

# **NEW YORK STATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION ASSOCIATION**

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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

NYSDRA is the association of the statewide network of 20 Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) throughout New York State. Under a service agreement, memorialized in a Memorandum of Understanding between NYSDRA and each CDRC, services are provided in all 62 counties in New York State. NYSDRA’s programs, and by extension the services of the CDRCs, are available to all New Yorkers. These services are designed to provide the timely and satisfactory resolution to a wide range of conflicts. Such conflicts might otherwise be litigated, but as the costs and time required to pursue a court case is prohibitive to many low-income individuals, the services become vital in helping low-income New Yorkers access justice, often resulting in resolution of many contentious issues, that would otherwise have a negative impact on the social and financial circumstances of those individual accessing the services.

NYSDRA’s programs, through subcontracted relationships with CDRCs, therefore, provide resolution to problems facing New Yorkers in rural, suburban, and urban areas, and offer access and opportunity for resolution to conflict in a wide range of issues faced by many low-income New Yorkers in areas of family, youth, disability services, property, and community disputes. In many cases, parties resolve their disputes leading to improved relationships, improved communication, time, and financial savings.

During the reporting period of April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, NYSDRA provided community legal education to approximately 1,226,035 individuals through community dispute resolution center trainings, live and recorded webinars, advertisements in various media outlets, individuals reached via our annual digital marketing campaigns (over 1 million reached this period!), print outreach materials distributed (e.g. brochures), social media (e.g. Facebook,



**Service Area:** New York State  
**Population Served:** Community Dispute Resolution Centers  
**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
Total Staff: 6      Lawyers: 0  
Paralegals: 0      Others: 6

LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.), postings on the NYSDRA web site, communications via SoftEdge (outreach platform) and GlueUp (client relationship management platform), community presentations about available services, trainings hosted by NYSDRA, and people reached at conferences attended and/or co-hosted.

From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, the primary target population for NYSDRA programs included New Yorkers in need of conflict resolution services, including mediation, and other services aimed at improving New Yorkers' access to justice and meeting the need for quality means of conflict management and resolution. This includes the range of programs and services managed by NYSDRA and provided by the Community Dispute Resolution Centers, such as our Disability Mediation Programs (Early Intervention Mediation Program, Special Education Mediation, and ACCES-VR Mediation Program), the Community Mediation Service Corps Program (CMSC AmeriCorps), and the Lemon Law Arbitration Program.

Several years ago, in an effort to reduce court backlogs, improve case processing and deliver the highest quality justice to New Yorkers, the presumptive Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) initiative was introduced by former Chief Judge DiFiore. This transformed the culture of the courts from one of "litigate first" to "mediate first." Presumptive ADR opened the door that enables litigants to resolve their disputes using resolution strategies such as mediation, arbitration, neutral evaluation, restorative justice, and a host of alternative methods. Each county in New York State offers ADR options in its courts and communities.

An invaluable community resource, CDRCs provide a wide range of conflict resolution options including Conflict Coaching, Restorative Justice circles and a host of other services. CDRC services are provided at no or low cost to the people of New York State with the vast majority of services provided pro bono by volunteers - professionally trained community mediators.

According to the most recent data available by the NYS Unified Court System's Office of Court Administration, approximately 60,246 individuals were served by the CDRC network. Of the 60,246 served, it is estimated that 39,374 individuals were served by the CDRC network as a result of direct court referrals from judicial districts resulting in approximately 22,101 judicial-based mediation cases. An estimated 800 volunteers logged approximately 18,000 volunteer hours at an in-kind rate of \$75/hour. Preliminary data reporting for the fiscal year was provided to NYSDRA by the Unified Court System's Office of Court Administration. Once publicly available, the Annual Statistical Report for fiscal year 2023-2024 will be posted here: <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/Publications.shtml>.

