

NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICES

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the last fiscal year, NDS provided civil legal services in 2,491 matters and benefited 4,323 people. These services were provided across our multifaceted civil legal services program in matters including eviction defense, employment, public benefits, family, immigration, reentry, and individual rights. The core mission uniting the provision of these diverse services is to provide the highest quality legal representation to members of the Northern Manhattan community and beyond who cannot afford an attorney.

NDS also made numerous, significant program changes that allowed us to serve a greater number of clients across a more diverse set of needs. Of particular note, the Civil Defense Practice expanded the scope and capacity of our community intake practice through the addition of a Paralegal Pathways Initiative (PPI) fellow.

With the addition of this new position, the Civil Defense Practice has been able to re-open community intake on a walk-in basis for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. Our PPI fellow conducts phone intake once per week and in-person intake twice per week on a walk-in basis, providing robust advice and also brief legal services to any member of the Northern Manhattan community with a civil legal need. With this added capacity, we have been able to assist with more cases on an early intervention basis – providing advocacy to landlords, employers, and agencies to resolve issues before they go to court.

Finally, the Civil Defense Practice for the first time added a full-time Education Staff Attorney. This position began in October 2023 and has been providing education representation and advice to the young clients in our Criminal Defense Practice as well as to parents from our Family Defense Practice facing exclusion from the education process due to ACS involvement.



Service Area: Manhattan

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 97.5	Lawyers: 57.5
Paralegals: 1	Others: 27.95

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Immigration and Individual Rights: In an immigration and individual rights matter, Immigration Defense Team collaborated with our Criminal Defense Practice to fight for Mr. R's release from immigration detention, secure immigration relief, and seek injunction and redress for the violation of his rights. Mr. R was facing criminal charges stemming from his struggle with substance use, which began as his life became destabilized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. R was represented by NDS in criminal court when the NYPD and District Attorney's Office unlawfully conspired with ICE to detain him at a court appearance and transfer him to ICE custody in Pennsylvania. A team of cross-practice attorneys and social workers immediately jumped into action, filing a temporary restraining order and request for relief in civil Supreme Court, filing a habeas corpus petition in the Southern District of New York, and appearing on a bond and ultimately individual hearing in the Pennsylvania immigration court where he faced removal.

After months of advocacy and encountering numerous hurdles including a judge unmoved by Mr. R's asylum claim and biased due to his misdemeanor record, our holistic team was able to help the judge see Mr. R's struggle with substance use and the support he would be receiving from family and through treatment.

He was miraculously granted withholding of removal and released from detention after nearly a year. Shortly after his release, NDS was able to work with pro bono counsel to settle the civil matter challenging the violation of his rights due to the unlawful ICE arrest, providing Mr. R with much-needed financial support to regain stability.

Our team continues to work to explore additional options for relief so that Mr. R can avoid future immigration consequences.

