informed Her Justice that their clients are not always comfortable going to the FJCs for legal services. Her Justice closely partners with the following organizations, providing and accepting referrals, conducting training for organization staff to provide information, know-your-rights presentations, and legal information and advice directly to their community members: Korean American Family Service Center (KAFSC); Sakhi for South Asian Women; Violence Intervention Project (VIP), which provides crisis counseling, advocacy and support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence; ConnectNYC; Restore; Garden of Hope, who serve trafficking survivors; and Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC).

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$6,215,139



IOLA Funding	\$ 306,000
City & County Funding	\$ 569,407
State Funding	\$ 654,439
Foundations	\$ 337,290
Fundraising	\$ 4,347,353
Other Funding	\$ 650