

# **JOURNEY'S END REFUGEE SERVICES**

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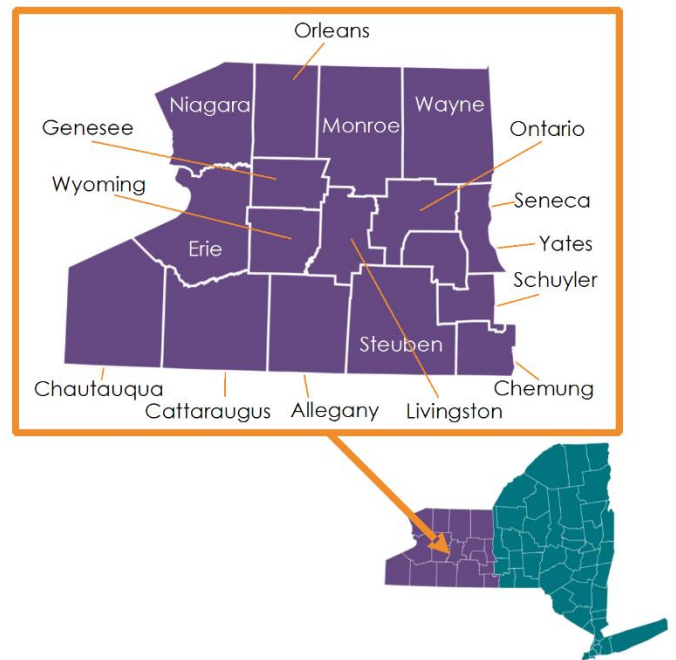
**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

**Major Achievements:** The Immigration Legal Services (ILS) Program at Journey's End Refugee Services continues to dedicate our practice to U.S.-based immigration law, operating from five offices serving low-income immigrants across Upstate New York, including a new location in Ithaca, NY which opened in August 2023. This year, we closed 2,252 cases, benefiting 2,615 individuals; provided legal education to 1,169 community members; provided pro se assistance on 837 cases; and referred 164 individuals for appropriate services. A total of 23 volunteers helped us meet these critical needs.

**Primary Target Population:** Our primary target population remains immigrants residing in the twenty-two counties we serve, whose incomes are below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. This population includes refugees, asylees, asylum-seekers, immigrants with temporary status, immigrants with Special Immigrant Visas ("SIV"), undocumented immigrants, lawful permanent residents, naturalized U.S. citizens, and Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolees. We continued to assist members of impacted immigrant communities as they navigated changing policies, lengthy case adjudication backlogs, and continued humanitarian crises. We focused efforts on immigrants who cannot afford access to counsel, cases of pressing humanitarian concern, and cases where attorney advocacy would significantly impact outcome. A major program focus this year was a response to the influx of over 600 migrants bussed to our region from New York City.

**Dollar or other benefits realized:** Benefits from our services were substantial. This year, we



**Service Area:** Western Region of New York

**Population Served:** Low Income Immigrants and Refugees

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 34    Lawyers: 17.25  
 Paralegals: 3    Others: 13.75

helped qualifying individuals seek: protection from persecution (asylum and withholding of removal); protection from torture; temporary reprieve from returning to a country where conditions are unsafe; relief under the Violence Against Women's Act; legal permanent resident status; and naturalization in order to become U.S. Citizens. We petitioned for our clients' overseas spouses, children, parents, and siblings to reunite family units in the U.S. Many clients realized the additional benefit of work authorization, often crucial to obtaining sustainable employment, affording safe housing, and supporting a family. Clients were assisted in obtaining fee waivers where expensive government fees applied, saving \$107,895 in total.

**Increased access to justice:** This year, we increased access to justice through services provided to individuals that would likely be denied immigration benefits without our assistance. In immigration proceedings, represented individuals are substantially more likely to succeed in their legal matter. This is critical when consequences of denied immigration cases can include an inability to work lawfully, prolonged family separation, risk of civil detention, and even deportation to countries where clients lives would be at risk.

We also helped to increase the availability of quality legal assistance through providing program support and technical assistance to Department of Justice ("DOJ") accredited agencies. After hundreds came to our area with no legal status and no work authorization, our direct assistance and coordination helped this population to navigate the complex immigration system to meet these crucial needs.