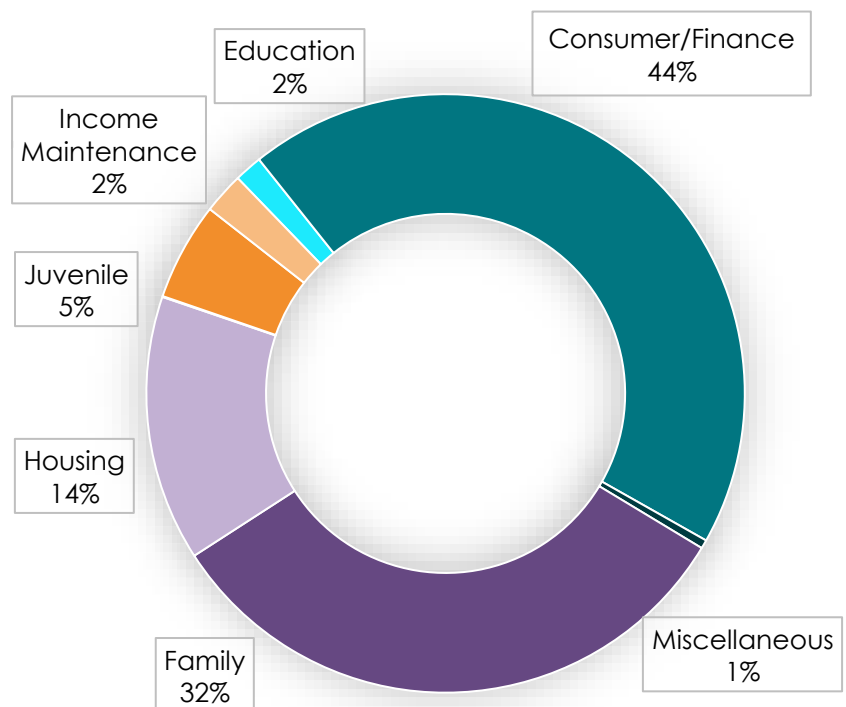
# OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

NYSDRA has several state contracts including the ACCES-VR Mediation Program, Special Education Mediation Program, AmeriCorps Community Mediation Service Corps, Developmental Disabilities Planning Council Project, Early Intervention Mediation Program, and the NYS Attorney General’s Lemon Law Arbitration Program. NYSDRA manages these state contracts for mediation programs and oversees the program service delivery through the network of CDRCs located throughout New York state. Each contract has case metrics and available funding for outreach efforts to increase awareness and usage of these community programs. For each of our programs we have an estimated caseload per year and have seen increases in certain programs as a result of community legal education through outreach, networking, informational materials, and online and print communications.

Each program works closely with CDRCs and state partners to increase case load goals, refine service delivery, program improvements, and develop strategies to influence populations to utilize dispute resolution services as an alternative to other due process forums such as court processes and impartial hearings.



## ADR CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



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**Examples of Other Legal-Related Services**

1. NYSDRA and its Albany-based CDRC partner held several meetings with an Equal Employment Opportunity Officer of the New York State Office of the Attorney General to guide them on the creation of an in-house mediation program. This program would be used to add value to existing processes and offer another people-centered approach to addressing some of the underlying issues involved in a workplace dispute or EEO matter. We are continuing our discussions into the development phase.

2. NYSDRA, along with two of our CDRC partners, met with representatives across the administration of the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs to conceptualize how our programs might support their clients. During these engagements we educated staff on the use of restorative practices as a way of healing harm and repairing relationships. Future engagements will take place in 2024 to discuss potential collaborations.

3. In Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programming and Community Legal Education, NYSDRA continued providing credit-bearing, certified programs throughout the reporting period for both attorneys and non-attorneys. Through the reporting period, a total of 58 CLE credit certificates were issued.

**1,226,035**

people benefited from  
**Community Legal Education**

**378**

people benefited from  
**Web-Based Assistance**

# IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

In August 2023, NYSDRA received a \$10,000 discretionary grant from the Interest on Lawyer Account (IOLA) Fund, dedicated to enhancing our technology infrastructure. This grant has been pivotal in advancing several critical initiatives within our organization, ensuring we continue to meet our mission with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

**Online Contract Reporting System with Automations:** A portion of the grant was allocated to developing an advanced online contract reporting system (OCRS). This new system integrates various automations that streamline our contract management processes, reducing manual workloads and increasing accuracy. The automation features include automated tracking, compliance monitoring, and comprehensive reporting capabilities. Without the support of this grant, implementing such a sophisticated system would have been financially challenging. This initiative not only improved our operational efficiency but also aligned with our strategic goal of leveraging technology to enhance organizational performance.

**Redesign of the NeonOne Website:** The grant also facilitated a comprehensive redesign of our NeonOne website. The updated design offers an improved user experience, with a more intuitive interface and enhanced functionality. This redesign supports our commitment to accessibility and user engagement, making it easier for our members and the public to access information and resources. The website overhaul was essential to keep pace with modern web standards and expectations, and the grant made it possible to undertake this critical project.

