

RISEBORO COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INC.

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

RiseBoro Legal Empowerment and Assistance Program's (LEAP) objective, as a legal services provider, is to fulfill its mission of providing comprehensive legal housing services and community empowerment to vulnerable Brooklynites. We accomplish this by helping tenants in the community to access justice with dignity. In addition to empowering, emboldening, and educating them to know how and where to seek assistance, along with how to advocate for themselves.

Number of Households Served: Throughout the years, the funds that IOLA provides rendered significant financial support to the implementation of our comprehensive program. LEAP has conducted 1192 intakes from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024.

Our intake numbers are a combination of housing court proceedings of Non-Payments, Holdovers, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) cases, HP Actions, and a wide variety of services such as brief service/legal advice, assistance with applying for SCRIE/DRIE benefits, rent and repair-related advocacy, lease issues, and filing applications to the state agency Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). Collectively we closed 995 cases, representing approximately 2,139 people.

Target Population: LEAP targets populations that are underserved, marginalized, and trapped in intergenerational poverty throughout the entire Brooklyn area. Our program focuses on areas that have been historically underserved within the communities of North and Central Brooklyn neighborhoods Bushwick, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, and Crown Heights in particular. Though specific demographics vary across these neighborhoods, they are each majority



Service Area: Kings

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 28	Lawyers: 18
Paralegals: 8	Others: 2

communities of color and all consistently rank poorly in markers of social determinants of health including household poverty, unemployment, and education levels. Our program serves individuals with income levels below 200% FPL and a few cases above our income level requirement to preserve the long-standing character of the historic communities of color that we serve.

Direct Impact of LEAP Services: The indirect dollar benefits to tenants resulting from successful buyout negotiations totaled \$166,900.00. However, tenants avoided liability for payments by eliminating charges from abatements and rent reduction orders issued by Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) totaling \$1,309,428.02. Furthermore, SCRIE and DRIE benefits total monthly savings totaled \$19,622.50. Lastly, in rental payments via rental subsidies, totaled \$144,765.95.

Access to Justice: LEAP has an extensive community program designed to facilitate access to justice by providing educational services, tenant advocacy, landlord-tenant mediation services, brief advice, connections to supportive services, as well as direct legal representation to tenants facing harassment, displacement, and/or eviction. Our organizing team works diligently to engage tenants by making direct phone calls, conducting home/site visits, organizing meetings with tenants in person, focusing on forming tenants' associations, and working with tenants displaced by fires.

Improved Capacity: RiseBoro LEAP seeks to meet the needs of its clients and the community as a whole. We enhanced virtual services and online presence. Our website, social media existence, outreach material, and remote communications have all been improved. Through the years, LEAP has adopted the use of LegalServer to better track quality assurance and manage cases efficiently, in addition to DocuSign to make access to legal services more accessible to tenants.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Our program provides full case assistance and representation to residents in Brooklyn who face housing court eviction proceedings. The following are two case narratives that illustrate how our program was able to provide full legal representation, advocate as a third party with Human Resources Administration (HRA), and preserve the client's home.

Case Example #1: A holdover proceeding was referred to RiseBoro LEAP in which the landlord commenced an eviction case against a family, seeking possession of an apartment in Brooklyn, New York. The apartment had been the residence of this family for several decades, with three generations of the family having resided there. The holdover petition was based upon the landlord's allegation that the tenant of record, did not maintain the apartment as their primary residence. The family members were represented by various attorneys. However, RiseBoro Community Partnership ("RiseBoro") represented the head of the household, the main resident of the subject apartment, and the son of the tenant of record. During the pendency of the proceeding, all family members other than the head of household, surrendered their rights to the apartment, as they wished to reside elsewhere. Our client did not wish to leave his family's apartment.

After several years of litigation in Housing Court, LEAP settled the proceeding with the landlord agreeing to provide our client a rent-stabilized lease with a preferential rent and recognizing our client as the rent-stabilized tenant of record of the apartment. The case was discontinued, all rent arrears were paid and our client remains in his family's apartment as the tenant of record.

Case Example #2: RiseBoro Leap had an elderly client involved in a nonpayment proceeding with limited income, insufficient to cover her monthly rent. The client relied on her son to help with a portion of the rent.