**Significant improvements in capacity to deliver services:** Our program yet again saw a significant increase in demand this year. The migrant influx created an immediate and significant demand and was paired with a dramatic increase in refugee admissions. Arrivals of asylum-seekers at the southern border have also increased, and as routes to Canada have decreased, many more individuals are remaining in our region to seek asylum. We expanded services to assist these populations through our partnerships with the NYS Office for New Americans and the NY Immigration Coalition.

These increased investments in our program supported a significant expansion in staffing - including supervisory roles, administrative assistance, and direct services staff (totaling 16 new hires and promotions to new roles). New staff have assisted recent arrivals with applications for asylum, temporary protected status, employment authorization, adjustment of status, family reunification, and more. We handled 695 cases for clients residing in NYC-funded hotels in the second half of this year alone.

## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

We provide direct immigration representation in proceedings before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for immigration benefits, and before Immigration Court where attorneys defend immigrants in removal (deportation) proceedings.

**Immigration, Humanitarian Parole:** In response to the fall of the Afghan government in late 2021, we filed and have continued work on hundreds of pending humanitarian parole applications for clients seeking evacuation for their family in Afghanistan. One such case was for a U.S. citizen petitioning for 9 family members, who faced particular danger in Afghanistan because of their past support of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and for their efforts to promote gender equality. The family included women in highly skilled professions, women's rights activists, a high-ranking member of the Afghanistan National Army, and a police official. The family had been threatened and were forced to flee the country to avoid arrest, torture, and likely death.

This year, we responded to requests for evidence from USCIS, which essentially requested entirely new application packets for each of the 9 family members. The packets included detailed research and evidence on conditions in Afghanistan, the familial relationships, and the specific humanitarian needs of the family, a filing totaling around 1,000 pages.



2,615

people  
benefited  
from

2,252

legal cases  
closed

The cases were then conditionally approved, and we assisted the family in completing their consular processing through the embassy, including several more applications and interviews for each person.

Finally, the family members were approved for travel and arrived in the U.S. with their temporary humanitarian parole status. Once in the U.S., we assisted the family by filing applications for employment authorization, and are in the process of completing asylum applications now to secure permanent status for the family.

## CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



**Immigration, Defensive Asylum:** A single mom and her child from the Republic of Congo were represented in their defensive asylum cases before an Immigration Judge in Buffalo. While in the Republic of Congo, her family tried to sell her into marriage with a powerful politician; when she refused this sale many times, she was ultimately kidnapped, attacked, and severely violated by the police.

We assisted her in submitting an asylum application and preparing for trial. Given the sensitive nature of her case, she had very little personal evidence to submit, so we worked together to put together a compelling filing filled with country conditions evidence. We also referred her to a psychological evaluation from the Human Rights Initiative in Buffalo, in which their report was used to supplement her case. Through this psychological evaluation, she was able to secure regular counselling services.

After an afternoon of testimony, she won her asylum case, and after a highly emotional day, the relief that she never had to go back was palpable; she is excited to begin a new life for herself and her child.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

In addition to direct representation on immigration cases, we also provided community legal education, legal clinics, legal consultation days, and pro se assistance. At community legal education events, we presented to community members—immigrants, civically engaged non-immigrants, social workers, students, DOJ Accredited Representatives, and more at information sessions and trainings on topics including: Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelan and Somali Nationals; VAWA-based relief; Overview of Immigration Court; Issues at the Southern Border; Forensic Evaluations & Affidavits for Asylum Seekers; Legal Ethics for DOJ Accredited Representatives; Immigration Court Mock Trial for new practitioners; and more.

We also provided legal clinics and legal consultation days where individuals received an attorney's counsel or referral – held weekly at our Buffalo office and at multiple times each month at Jericho Road, Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga, Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester, and the American Civic Association in Binghamton. Our program expanded our pro se assistance, with a particular focus on those seeking asylum. Rapid response pro se efforts were developed and implemented in response to the migrant influx, focused on Temporary Protected Status, Employment Authorization, and Asylum. After advising pro se applicants of the limited scope of assistance, our attorneys reviewed applications, explained any complicating issues, assisted in drafting addenda/cover letters, and advised on required evidence, filing deadlines, and submission protocol.

