

VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE

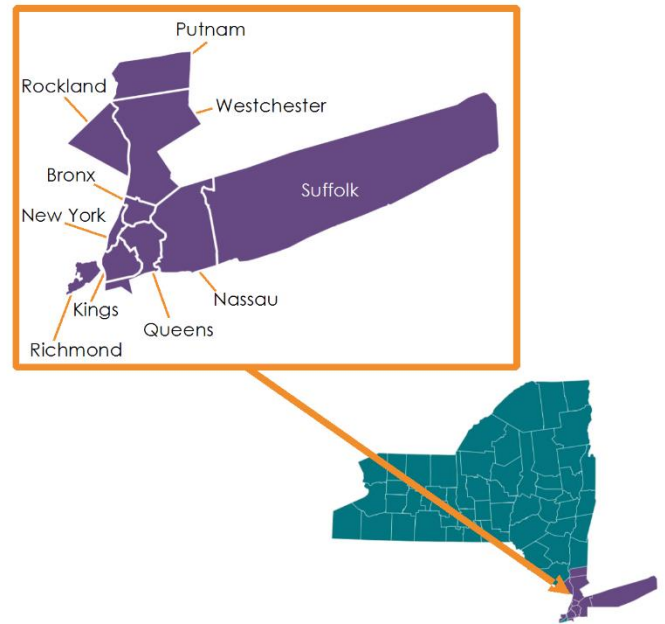
**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During the reporting period, VOLS provided legal services for low-income older adults, veterans, individuals seeking public benefits, immigrant youth, children and their families, incarcerated mothers, formerly homeless young adults, and under-resourced microentrepreneurs, inclusive of age, race, gender and LGBTQIA+ identity, ability, and veteran and immigration status. We multiplied our impact through pro bono volunteers whom we recruited, trained, and mentored from 80 law firms/corporations and maintained a network of 150 community partners with whom we collaborated on legal education clinics, identified community members needing support and trends in legal needs, and helped ensure accessibility of services.

VOLS closed 3219 legal matters, provided services benefitting 4,070 low-income New Yorkers, won \$247,630.80 in financial benefits for our clients, provided community legal education to 3031 community members, engaged 1,097 volunteers, and secured 27,117.3 hours of pro bono legal and volunteer assistance. 37% of reported cases were handled with support from pro bono. VOLS also enhanced our provision of legal services and increased access to justice. Highlights of this work follow:

We launched the VOLS Benefits Law Project (BLP) to help low-income New Yorkers more equitably access a range of public benefits. VOLS BLP incorporates and expands on the success of the VOLS Unemployed Workers Project, which addressed Unemployment Insurance (UI) challenges. Through the work of VOLS BLP, we have successfully achieved \$33,092 in Unemployment Insurance benefits for our clients since the beginning of the reporting period. Additionally, VOLS BLP now provides legal



Service Area: New York City Metropolitan Area

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 22	Lawyers: 13
Paralegals: 3	Others: 6

services for challenges with UI, Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) /Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE), and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)/Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) benefits. We provide community legal education, assistance in the application, recertification, appeals phases, and increase the legal community's capacity by training pro bono. VOLS BLP kicked off activities at a SCRIE clinic held for residents of Knickerbocker Village, organized in collaboration with Hamilton Madison House, State Senator Brian Kavanagh, State Assembly Member Grace Lee, and City Council Member Christopher Marte.

The VOLS Immigration Project (IP) helped address the great need to provide recent arrivals with immigration legal services. We supported new arrivals as they navigated immigration legal challenges, providing intakes, advice, and representation. We screened families, helped each member apply for relief as appropriate, filed documents in Family Court, with USCIS, and Immigration Court, if necessary, assisted family members with applications for employment authorization, filed change of address forms, and provided pro se support with asylum applications.

In one example, we received referrals of immigrant students and families from PS 188 – The Island School and the Lower East Side Family Union, which saw an increase in immigrant enrollment and where our pro bono partners reported an overwhelming need for support. We provided mentorship and support to pro bono teams representing families with asylum claims in Immigration Court and reviewed the eligibility of families for Temporary Protected Status, assisting with applications, as appropriate.