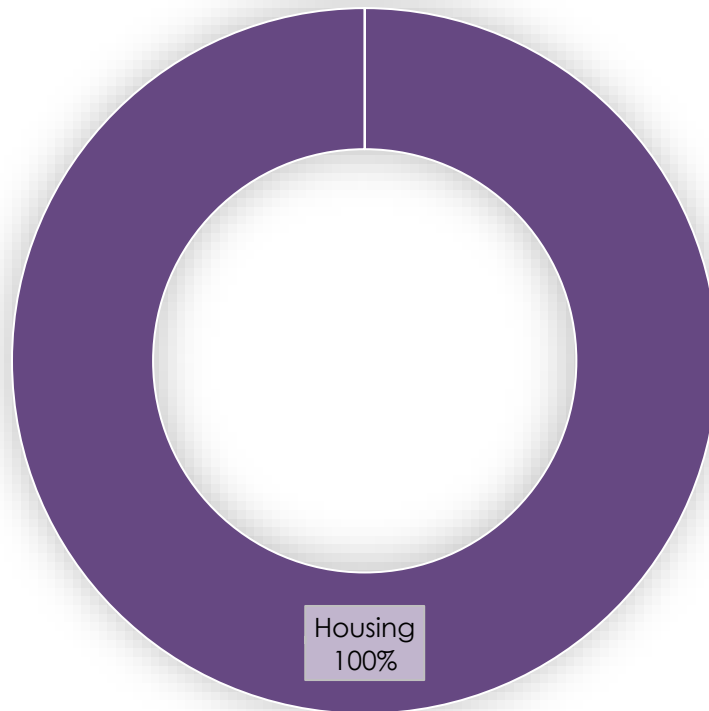
2,139

people
benefited
from

995

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Sadly, due to the pandemic, our client's son stopped working which resulted in arrears accruing. While the son eventually got his job back and was able to help with ongoing rent, the arrears were still an issue. As the client did not have sufficient income to cover the rent, the client needed her son to be the third party for her one-shot deal application. The client's one-shot deal application got unreasonably delayed for months due to administrative delay on HRA's part, which required us to file four (4) orders to show cause to obtain more time.

With our advocacy, RiseBoro Community Partnership, the tenant, and the landlord's attorney, before the judge; we were able to get the client enough time for the one-shot deal to finally pay the balance in full. Our advocacy resulted in an elderly tenant keeping her tenancy in which she resided for decades.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Community engagement is a key component of LEAP's program. LEAP has a great support team that consists of Community Organizers and Legal Services Navigators, who are out in the Bushwick Brooklyn neighborhood and parts of Ridgewood, Queens, visiting and engaging with residents to help with their housing and legal needs.

While engaging with the community, they are providing Tenant's Rights advice, distributing self-help materials, and Know Your Tenant Rights brochures. Furthermore, our one-on-one and group meetings along with door-to-door services, have resumed with safety precautions. Organizers conduct home visits to assess conditions to determine the next steps and the level of services that the client may need. The LEAP staff work together to achieve the best outcome for the client. We want to ensure that after receiving LEAP's services and advocacy, there is an amicable relationship between the client and landlord/management to avoid future misunderstandings.

During this fiscal year, we successfully provided Community Legal Education to 224 people of which 672 brochures were distributed. We successfully provided Legal Clinics to 164 people and distributed 492 materials for tenants to take home.

656

people
benefited from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

896

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Other Legal Services Example #1: RiseBoro LEAP staff is determined to educate the community regarding tenants' rights. We regularly conduct in-office or building meetings to address tenants' concerns and educate them. Our staff works together to ensure tenants take home information they can share with their family and friends after each meeting. In our group meetings, our supporting staff cover basic tenant's rights information such as: understanding how to read your lease; proper rent increases, how to avoid rent overcharges, how to obtain repairs, eligibility requirements for various rent subsidies, and how to apply for them such as SCRIE or DRIE. We also encourage them to share with us questions or concerns such as problems occurring in their buildings.

Our goals for every group meeting are to ensure each person receives guidance, a sense of unity among their neighbors, and confidence before they leave and that the materials LEAP provides to each person who attends our meetings reassure them. LEAP staff provides materials/brochures to all tenants during our meetings. Some of these materials are as follows: Rent Guidelines Board fact sheet, Rent Increases for Individual Apartment Improvements (IAI), Division of Human Rights: Source of Income Discrimination in Housing, and Rental Listing Scam: how to avoid it and where to report it. Our most informative brochure is the ABC's of Housing, it's a 27-page booklet which is designed to help tenants gain an understanding of the rules and regulations affecting housing and provide them with information on where they can receive assistance on their housing matters.

Other Legal Services Example #2: LEAP also educates and advises clients who are referred by other programs from within RiseBoro who are having housing law issues. Our workshops and legal clinics provide legal advice to community residents or people whom we come into contact with through means other than the courthouse. Tenants without an active court case seek advice in fear that their landlord might attempt an eviction in Housing Court. Tenants who do not meet the 200% income guideline also receive advice from LEAP.

In reviewing legal documents or other notices, we provide the tenant with a better understanding of the document being reviewed, whether it's information about the housing court process, their rights, risks, and possible outcomes. For example, our organization's HomeBase case managers refer their clients to LEAP attorneys who have rent-related legal questions but are not in court proceedings. The notice can be anything from a 14-day rent demand to a letter of default in payment. Our team reviews the document briefly, then advises the client on the next steps and provides relevant educational materials.

IMPACT CASES

LEAPs, Legal Service Navigators, and Community Organizers have been working diligently with three families from 198 Jefferson Street, Brooklyn, NY. In light of the previous owner's passing, buyouts were offered to tenants. There was no desire among tenants to leave the home where they had lived for a combined 10 to 15 years. During the past five months, LEAP has fought hard for these three (3) tenants and ensured that they received renewed leases and that substantial repairs were initiated. The LEAP team will remain engaged with this building until all repairs and tenant concerns are resolved. The total number of people who benefited from our services was 15.