837

people  
benefited from  
**Pro Se  
Assistance**

1,209

people  
benefited from  
**Community  
Legal  
Education**

**Example— Temporary Protected Status Community Legal Education and Legal Clinics:** Beginning in June 2024, around 600 migrants with no permanent status in the U.S. were bussed from New York City to Buffalo and Rochester, including over 150 Venezuelans. On September 20th, the Biden administration announced the extension and redesignation of Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans, and by September 26th we had prepared and scheduled a series of Know Your Rights presentations on Temporary Protected Status, including an overview of eligibility guidelines, work authorization, evidence requirements, and deadlines for registration, for a total of 164 attendees.

Following the presentations, we conducted a series of 10 legal clinics and were able to complete 159 TPS applications and 162 work authorization applications for this population. This effort allowed clients to more quickly achieve self-sufficiency and move out of the shelter system into more permanent housing.

**Example— USCIS Afghan Support Center:** In late March, we participated in the USCIS Afghan Support Center in Buffalo, which provided an opportunity for Afghans and other community members to speak with U.S. government staff, New York State government agencies, and a variety of service providers. Over 1,000 people attended the event, throughout its four-day run. Our attorneys were on hand to answer general legal questions, assist clients in speaking with the various government agencies, and to provide brief consultations.

We assisted clients in speaking to officers from the following: USCIS Buffalo Field Office regarding adjustment of status; USCIS Newark Asylum Office; USCIS Humanitarian Parole Unit; USCIS I-730 Unit regarding family reunification; National Visa Center regarding SIV processing; and Department of State CARE program regarding evacuations from Afghanistan.

Through our advocacy at the event, a number of humanitarian parole applications were re-opened, many asylum and adjustment cases were flagged and expedited by USCIS and the CARE team, and connections were made to FAMIL, resulting in several clients receiving their Chief of Mission approval. We were also able to make referrals to local service providers who were present at the event for matters such as housing, benefits, employment, and education.

# TECHNOLOGY

Journey's End utilized Cerenade's elmmigration platform, a cloud-based data-tracking software program, to record, organize and report all services provided by the ILS Program. The software provides a platform for case management for each client and legal matter, generates case reports, tracks USCIS and Department of State processing times, and is compatible with e-filing. Cerenade employs multiple layers of security to ensure client data is confidential and secure, including data encryption. We also continued utilization of AILALink and Westlaw, significantly effective database subscriptions available to immigration practitioners. Migration of all digital files from an on-site file server to the SharePoint Online system has allowed for streamlined digitization and storage of closed files, ensuring that client data is accessible well beyond the legally required storage period. Departments at the agency outside of the ILS Program began implementing a new software, ClientTrack, which will allow information sharing and referrals throughout the agency. While the ILS Program will not share data with other departments due to confidentiality, we will be able to access client information to use in legal matters such as past addresses, copies of identity documents, and other biographic information.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Additional funding in support of technology infrastructure improvements was dedicated to hardware and security upgrades in ILS Program satellite offices. Specifically, the ILS Program upgraded its Rochester satellite office copy machine, investing in the Toshiba e-STUDIO2010AC. This hardware upgrade was necessary to accommodate our growing staff in the Finger Lakes region and increased demand on the office's resources. The machine is a multifunction copier designed to streamline document handling and is equipped with advanced printing, scanning, and copying capabilities. It provides multiple connectivity options that facilitates integration into the office's diverse workflows where staff regularly generate significant paperwork, copy lengthy applications and evidentiary submissions, and upload large electronic filings to Immigration Court. Security features are included to safeguard sensitive information and ensure compliance with data protection regulations.

With this designated funding, the ILS Program also upgraded its Binghamton satellite office security system, investing in an electronic key fob building entry system that enhances workplace safety and security. This multifaceted system through Amherst Alarm secures office entry and



manages space access through the use of secure fobs assigned to each legal staff member – reducing the risk of unauthorized entry and enhancing overall security measures.

## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Traditionally, we recruit volunteers and interns through our website, university job postings, and multiple legal service career events at the University at Buffalo Law School. This year, we hosted 1 volunteer attorneys, 8 law students, 8 undergraduate interns and 6 community members. To equip interns and volunteers for service, we substantially invest through internship orientation, substantive training on immigration law, and opportunities to shadow staff. Once trained, volunteers and interns are assigned tasks including assisting with intakes, evidence collection, assembly of filings, and file management. Interns and volunteers assist with direct representation cases under the guidance and close supervision of assigned Staff Attorneys.

In response to the migrant influx, law student interns assisted with a series of screening events held at the hotels where migrants were located. Together with the attorneys, law students conducted intakes to assess what the immediate immigration needs of these groups of clients were, to triage and create a plan for how to move forward providing services to a group that at the time, we knew little about. Students participated in 4 clinics, screening 250 individuals, and helped set service providers on a path to meet the needs of this new population.

**1**attorney volunteered **10** hours**8**law students volunteered **1,021** hours**14**other volunteers volunteered **899** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Collaborations are among our most valuable resources, helping us holistically address client needs through our own services and those of our partners. Our most significant collaborations come through our continued designation as NYS Office for New Americans Legal Counsel for Upstate New York, and in that capacity, our work with ONA Opportunity Centers across Western New York, the Finger Lakes, and the Southern Tier, and include American Civic Association in Binghamton; Catholic Charities Family and Community Services of Rochester; Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga in Ithaca; and Buffalo-based Jericho Road projects Hope Refugee Drop-In Center and VIVE (an asylum shelter and physical location of our second Buffalo office).

Our collaborative efforts with these partners include: the provision of technical legal assistance; program development; mentoring of DOJ Accredited Representatives; trainings to staff on emerging immigration issues; frequent legal consultation days; pro se assistance; community information and Know Your Rights programming; intakes on cases for potential direct representation; and ongoing availability for assistance with immigration inquiries. By these efforts, we expand access to immigration legal services from qualified representatives in our service area.

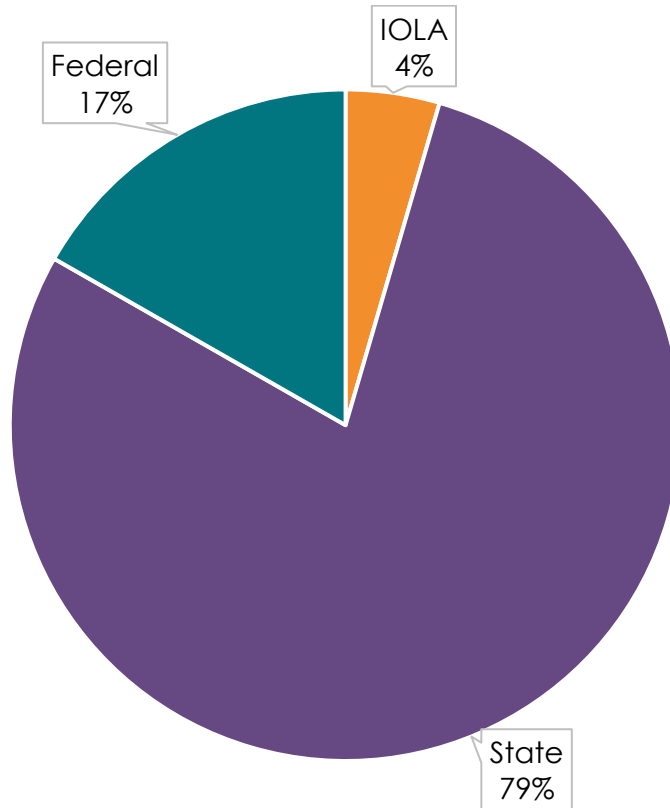
In addition to these efforts, we have also continued our commitment to local partners, including the Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) where we provide regular legal clinics, Justice for Migrant Families, the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Healing, where we provided clients with legal representation, case management, and mental health services in partnership with Jewish Family Services (JFS).

We continued to build upon our work under The Refugee Partnership, and also came together with ECBA's Volunteer Lawyers Project, Jericho Road Community Health Center, and The NY Immigration Coalition to triage and coordinate a response to the migrant influx.

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# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 2,589,868.89**



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 117,000.00</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 2,039,347.99</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$ 433,520.90</b>