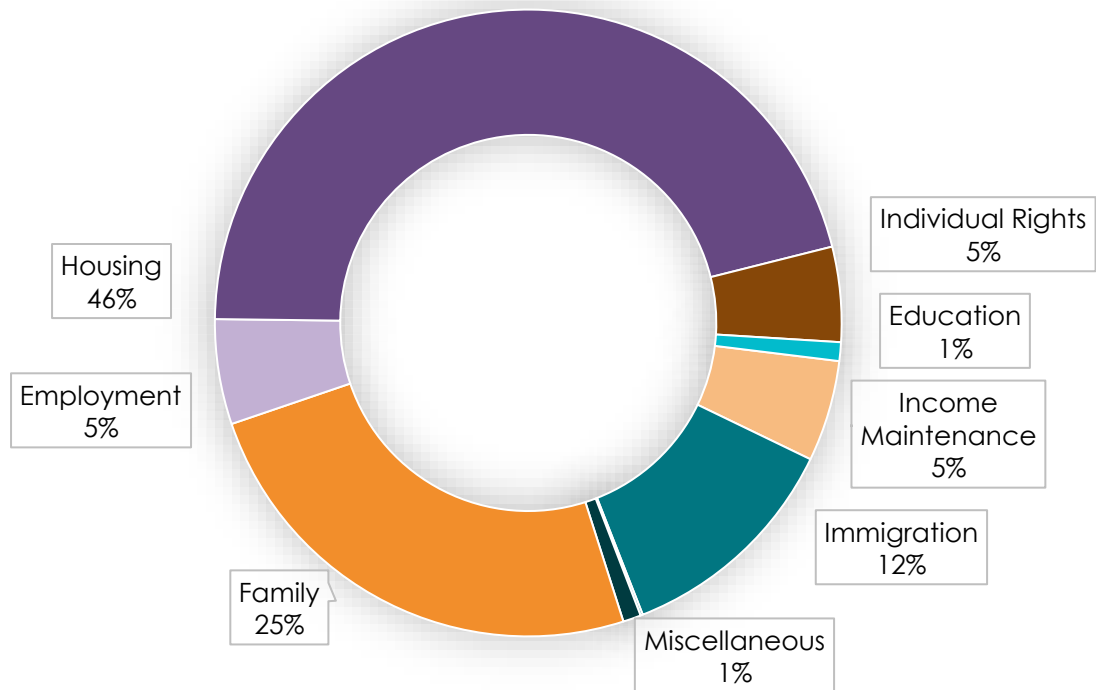
4,323

people
benefited
from

2,491

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Case Example #2, Housing: NDS first met the N family through Right to Counsel intake in Housing Court, after they became aware a housing case had been filed against them and a default judgment entered. The N family had been struggling to pay their rent since the COVID-19 pandemic after job loss and personal circumstances pushed them further and further behind. NDS jumped in to vacate the default judgment and began to litigate the meritorious claims in their case. Meanwhile, we assisted in applications for rental support – though the arrears had accumulated significantly, to over \$60,000.

Through tough negotiations and litigation, NDS’s attorney was able to negotiate with the landlord to partially waive the arrears due to the N family’s defenses as well as lower the monthly rent by \$500 so our clients could become eligible for FHEPS and preserve their family home. While our attorney advocated ferociously in court, our legal advocate pushed for the rental support from FHEPS, drafting a compelling advocacy letter and explaining the extenuating circumstances that would justify not only ongoing rental support, but payment of over \$50,000 in arrears.

Ultimately, through this intensive advocacy, we were able to secure a settlement of the non-payment case along with \$55,000 in arrears support and an ongoing subsidy to ensure the N family could attain necessary stability to finally move past the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

NDS has been able to conduct both virtual and in-person community legal education during the fiscal year. Our target population for community legal education events is Northern Manhattan residents seeking know-your-rights information around the housing, employment, reentry, immigration, and family services NDS provides. 883 community members received these services during the fiscal year.

In collaboration with the District Attorney's Office and other legal services providers, NDS participated in a Harlem-based community event to share information about the passing and implementation Clean Slate, help community members understand their rights around reentry, and provide information about the services NDS provides. NDS's Family Defense Practice participated in a virtual Know Your Rights training through the Bridge Project to provide information to expectant parents regarding the Patient Bill of Rights and health information used by ACS. NDS's Family Defense Practice also collaborated with New York City Councilmember Ayala to educate the community about ACS-related Miranda rights and conduct a know-your-rights training.

883

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

TECHNOLOGY

This past year NDS has implemented new initiatives to remain vigilant on ensuring data integrity and cyber security. SysAid has been installed to assist in remote troubleshooting, software deployment and uniformity, along with inventory tracking. Mimecast has also been implemented to stop the constant phishing attempts through email. Recently, NDS has purchased Cisco Duo Essentials, this will be deployed across the organization requiring all employees to use multifactor authentication.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The Technology grant enabled NDS to further build out its case management system, defenderData. defenderData has had extensive customization since NDS began using it in 2020

to capture the services of our unique practices. With the support of the technology grant, several customizations benefiting our civil legal services and collaborative practices have been completed including:

- Enhancing functionality on mobile case pages
- Increasing accessibility for non-attorney use
- Linking documents from internal shared drives Egnyte to Defender Data
- Improvements on the functionality of case notes
- Creating an automated referral system for cross practice use
- Improvements in reporting and data fields reflecting practice growth and changes

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

NDS maintains strong pro bono partnerships with the private bar, and our clients have benefitted significantly from this over the last fiscal year. In particular, as described above, NDS partnered with pro bono counsel at Dechert LLP to pursue injunctive relief and damages on behalf of our client who was unlawfully arrested by ICE during a criminal court proceeding.

