

# **UNITY HOUSE OF TROY**

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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During the reporting period, we closed a total of 402 cases that affected a total of 988 individuals. Our target population is survivors of domestic violence with low income and any resident of Rensselaer County with low income.

The dollar benefit realized by the clients we served consisted of back awards and settlements in child support cases of \$15,000, monthly child support benefits in the amount of \$3905.26, back awards and settlements of maintenance in the amount of \$9,959.53 and maintenance monthly benefits of \$1,540.40.

We have increased access to justice in two ways. The first involves the work we do with the immigrant and refugee population. The clients we have served in this demographic have to overcome language, culture, family and other barriers. We dedicate time and resources through language line or volunteer translators to overcome the language barrier and understand the clients concerns and fears related to their particular situation. In serving this population, it is critical to understand the cultural and family dynamics specific to the individual. A typical legal intervention may not be appropriate due to culture or family dynamics and it's important to understand this so as not to alienate the client.

The second way UHLP increases access to justice is through our satellite office in Hoosick Falls. This is a second location in rural Rensselaer County. Rural clients often experience barriers to accessing legal services such as lack of transportation or fear of coming to a city center for court. Meeting clients in a rural office setting is less intimidating and allows us to build rapport and provide additional resources to help make the court process less overwhelming.



**Service Area:** Rensselaer

**Population Served:** General Low-Income Population

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 3.62 Lawyers: 1.5  
 Paralegals: 2 Others: 0.12

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

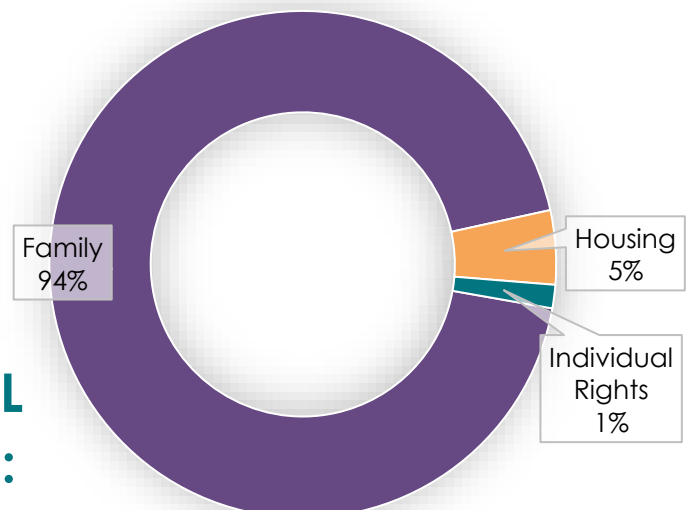
**Case Example #1:** Our first example of a typical family law case is a client that received legal assistance obtaining an Order of Protection against her abuser. Our client was referred to us by her veterinarian, who had treated the client’s pet who had also been abused. The client had experienced several instances of domestic violence including physical abuse and being strangled by her abuser to the point of almost passing out. Following the last instance of domestic violence, the abuser also injured the client’s pets. We helped the client obtain a full stay away Order of Protection which also protected her pets.

**Case Example #2:** Our second example of a typical case is a client that received legal assistance with a custody matter. This client is living in poverty with two children with disabilities. The children's father had gained primary custody before we were involved in this case, and their schooling and mental health was steadily declining. The father was neglectful and irresponsible, and the children were surrounded by drug and alcohol abuse and dad’s uncontrolled temper. Our client filed for custody and with our help, we were able to unravel the truth. The father was unemployed and when the children got off the school bus, they would all head to dad’s favorite drinking establishment. Instead of discussing the children's day at school, working on school work and eating a healthy dinner, they sat in bars waiting for dad to finish yet another beer.

With our help, our client regained custody of the children. They are now in school consistently, have a therapist they talk to, and have therapeutic visits with their father.



## CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

We created a new brochure on divorce for the Unity House Law Project. The brochure was focused on divorce in New York State. It provided general information about the divorce process and about the services offered at UHLP to assist. It also provided a list of other NYS legal resources. A total of 360 brochures were distributed through all Unity House programs and through our collaborative partners.

The attorney gave a presentation on family court practice to 15 youth at School 12. The attorney provided the audience with information on the services Unity House provides. She discussed the types of proceedings handled by Family Court including, but not limited to, custody and youth proceedings, and the role of the Attorney for Children in Family Court litigation.

# 375

people  
benefited  
from

**Community  
Legal  
Education**

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

We purchased the following equipment with the funds provided through the 2023 IOLA Technology Grant: 1 printer, 1 AIO computer, 4 Monitors, 3 Desktops, 2 laptops, 5 HD webcams, 3 Laptop bags, 1 apple Pencil, 1 iPad case with keyboard, 1 iPad pro, 5 keyboard and mice combos. Although we replace computer equipment from time to time when it wears out and/or becomes extremely outdated, we would not have purchased much of this equipment without the grant.

While replacing basic equipment, we also focused on expanding our technology resources to improve attorney access to documents both in the office and at court as well as improve the overall work experience. Having multiple monitors makes working with multiple documents so much easier and is a time saving strategy. We were able to purchase additional monitors to add to each work station which will streamline work flow. Additionally, we purchased an iPad which will afford the attorney the ability to more easily access documents, research and access web based resources while at court. The grant further afforded us the opportunity to

upgrade some of our older computers which will increase computer performance and speed resulting in easier access for the attorneys and paralegals.

This grant supported our agency's strategic technology goals by allowing us to improve computer performance, upgrade to more efficient and faster equipment, and expand technology resources available to attorneys and paralegals in order to better serve clients both in the office and while at court.

## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

During this past year we were fortunate to have two law school student interns. They worked between 8 and 12 hours weekly for the length of the semester. The interns accompanied the lawyer to court to watch the proceedings, then back in the office they performed legal research, drafted orders and petitions, and reviewed discovery production noting where items were not produced and noting items needing the attorney's attention. It is a wonderful collaboration, providing the attorney with much needed assistance and providing the intern with experience in a field they may consider after graduation.

We were also fortunate to work with a volunteer translator of several Middle Eastern and Asian languages. Their live language assistance proved to be more effective than online or telephone translation services, which can sometimes suffer from technology issues including delays and language errors.



2

law students volunteered **170** hours

1

other volunteer volunteered **2** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

One significant collaboration during this past year has been with the Albany Law School. Each semester we interview and obtain a second-year law student to intern with us. These students have been instrumental in providing solid legal research on the many matters that arise with our case representations, including UCCJEA matters, rules on trial testimony, and recent appellate decisions on child and spousal support.

We collaborate with the Unity House Domestic Violence Program and Unity House Housing Program. These collaborations help us address our clients’ non-legal matters such as housing, food insecurity, and counseling.

Other significant collaborations we benefit from as the result of being part of the domestic violence program is a collaboration with the Troy Police, Hoosick Falls Police, Rensselaer County Department of Social Services, Probation and District Attorney’s Office.

# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

## \$ 499,077

<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 110,000</b>
<b>Federal</b>	<b>\$ 234,942</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 57,494</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 96,641</b>