In December, VOLS announced a new partnership with the NYC Small Business Services' Black Entrepreneurs NYC initiative to provide a range of free transactional legal services to Black entrepreneurs and underserved communities. A launch hosted by Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation provided a free presentation on business fundamentals from our team and pro bono; over 50% of attendees signed up for a one-on-one legal consultation after.

VOLS also hosted our second annual Pro Bono Partners Convening in January. We gathered pro bono partners from law firms and corporations and other legal services organizations for a day of collaboration around our theme of engaging transactional attorneys in pro bono.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Immigration: At two years old GV - now 19 - came to the United States with her mother. Her immigration journey reflects much of how VOLS works with youth to access safety, education, and employment opportunities and how we maintain ongoing support for our clients. GV has been represented by VOLS since 2020, first in Family Court, where she was granted a Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS) predicate order that allowed her to file an application for SIJS, along with a green card application. SIJS is granted for young immigrants under the age of 21 who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by one or both parents, a situation GV unfortunately experienced.

VOLS then worked with GV so that her green card application was approved, making her a lawful permanent resident of the United States, and providing access to financial assistance for school that was previously not available to her. In five years, she will be able to naturalize to become a U.S. citizen. We are so proud to support her on this journey.

Case Example #2, Other – Life Planning: When VOLS' client MP was diagnosed with early onset dementia, her caseworker from a partner organization that works with legally blind older adults connected her with VOLS. MP wished to name her long-term partner as her power of attorney and health care proxy.

As an LGBTQIA+ couple who never married or registered as domestic partners, without legal authority, the couple would face barriers when making health care decisions on each other's behalf and did not have spousal inheritance rights.

VOLS' team helped both women prepare their Wills, Powers of Attorney, Health Care Proxies, Living Will, and Control of Remains forms. For this loving couple, VOLS' work was vital to ensuring that their wishes were carried out while they still had the capacity to do so.