TECHNOLOGY

In spite of the pandemic waning and the return of in-person work, LEAP has continued to utilize many of the pandemic-era services to enhance our accessibility. As a result of the pandemic, LEAP pivoted its in-person services to virtual and enhanced its online presence. Our client database LegalServer, is used to help staff ensure better quality assurance, case management, and tracking of current and/or relevant housing trends. We also used the database to be proactive during a time of upheaval and monitor emerging community needs. LEAP continues to use the DocuSign digital system for clients to read and sign documents needed for securing representation. This service is essential for clients who are homebound or have a mobility impairment that does not allow them to meet in person to sign important documents. LEAP staff are supplied with updated laptops of their own that allow for more remote access to client records and they can travel with them to client locations to conduct site visits. All staff continue to have the means to communicate with clients and other RiseBoro program staff, whether on-site or working remotely. Our office locations are equipped with desktops, laptops, printers, and high-speed internet, as well as full access to Microsoft Office Suite. Riseboro's far-reaching and institutional efficiency ensures that LEAP is poised to continue deploying a dynamic, multifaceted, and community-based approach to anti-homelessness and eviction prevention.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The Technology Grant offered by IOLA was utilized to purchase laptops for current and new staff attorneys. We also used part of the funding to cover the cost of our LegalServer and Financial Coaching software.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

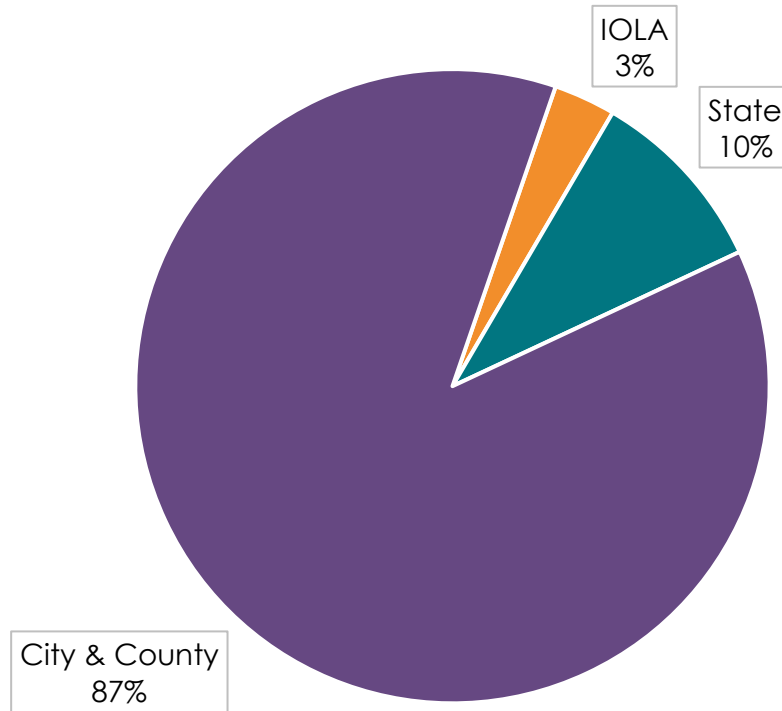
LEAP believes that collaboration with community partners enhances our capacity to serve Brooklyn's low-income residents. For many years, LEAP has pursued to meet with other Right to Counsel legal service providers to work on common themes and areas of interest in our ongoing march to assist clients who need our services.

Our program has maintained to be an active member of the Brooklyn Tenant Lawyers Network (BTLN) for many years. BTLN, whose mission is to strengthen the voice and influence of the tenant-side bar and foster the effective provision of high-quality legal representation to tenants in Brooklyn, actively works to provide a forum for tenant-side attorneys to discuss and develop strategies for improving the administration of justice in the Brooklyn Housing Court. Aside from working with the entities mentioned above, LEAP maintains a good relationship with the Human Resources Administration (HRA/DSS) and the Adult Protective Services Program (APS) to effectively implement an individualized approach to resolving client issues. We have also established networks with various organizations including CAMBA, Coalition for the Homeless, Catholic Charities, the Community Service Society, Federation of Protestant Welfare Associations (FPWA), and Brooklyn Housing and Family Services.

As members of the community-based North Brooklyn Anti-Displacement Housing Task Force, we work closely together to commence 7A Administrative hearings in housing court due to property owner's non-compliance and negligence acts on buildings we are representing. Aside from the Task Force, we also need the collaboration of the Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and the Department of Buildings (DOB) to ensure proper inspections are made during these proceedings. We additionally work with the Tenant Protection Unit (TPU) of the New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) agency. The TPU was created to ensure property owners' compliance with HCR Orders, rent registrations, and fraud detection correction. All of these entities are essential to ensure prompt and effective action is taken to prevent tenant displacements.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 4,276,511



IOLA Funding	\$ 135,000
City & County Funding	\$ 3,731,024
State Funding	\$ 410,487

