

SAFE HORIZON

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Safe Horizon, the nation’s largest victim service provider, delivered vital support to individuals in need from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, through its Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) and Immigration Law Project (ILP). Serving a total of 2,119 survivors across New York City, the DVLP and ILP offered comprehensive legal guidance and representation, benefitting a total of 2,874 individuals.

Safe Horizon’s DVLP focused on family law and matrimonial law, handling litigation, and providing brief services such as legal advice and counsel, document drafting and other legal advocacy to 1,441 individual clients. Additionally, the DVLP conducted community trainings covering family law orders of protection, custody, child support and dissolution of marriage.

Safe Horizon’s ILP conducted legal consultations, and provided full representation to 678 clients in various humanitarian-based benefits, including U visas, VAWA self-petitions, asylum, battered spouse waivers, petitions for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as applications for employment authorization documents, adjustment of status (a/k/a, "green cards"), and naturalization, and defense in removal proceedings. Additionally, the ILP conducted trainings and presentations covering humanitarian-based benefits for immigrant survivors and conducted comprehensive consultations for recent arrivals.

Funded in part by IOLA (Interest on Lawyer Account) grants, the DVLP/ILP ensured victims of domestic violence received holistic legal services virtually across Safe Horizon’s programs, including Community Programs, Domestic Violence Shelters, and Court Programs. This comprehensive approach ensures the safety needs of victims are met and empowers them with awareness of their legal rights and remedies, enabling informed access to the justice system.



Service Area: New York City Metropolitan Area

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 8 Lawyers: 6

Paralegals: 1 Others: 1

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Family – Fatima* (name changed to protect identity), a DVLP client, initially became a client of the program when her husband strangled her in the presence of her two young daughters. DVLP assisted Fatima in filing for and obtaining a full stay-away order of protection from the Queens Family Court. This order of protection had the impact of removing Fatima’s abusive husband from the home shared with the children.

As with many Family Court OP matters where children are involved, the client soon thereafter found herself in a position where her abusive husband was seeking full custody of their daughters. DVLP was able to represent the client in an extremely contentious litigation process regarding the custody and visitation of the children. The abuser was intent on revenge and used every litigation tactic to extend the duration of the litigation and regularly took extreme positions against Fatima simply to be punitive to her for seeking the Order of Protection. Because DVLP has extensive experience in dealing with abuser tactics during Family Court litigation, our attorneys were able to support and guide Fatima every step of the way.

During the litigation, DVLP negotiated for a step-order for the father’s visitation with the children, ensuring that they began contact with the father in a supervised setting that only expanded to unsupervised and later overnight visitation once it was clear that the father’s behavior was safe and that the children were comfortable.