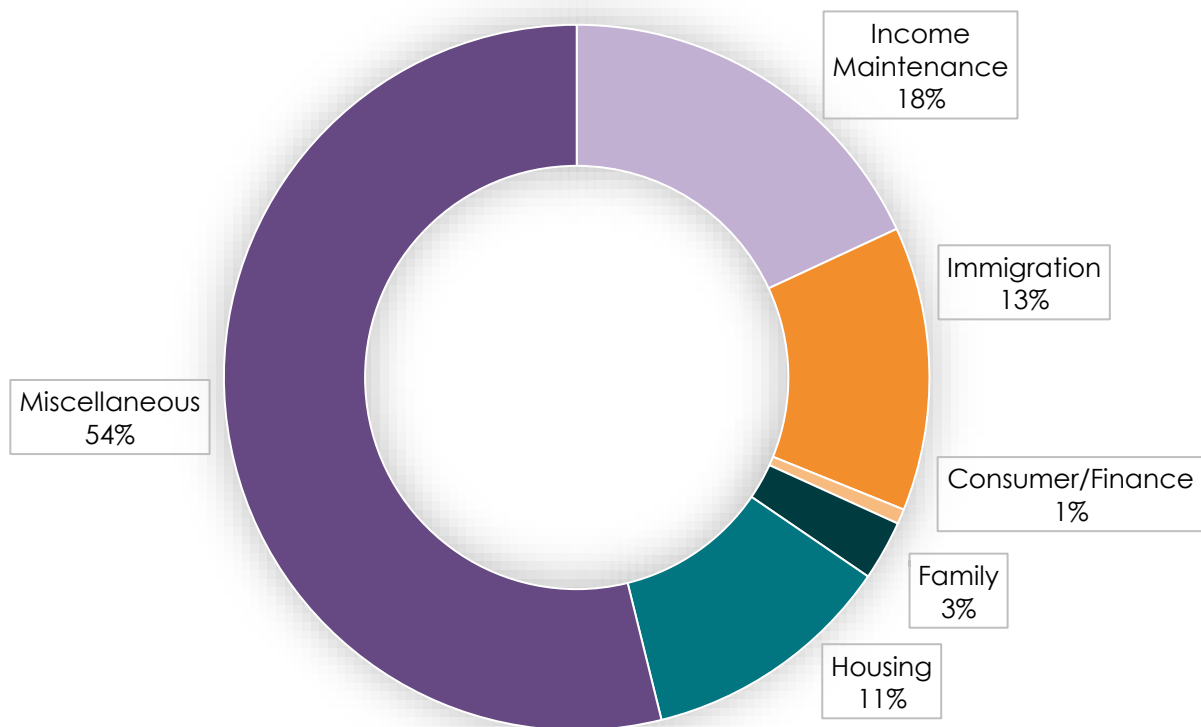
4,070

people
benefited
from

3,219

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

During the reporting period, VOLS SLP assisted clients filing pro se Voluntary Administration or Small Estates Administration petitions in the Surrogate’s Court, assisting in 14 matters for pro se clients. VOLS IP continued our support of new arrivals filing pro se immigration law related applications. Our “Know Your Rights” presentations further empowered the public and our clients to better understand the broader context for their legal concerns.

During the reporting period, we conducted several in person trainings, workshops, and presentations that reached 2,031 community members (webinars are not reflected in this number). VOLS’ self-help, legal educational materials were downloaded from our website 4,379 times. Presentations were provided both virtually and in-person as noted in our description of our hybrid model. Our presentations were conducted for VOLS’ community-based organization partners who promoted them to their constituents and members. VOLS has also continued to produce legal information guides and resources in English, Spanish, and other commonly spoken languages in New York City.

VOLS Microenterprise Project developed new fact sheets and checklists on topics presented in our outreach and community education presentations. Specifically, we developed resources to reflect the content from our “Legal Considerations for Small Businesses, Legal Basics Workshop for New Entrepreneurs, and Forming LLC in NY” presentations, including, “NY C-Corporations: Formation and Post-Formation Guide,” “NY Sole Proprietorships: Formation and Post-Formation Guide,” and “NY Limited Liability Company (LLC) Formation Guide.” VOLS MEP is recruiting pro bono volunteers to translate these resources.

VOLS Benefits Law Project created client-facing and community partner-facing training presentations on New York’s “Rent Freeze Program,” i.e., SCRIE/DRIE benefits. The presentations cover an overview of the program; eligibility; how to apply; and information on renewal applications.

VOLS Senior Law Project created two new guides for older adults and their caregivers to help demystify what it means to be an agent and answer frequently asked questions. When our older adult clients name an agent in a Health Care Proxy or Power of Attorney, their agent(s) often have questions about their responsibilities. The guides help older adults, and their caregivers understand these planning documents, an important part of empowering our clients to take control of their futures and are available in English and Spanish. This year, we intend to translate the guides into Mandarin. In addition, VOLS’ life planning pamphlet for older adults, created in collaboration with the Center for Urban Pedagogy, was translated into Spanish during this period. “Planifica Tu Futuro” provides accessible information to our older clients about life planning that would previously be less accessible to the older adult Spanish-speaking community. We intend to have a Mandarin translation in the coming year.

14

people
benefited
from

**Pro Se
Assistance**

3,031

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

4,379

people
benefited
from

**Web-Based
Assistance**

IMPACT CASES

Markey v. Tietz – Index No. 910060/23: In December 2022, VOLS was retained by an 100% service-connected disabled Navy veteran who had continued his service to his fellow veterans by working at the VA after he had been discharged from the military. During the pandemic he had fallen into rent and utility arrears. He applied for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) to help prevent an eviction and electrical service cut off. ERAP erroneously denied the application, stating that he did not reside in a county participating in the program, even though he lived in New York County. During the reporting period, VOLS filed an Article 78 proceeding in New York County Supreme Court and the State almost immediately paid 15 months worth of rent arrears and nearly \$900 in utility arrears. These payments ensured that he was no longer at risk of eviction.

After the ERAP payments were made, VOLS and our pro bono co-counsel sought attorneys' fees pursuant to Article 86 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules, also known as the New York State Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA). Under EAJA, a prevailing party against a state agency is entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees. Although a judgment was never rendered in the proceeding, we believe that an award of attorneys' fees is warranted because the filing of the Article 78 proceeding was the catalyst for the change in Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)'s position.