**Membership Management Platform:** In our continuous effort to better serve our members, we invested part of the grant in purchasing a new membership management platform called Glue Up. This platform enables us to efficiently manage member information, track engagement, and streamline communication. It includes features such as automated membership renewals, event registration, and member-specific content access. Prior to receiving the grant, budget constraints limited our ability to invest in such advanced tools. This platform is a significant upgrade from our previous system and supports our strategic objective of improving member relations and operational efficiency.

**Training/Event Management Platform:** Lastly, we used the remaining funds to acquire a robust training and event management platform (Cvent). This platform supports our educational and professional development initiatives by providing tools for event scheduling, registration, and management. It also includes features for conducting virtual and hybrid events, which have

become increasingly important. The acquisition of this platform marks a new initiative aimed at enhancing our training capabilities and broadening our outreach. This aligns with our strategic goals of expanding our educational offerings and improving event management processes.

**Impact and Strategic Alignment:** The 2023 IOLA Technology Grant has been instrumental in supporting several key projects that align with NYSDRA's strategic technology goals. These enhancements have:

- **Supported Staff and Services:** Enabled our staff to work more efficiently and effectively by reducing manual tasks and improving system integrations.
- **Facilitated New Initiatives:** Allowed us to launch new systems and platforms that would have been unattainable without this financial support.
- **Advanced Strategic Goals:** Helped us achieve our strategic objectives of improving operational efficiency, enhancing member services, and expanding our educational outreach.

## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

The work of the CDRC network is dependent on the work of community volunteer mediators and arbitrators. NYSDRA provides support and technical assistance to volunteers across the state as well as training and professional development opportunities in the form of in-person trainings, webinars, and sessions at the annual conference. NYSDRA highly values the work of volunteers throughout the CDRC network as mediators and arbitrators. The CDRC network has approximately 800 volunteers, who logged an estimated 18,000 volunteer hours annually, at an in-kind rate of \$75/hour. The value of these services is estimated at \$1,350,000.

NYSDRA continues to support CDRC work, focusing on volunteer recruitment and engagement and forging new relationships within communities to make CDRC services more widely known and accessible. NYSDRA actively recruits and encourages participation from students and membership is made available at a discounted rate.

**800**

other volunteers volunteered **18,000** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

NYSDRA is the membership association for a statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs), who have been our members since 1985. New York's CDRCs provide low-to-no cost dispute resolution services to New Yorkers, ensuring access to justice for thousands of New Yorkers and providing tools for people across the State to address conflict peacefully and productively. Last year, the network served over 60,000 individuals and resolved over 21,000 cases!

NYSDRA continues its collaborations with both private practitioners (ex: attorney Genesis Fisher of the Fisher Law Practice) to support their work and build out the ADR community. We have also continued our partnership with Marist College, which offers special tuition pricing for all employees, members, volunteers, and immediate family members. This is part of our campaign to expand membership values and demonstrate value.

NYSDRA will be an in-kind sponsor partner for the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR-GNY)'s annual conference scheduled for June 4-7, 2024, which attracts approximately 200 attendees. NYSDRA's role would be our acting as the accrediting body for CLEs for the conference. Through this partnership, we continue to cultivate our partnership with ACR-GNY and to get NYSDRA's name out in front of this audience to promote our work and that of the network.

On March 29 and March 30, NYSDRA hosted a two-day virtual ACCES-VR Mediation Training in partnership with staff of the NYS Education Department's Central Office for the Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) program. There were 45 attendees in total who learned 'best practices' and secured their annual certification to provide ACCES-VR mediation services.

Recognizing the need to bring our client bases together to solve big problems, such as housing security, NYSDRA and its NYC-based CDRC partners have been meeting with the Albany Housing Authority and the Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP) to move forward with the development of an eviction diversion program.

NYSDRA continued its collaborative work with schools through its AmeriCorps Community Mediation Service Corps (CMSC) program. In the winter, CMSC members were trained in Conflict Coaching and Restorative Circles. They worked with alumni mentors to practice and



home in on their skills that they will use to work with youth in school-based and community settings as they navigate conflict.

NYSDRA relies on expertise from professionals in many related organizations and engages in events sponsored by other dispute resolution organizations, such as the Association of Conflict Resolution of Greater New York. NYSDRA is an active member of several organizations whose work is critical in enhancing and promoting the dispute resolution field as well as the nonprofit sector. These groups include The Association for Conflict Resolution Greater New York Chapter, Inc. (ACR-GNY), the New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc., the National Association for Community Mediation, the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education, New York State Council on Divorce Mediation, the Capital Region Chamber of Commerce and the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce.

## CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 953,777.52**

<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$191,150.55</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$201,226.39</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$17,336.56</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$466,726.43</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>\$77,337.59</b>