2,874

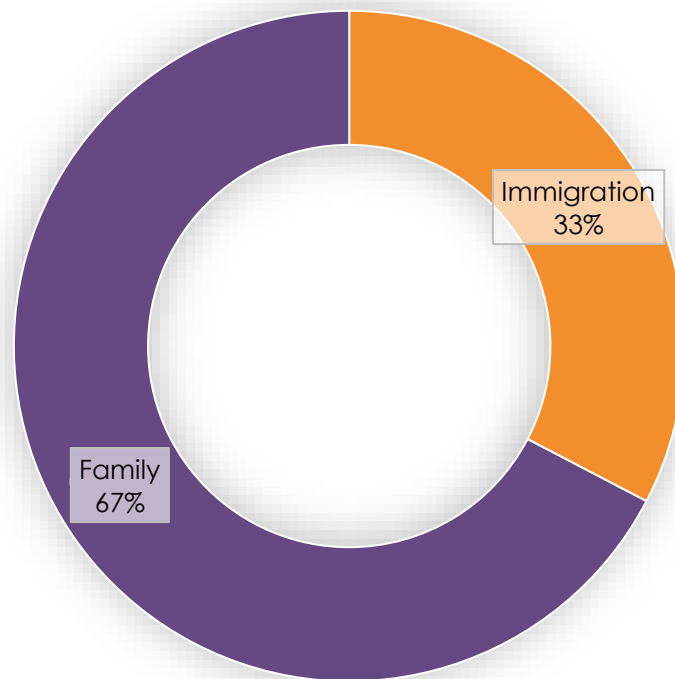
people
benefited
from

2,119

legal cases
closed

DVLP attorneys were ultimately able to ensure that Fatima won sole legal custody and decision-making over the children and negotiated a reasonable shared physical arrangement for the children that placed appropriate safeguards around Fatima at the exchange of the children, and which also provided necessary boundaries within the father’s contact with his children.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Case Example #2, Immigration – David* (name changed to protect identity), an ILP client, was granted asylum in the New York City Immigration Court in November, 2023, over eight years after fleeing political persecution in Cameroon. David was detained, tortured and sexually assaulted by the Cameroonian government in 2011 after he voted against the ruling political party. The police then spent the next four years extorting David, arresting him if he refused to pay bribes and forcing him to perform free labor for the government.

ILP helped David file his asylum application in January 2016 and represented David at his asylum interviews in 2020 and 2021. Despite David's strong asylum claim, he was referred to immigration court in 2021 without a final decision on his case. After being referred to immigration court, many cases languish for years due to the over 2 million case backlog. ILP filed a motion to get a hearing calendared for his asylum claim based on humanitarian grounds. That motion was granted and he was scheduled for a final merits hearing on November, 2023.

ILP represented David in a two-hour hearing and ultimately prevailed—the judge granted David asylum. He can now continue to heal from the trauma he experienced and build his life in peace and safety here in the U.S.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

The DVLP/ILP frequently participates in community meetings across diverse neighborhoods in New York City to disseminate information about domestic violence and the comprehensive services offered by DVLP/ILP. Leveraging Safe Horizon's extensive network as the largest provider of victim services in New York City, DVLP/ILP utilizes this established infrastructure to connect with individuals in need of assistance. Staff attorneys from DVLP/ILP routinely conduct trainings at Safe Horizon's community programs, precinct programs, shelters, and child advocacy centers, furthering outreach efforts and enhancing awareness of available resources.

ILP engaged in outreach at several events during the reporting period. These events included a clinic co-organized by ILP, the Kings County District Attorney, Brooklyn Law School's Safe Harbor Clinic, and Catholic Migration Services to assist Venezuelans with applying for Temporary Protected Status (TPS). At this clinic, we utilized technology in the form of QR codes on flyers to inform participants of the documentary requirements for their appointment at the clinic. ILP utilized technology again by conducting virtual trainings to staff at sister programs such as the Streetwork Project and the child advocacy center (CAC), who were seeing an influx of new arrivals needing services, to help facilitate referrals. ILP also conducted in-person presentations and provided resources on immigration benefits for survivors to recently arrived asylum seekers at the Belnord Hotel and Trinity Church/Trinity Commons. Finally, ILP partnered with Trinity Church/Trinity Commons to provide bi-weekly on-site comprehensive consultations to new arrivals in the months of November, December, February and March.

190

people
benefited from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

307

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Example #1: Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) has continued to receive referrals from family courts across New York City over the past year, supporting the courts in providing services to litigants citywide. DVLP remains actively involved in drafting various petitions, including family offense, custody, and child support petitions, addressing urgent matters such as orders of protection and writs of habeas corpus upon litigant requests. This support is crucial as the capacity of court clerks has significantly diminished in recent years.

Example #2: DVLP recently collaborated with the Richmond County District Attorney's Office and the Queens Family Justice Center to conduct a training session on the distinctions between criminal and family court orders of protection, as well as the procedural differences between these courts. Targeting mainly sergeants from various Queens police precincts, this training aimed to enhance understanding of the family court system's current state and proceedings. DVLP attorneys provided their contact information to participants for follow-up inquiries and distribution to individuals requiring advice, counsel, or representation in the future.

IMPACT CASES

Safe Horizon, Inc. and ASISTA Immigration Assistance v. USCIS and USDHS: ILP is engaged in impact litigation (FOIA lawsuit) to compel DHS and USCIS to disclose records relating to a shift in practice relating to its adjudication of U visas and U visa-related applications.

