

# **SAFE PASSAGE PROJECT**

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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

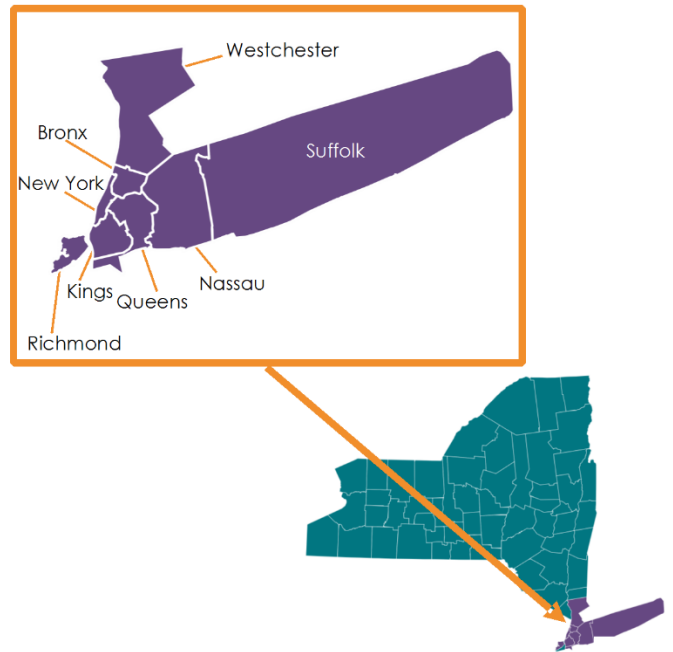
Safe Passage Project’s mission is to ensure that no child faces the immigration process alone by providing high-quality legal services and social work support to unaccompanied youth who run the risk of deportation. We are committed to seeing that unaccompanied immigrant children arriving in New York receive due process and access to justice.

Over the course of this grant we:

- Screened 438 children;
- Opened 297 new cases for full representation;
- Closed 1278 cases with primary benefit successful

The majority of our clients are unaccompanied children under the age of 21 who traveled to the United States seeking refuge and are now living with an adult sponsor in the New York City area or in Long Island. The population we serve includes children who are homeless, who have fled gang violence, and who face serious threats in their home countries, including parental abuse, child labor, and extreme poverty. They are survivors of gender-based and sexual violence and many of them identify as LGBTQ+.

While the majority of the young people we work with typically come from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, we serve children from all over the world who are seeking refuge in the United States. 95% of our clients identify as Hispanic/Latino, 2.5% as Black (African/Afro-Latino/Garífuna), and less than 1.5% as Asian, Caucasian, or other. These children, many of whom are of indigenous heritage, often confront poverty, hunger, and discrimination due to being undocumented in New York.



**Service Area:** New York City and the Surrounding Area

**Population Served:** Children Facing Deportation

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

Total Staff: 52	Lawyers: 30
Paralegals: 7	Others: 15

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

**Case Example #1, Client B:** B is a 23 years old Garifuna young woman from Honduras who, after a long personal journey, finally obtained her legal permanent residency (greencard). We first met B in February of 2015, when she was 14 years old. At the time, she was living with her brother, sister-in-law, and their family in the Bronx. B was eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) based on her father's abandonment.

B's case was placed with a pro bono attorney and a volunteer interpreter who guided B and her family through the family court process. The team secured a guardianship order for B's sister-in-law and the special findings order necessary to apply for SIJS. At the same time, the pro bono attorney represented B in front of the immigration court. While everyone involved did everything needed for the case and the immigration court's case was terminated, the SIJS visa category retrogressed and B's application for adjustment of status was administratively closed for years leaving her legal status in limbo.

When the visa category finally reached her number years later, B was dealing with personal issues that served as a barrier to completing her case. She was a young mother, estranged from her brother and sister-in-law, and responsible for her young son. B was living in a shelter and communication with her was difficult. During the waiting period, the pro bono moved out of state and Safe Passage took on the case in-house.

B moved out of state several times trying to find work but none of the work situations were stable enough to help her work and care for her child. She kept returning to NYC and to Safe Passage during those years. She also went through a traumatic relationship and other personal situations that caused her severe trauma.