Additionally, NDS continues to provide internship opportunities for law students and social work students. In Summer 2023, NDS's civil program hosted 17 law student interns who benefitted from a structured cross-practice training program and full-time legal work under the supervision of NDS's attorney staff. Fifteen law students have been enrolled in NDS's Police Accountability clinic over the two semesters in this fiscal year, providing services to clients on individual rights matters. Additionally, NDS is the placement organization for two Pro Bono Scholars in the spring of 2024. NDS participates in recruitment events including the Equal Justice Works conference and NYU's PILC fair in addition to posting opportunities.

2

attorneys volunteered **80** hours

34

law students volunteered **9,350** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Legal Service Providers: NDS has robust partnerships with legal services providers across New York City and New York State. Some of the most significant formal partnerships include membership in the Leap coalition, New York State Legal Services Coalition, and the New York State Bar Association's Committee on Legal Aid. Through these organizations, NDS joins other legal services providers to advocate for issues impacting our clients and our staff including securing and preserving adequate funding, address case capacity and court accessibility concerns, and advance substantive and other policies to ensure equal access to justice. Additionally, NDS engages with other non-profit providers to streamline referrals and respond to issues impacting our service area.

Harlem Community Justice Center: NDS has partnered with the Harlem Community Justice Center to serve low-income tenants in a brief service capacity; through this partnership, we are also able to both send and receive referrals for clients within our respective priority areas.

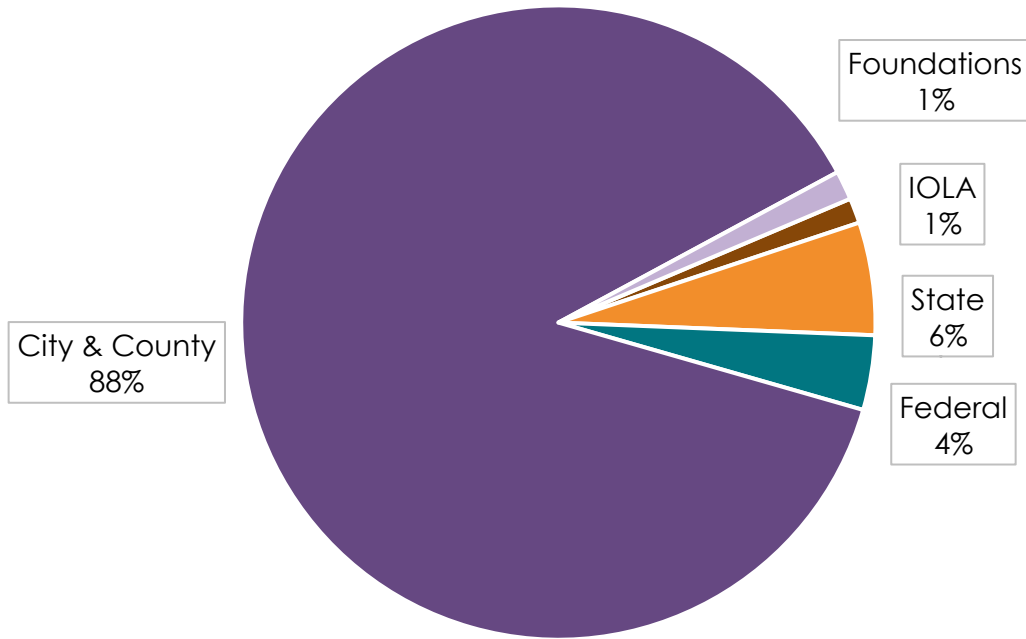
Immigrant Defense Project: Additionally, we maintain a strong relationship referral-based and collaborative relationship with the Immigrant Defense Project, which assists our immigration clients in obtaining Post Conviction Relief to advance their immigration cases, has provided consultations on appeals and other complex matters, and has forged pro bono connections.

Right to Counsel Coalition: NDS also actively participates in the Right to Counsel coalition to align our eviction defense services with the community-driven movement to achieve representation for all tenants in Housing Court.

NYU: Finally, NDS has an established externship course through NYU focused on police accountability where students assist clients in obtaining redress for violations of individual rights.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 10,789,206



IOLA Funding	\$ 138,331
City & County Funding	\$ 9,460,638
State Funding	\$ 619,961
Federal Funding	\$ 410,278
Foundations	\$ 159,998