We retained the law firm, Gibson Dunn, to assist us in this matter pro bono. We filed a FOIA requesting the records and when DHS and USCIS failed to comply, we filed a complaint in March 2021 in the Southern District of New York to compel compliance.

This matter is ongoing. DHS and USCIS have been releasing records and ILP and ASISTA with the assistance of our attorneys have been reviewing the records and negotiating with the agency attorneys toward a resolution. Any responsive records we obtain as a result of this FOIA could impact hundreds of U visa applicants and their advocates across the country.



TECHNOLOGY

DVLP/ILP maintains effective communication channels through various platforms including email, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, facilitating seamless collaboration with other Safe Horizon programs and social services organizations. When deemed safe, DVLP/ILP also utilizes email or text messages to communicate with clients, ensuring efficient and accessible support. Staff attorneys have access to online legal research tools such as LexisNexis and the New York Law Journal, enhancing their ability to represent clients effectively.

Each DVLP/ILP staff member and intern is equipped with an individual computer connected to the internet and equipped with essential software, including the Microsoft Office Suite comprising Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Access, which are utilized daily for various tasks. PowerPoint presentations are commonly utilized for conducting training for advocates, attorneys, and clients, facilitating comprehensive knowledge dissemination. Adobe Acrobat Reader enables staff to create, edit, and collaborate on PDF files efficiently, including utilizing features like electronic signatures.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The discretionary technology grant has significantly bolstered our legal programs (DVLP/ILP) by equipping our attorneys with new and upgraded desktops and laptops. These essential tools are now integral to the daily operations of our staff attorneys and program coordinators, both within our offices and in remote settings, including inside court buildings.

The utilization of these laptops has notably enhanced communication channels among attorneys, judges, and clients. Particularly in court buildings where reception can be unreliable, these devices have bridged the gap, ensuring smooth coordination of appointments and arrivals. Moreover, the availability of Wi-Fi-enabled laptops empowers attorneys to promptly modify orders and court documents as needed, before, during, or after appearances.

Within the confines of the court building, the attorney-client duo can efficiently utilize their time together to electronically file case documents and arrange virtual hearings and meetings. This proactive approach not only streamlines processes but also mitigates the need for unnecessary future court dates, as changes can be executed in real-time, ultimately expediting the legal proceedings and enhancing client satisfaction.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

DVLP/ILP maintains robust relationships with all of New York City's law schools, leveraging law student volunteers to meet the needs of domestic violence victims. During the summer, DVLP hosts four full-time law student interns for ten weeks, while ILP hosts one full-time law student intern, each averaging thirty-five hours per week. In addition, ILP hosts two full-time law student interns for one week in March 2023, during the students' "Spring Break". Since 2022, the DVLP summer program has been conducted in a hybrid format, with interns working remotely and engaging in virtual meetings and collaborations, supplemented by scheduled in-person court appearances, office meetings, and gatherings throughout the summer to foster connections and teamwork. ILP law student interns followed the same hybrid work model as the rest of the ILP staff.

Upon the internship program's start, interns are equipped with a comprehensive DVLP/ILP training manual developed by staff. This manual encompasses office policies, operation of the Legal Helpline, and detailed information on family law matters. The internship begins with a three-day intensive training facilitated by various legal service organizations in the city, covering pertinent areas such as family law, criminal law, immigration law, domestic violence, housing, and other relevant topics. Furthermore, DVLP offers ongoing training with a focus on implicit bias and trauma-informed interviewing, supplemented by weekly brownbag lunch discussions addressing diverse areas of relevance. These discussions cover a spectrum of topics including Government Affairs, issues affecting the LGBT Community, Consumer Debt/Credit, trafficking, the New York District Attorney's Office Sex Crimes Unit, the Legal Aid Juvenile Rights Division, the Bronx County District Attorney's office, and mental health considerations following domestic violence incidents. Additionally, a brownbag lunch session is dedicated to career development, offering insights on crafting ideal resumes and cover letters.