SPP's legal and social work teams did not give up on assisting this young person. After several years of trying to get all the documents and medical records needed, B finally received her greencard 8 years after beginning her immigration journey. She now has the legal stability to care for her young family and to focus on the future.



2,556

people  
benefited  
from

1,278

legal cases  
closed

# CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



**Case Example #2, Client K:** K is a 13-year-old from El Salvador whose father is a U.S. citizen. At the time we met K, she was only 5 years old and lived with both of her parents. While K had a path to an immigrant visa and citizenship prior to her entry, her parents were afraid for K's safety due to the rampant gang violence in El Salvador.

K entered through the southern border as an unaccompanied minor and was immediately put in removal proceedings. K was eligible to apply for an immigrant visa as the daughter of a legal permanent resident, then turned U.S. citizen. However, due to her unlawful entry she could not apply for legal permanent residence in the U.S. She had to travel outside of the U.S. and return to El Salvador to apply for an immigrant visa at the U.S. consulate. K also had removal proceedings open against her, which means that she could not leave the U.S. and travel abroad.

As K's case presented several complications, SPP attorneys and pro bono attorneys had to advocate to several government agencies (CBP, ICE, EOIR, NVC) to end K's removal proceedings and secure her safe reentry to the U.S. after her consular visa interview.

After almost 8 years of advocacy and trying different immigration strategies, K has finally entered the U.S. as a legal permanent resident. Now that K is back in the U.S. as a legal permanent resident and residing with her U.S. citizen father, she has automatically acquired U.S. citizenship! SPP will continue working with K and her family to obtain the proof of her new U.S. citizenship status, either a certificate of citizenship and/or her U.S. passport.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Safe Passage Project provides community legal education to community partners such as schools/educators and religious institutions that serve immigrant communities. We provide these trainings so that our community partners better understand the immigration system, and feel empowered to make appropriate referrals to Safe Passage. During the grant period, we provided other legal-related services to 112 people.

On November 14, 2023, Safe Passage Project attended an immigration resource fair for School District 24 and 30, at which we presented information to educators and counselors about our work on behalf of immigrant youth. We helped educators and counselors understand how immigration law affects their students, and how they can make referrals to Safe Passage Project.

On March 16, 2024, Safe Passage Project attended a community resource fair at the Bronx Library Center, where we spoke with community members about our work and let them know how they can obtain our services.

112

people  
benefited  
from

**Community  
Legal  
Education**

## TECHNOLOGY

Safe Passage Project continues our partnership with a specialized IT firm to manage and optimize our technology infrastructure. This collaboration has enabled us to quickly address technology issues, standardize cybersecurity measures, and implement uniform tech practices across the organization. One of our newest improvements has been the implementation of a cloud software, Okta, that provides our organization with secure user authentication into the numerous applications we utilize. This includes providing more secure access to our expanding database in Salesforce Lightning which continues to increase our program efficiency. We have also recently hired an Operations and IT Associate who is working on optimizing our in-house database systems and providing crucial IT support to staff.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

In 2023, we utilized our supplemental IOLA Technology Grant funds to enhance our technological infrastructure. With these funds, we were able to purchase new computers for staff and support the expansion of our Salesforce system as well as our internal document database through Dropbox. The additional grant allowed us to provide hardware to new staff members promptly, effectively streamlining their onboarding process. Our staff enter their new roles feeling prepared and are able to adapt more quickly. Without this grant, securing these materials on such a timely basis would have been challenging. The grant also supported the continued expansion of our Salesforce database which is crucial to our programmatic case management. We are consistently updating our Salesforce system to reflect the growing and changing needs of our clients' cases. These funds have supported our goal of fostering a robust virtual working environment that is essential to our hybrid working model.

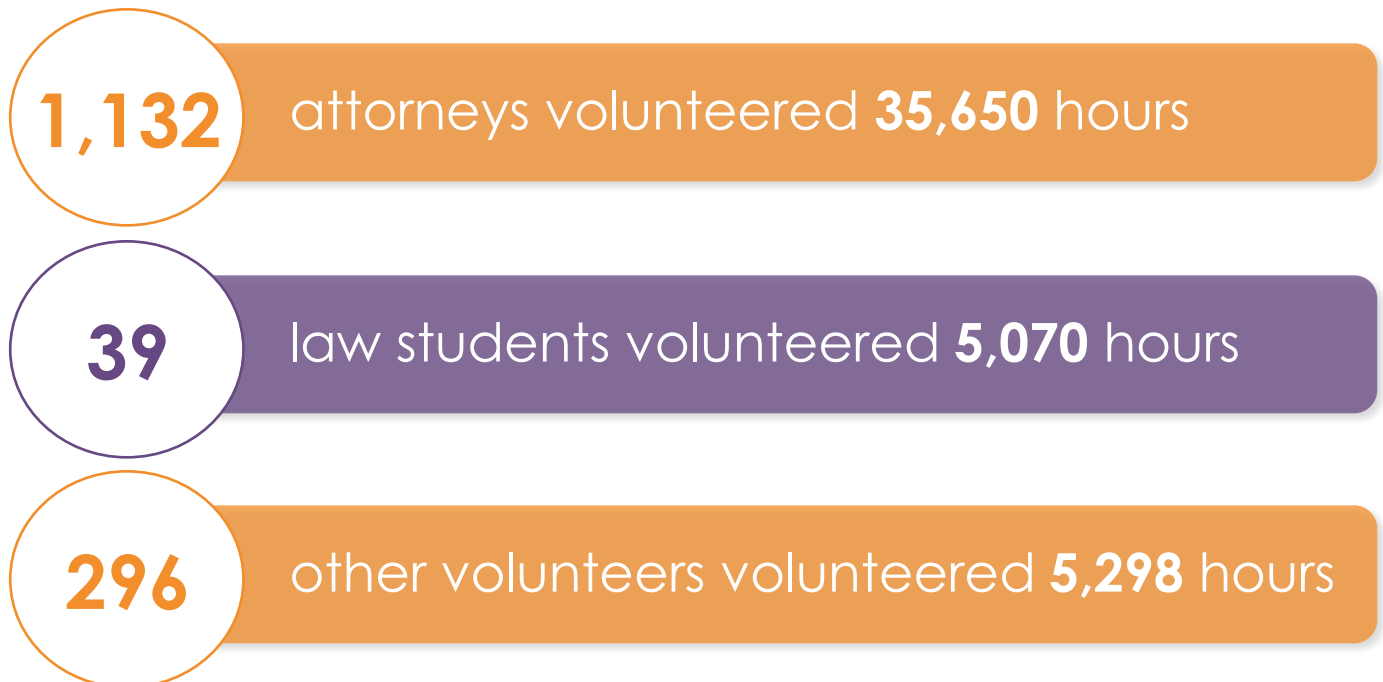
## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Our Pro Bono Program leverages the resources of over 900 attorneys every year. This year, our seasoned staff mentored 662 pro bono attorneys on full case services. This model allows us to take on even more cases than we would otherwise be able to with a staff of our size. These volunteers stick with their clients every step of the way and offer high quality legal services. In addition to our work with volunteer attorneys, we also hosted 39 law school students who provided direct case services alongside our in-house and pro bono attorneys. Many pro bono attorneys come back year after year to take on additional cases; some even take on more than one case at a time.

Our pro bono mentorship model sets us apart because our expert staff closely guide our pro bono volunteers, which results in success for a larger number of clients. To better support our pro bono attorneys, we recently launched North Star, a web portal that includes downloadable sample litigation documents, training videos, and other information intended to assist pro bono attorneys in their representation of immigration youth. Similarly, we have begun sending a pro bono email newsletter, Guidance for Practitioner Success (GPS), which includes updates on our work, our new case bulletin, and event information.

We also had 470 volunteer attorneys, who did not provide full case services, provide legal screenings to potential clients. We partnered them with 235 volunteer interpreters for pro bono attorneys who do not have law firm resources to assist with client interpretation. These interpreters form part of a multidisciplinary team to support our clients: Safe Passage mentor attorney, pro bono attorney, interpreter, and social worker.