At DVLP, each attorney mentors one or two interns, providing guidance and support throughout the internship period. At ILP, interns are managed by a staff attorney coordinator who oversees their work and serves as a mentor. Regular meetings between mentors and interns are conducted to monitor progress and address any challenges that arise.

4

law students volunteered **980** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) has actively collaborated with numerous community-based organizations in Queens, Bronx, Kings and Richmond Counties to ensure that survivor needs, beyond just legal assistance, are met. Additionally, Safe Horizon has forged partnerships with all New York City courts to ensure that every survivor seeking access to justice is provided with that opportunity.

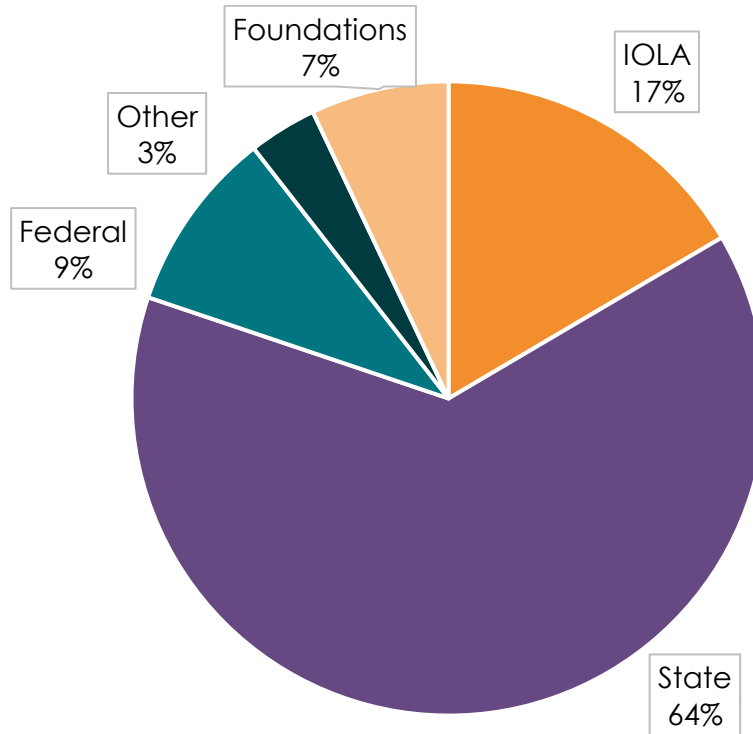
Over the past year, DVLP partnered with the New York City Bar Association and The Fund for Modern Courts to provide recommendations to the New York City Family Courts and the Office of Court Administration, aiming to enhance court operations to better serve clients in the future.

In October of 2023, Safe Horizon DVLP co-hosted another two-day Family Law legal conference titled "Justice for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence" alongside Sanctuary for Families, Gibson Dunn Proskauer Rose LLP, NYLAG, and Her Justice. The conference brought together family law practitioners, survivor leaders, social service professionals, members of the judiciary, and advocates to address systemic injustices faced by survivors of intimate partner violence within New York State's family law system. The conference, held both in-person and virtually, facilitated discussions on significant challenges for survivors in family law cases, key legal developments, and collaboration among practitioners and advocates. Safe Horizon DVLP once again dedicated months to organizing the conference logistics and securing guest speakers and panel members but also actively participated in numerous panels during the two-day event.

Similarly, the Immigration Law Project (ILP) collaborated with Brooklyn Law School's Safe Harbor Clinic and Catholic Migration Services (CMS) to provide legal assistance at a Venezuela Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Application Assistance clinics in December 2023, serving 65 Venezuelans in New York City. ILP also collaborated with churches and elected officials to provide resources and information about immigration benefits for survivors to recent arrivals in October 2023, . Additionally, ILP partnered with Trinity Church/Trinity Commons, to conduct bi-weekly comprehensive consultations, resources and referrals, in the Fall of 2023 and early 2024, serving over 50 recent arrivals.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 2,281,942



IOLA Funding	\$350,000
City & County Funding	\$355,453
State Funding	\$1,368,612
Federal Funding	\$200,000
Foundations	\$151,500
Other Funding	\$75,000