Our volunteers are a crucial part of our operations and work. We are so glad to have a robust community of volunteers who respond to our call for action to assist immigrant children in need. Their work helps us create capacity for our staff, which is crucial at a time of immense need in our community.



## SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

**Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort:** Safe Passage is a founding member of Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE), a coalition of nonprofit organizations that provides free legal services to immigrant children. We work together to ensure representation of children who may not have attorneys. We also work together to advocate for more just policies and rules for child refugees. ICARE was founded in 2014 to address the needs of immigrant youth in New York City. With seed funding from the New York City Council and the Robin Hood Foundation, the ICARE Coalition has grown significantly over the past 9 years. Our coalition now represents over 1,600 immigrant youth facing removal proceedings.

During the previous IOLA grant period, the constituent member organizations of ICARE commissioned a consultancy to assess the future of ICARE. Our consultant's recommendations were to create a separate fiscally-sponsored organization, leanly staffed by an Executive Director and Program Associate, to help raise funds for the constituent ICARE organizations, to help coordinate clients, and to advocate for policies that will benefit the member organization's clients. We successfully created a fiscally-sponsored organization under the Fund for the City of New York, and we hired an Executive Director. During this grant period, the ICARE Executive Director worked closely with the ICARE advisory board to explore funding opportunities and policy actions. In addition, ICARE has launched a joint wait list and referral form (described in more detail below),

**End SIJS Backlog Coalition:** Safe Passage Project is a member of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition, which is a national coalition of legal services providers that works with youth who are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Special Immigrant Juveniles are frequently stuck in a long "visa backlog," which prevents them from applying for their greencards and leaves them in limbo for years as they slowly move forward in a visa "line." Safe Passage Project takes a lead role in both the administrative advocacy and legislative working groups. We regularly hold listening sessions with USCIS, the immigration court, and the Department of State to address issues facing Special Immigrant Juveniles, and to propose solutions. In April 2023, Safe Passage Project was instrumental in securing a meeting with Senator Gillibrand's office to discuss a legislative solution to the SIJS visa backlog.

**Long Island Collaborations:** On Long Island, Safe Passage Project works with the Health and Welfare Council, the New York Immigration Coalition, the Central American Refugee Center, the Immigrant Justice Corps, Hofstra Law School, Touro Law School, and others. We also work with a network of national partners, statewide nonprofits, and law firms throughout New York to represent immigrant children in deportation proceedings, to influence state and federal policy, and to file joint reports. We maintain close ties with the ACLU and the NYCLU.

**NYC Collaborations:** Our social work team continuously refers young people to agencies and organizations throughout NYC and other counties to connect them with vital resources. NYC community-based organizations we collaborate often with include Public Health Solutions, Little Essentials, Terra Firma, The Door, HopeLine, Hunger Free America, Mercy Center, The Child Center of New York, Maya's Place, and El Centro del Inmigrante, amongst many others across the five boroughs. Outside of NYC, we have collaborated with the Hispanic Counseling Center, Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, The Inn, Circulo de la Hispanidad, Pride for Youth, Orange County Community College, Long Island Against Domestic Violence, Catholic



Health System of Long Island, and Northwell Hospital. These referrals are typically for services that include health insurance enrollment, youth shelter assistance, material goods (diapers, etc) for mothers and children, public benefit enrollment assistance, GED and ESL class enrollment, domestic violence resources, and medical and mental health services. We have also referred young people and caregivers to various legal service providers for assistance with complex housing and public benefits issues, including Legal Services of New York, Mobilization for Justice, and Bronx Defenders.

**Public Interest Pro Bono Association:** We are also a member of the Public Interest Pro Bono Association (PIPBA), which is composed of pro bono professionals on the non-profit/legal services side. Members participate in DEI training and strategize about best practices in the delivery of pro bono legal services. During the grant period, we attended two day-long conferences with other nonprofit leaders and law firm pro bono coordinators, where we had frank discussions about trends in pro bono service provision, nonprofit needs, and law firm capacity.

## CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 7,240,427**

<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$197,475</b>
<b>City &amp; County</b>	<b>\$1,793,652</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$559,144</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$3,304,020</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$1,198,230</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$187,906</b>