There is currently a split in Judicial Departments in New York – the First Department recognizes the award of EAJA attorneys' fees under a catalyst theory while the Second and Third Departments do not. The Markey matter was transferred by the Court to the Albany County Supreme Court after OTDA moved for change of venue, placing the matter in the Third Judicial Department. While we are unlikely to prevail in the Albany Supreme Court due to existing Third Department precedent, we intend to appeal the EAJA claim to the New York State Court of Appeals seeking to have the court resolve the split in departments. If the Court of Appeals rules in favor of the catalyst theory, it would have a broad impact for low-income New Yorkers seeking to appeal unfavorable rulings made by state agencies.



TECHNOLOGY

In this reporting period, VOLS created new portals in our LegalServer system that allow our pro bono volunteers to do intakes directly into LegalServer. VOLS SLP, IMLP and BLP have all implemented systems so that pro bono attorneys can use and be supported in this process. This significantly improves our ability to collect and manage data and increases our capacity to do intakes.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

VOLS is grateful to IOLA for issuing discretionary grants to each IOLA Grantee for technology infrastructure improvements in August 2023. The funds were not used to support new initiatives. They allowed VOLS to support critically needed technology infrastructure improvements. During this period, VOLS learned that our website had been hacked and had significant malware. Our clients had noticed pop-ups on our website when visiting the website to obtain our online resources. This raised security concerns with our clients and alerted VOLS to the issues with the website. Funds supported our ability to pay for a website clean-up during which time we removed infected plugins and implemented cybersecurity protections to avoid future malware. VOLS did not anticipate this expense. While we knew the website needed improvements, we did not know the full extent of the malware concerns. Cleaning the website from the malware instills trust in our legal services, confidentiality, and security.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

VOLS was founded in 1984 to promote and facilitate pro bono service by New York City's private bar. Accordingly, all of VOLS' projects and initiatives are designed to promote pro bono and incorporate the involvement of volunteers. VOLS' Pro Bono Opportunities Newsletter is sent weekly to our 80 pro bono partners to ensure they are aware of our pro bono opportunities. A full list of our partners can be found on VOLS' website and in our Impact Report.

VOLS prioritizes ensuring that clients receive responsible pro bono services and that volunteers feel supported in their work. Each volunteer is paired with a VOLS' staff member who provides ongoing support on client matters. Our legal volunteers are given specific subject matter training

and training in cultural competencies and trauma-informed client services. Volunteers can access extensive substantive resources through VOLS' Pro Bono Library, which we continually expand and update. Beyond work on individual client matters, we engage with pro bono volunteers to provide legal research on pressing issues; assist with client intake, create document templates, and to conduct community legal education.

We maintain an active network of 1,686 volunteers. During the reporting period, VOLS enrolled 1,097 volunteers including lawyers, law students, and legal interns. They contributed 27,117.3 hours of service. Twelve law students provided 4,200 hours of service, and three additional volunteers provided 205 volunteer hours. Through trainings and presentations, we engaged lawyers, law students, and paralegals who received training on civil law subject matter, VOLS' services, and policy changes. We engage law students through internships, the Pro Bono Scholars program, law school clinics, and National Pro Bono Month activities. The VOLS Pro Bono Advocates Council (PBAC) brings together emerging private bar leaders from private law firms and corporations who have a shared commitment to pro bono legal services and is an ongoing source of thought leadership on pro bono volunteerism. VOLS PBAC members take pro bono cases and promote pro bono within their firms. We continued to expand the resources in our Pro Bono Library in order to recruit, train, and support volunteer attorneys working to serve VOLS clients.

1,082attorneys volunteered **22,712** hours**12**law students volunteered **4,200** hours**3**other volunteers volunteered **205** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

VOLS collaborated with 80 law firms/companies and law schools whose volunteers provided pro bono representation. We collaborated with 150 community organizations to identify clients and provide assistance, including community legal education presentations and training, and staff training.

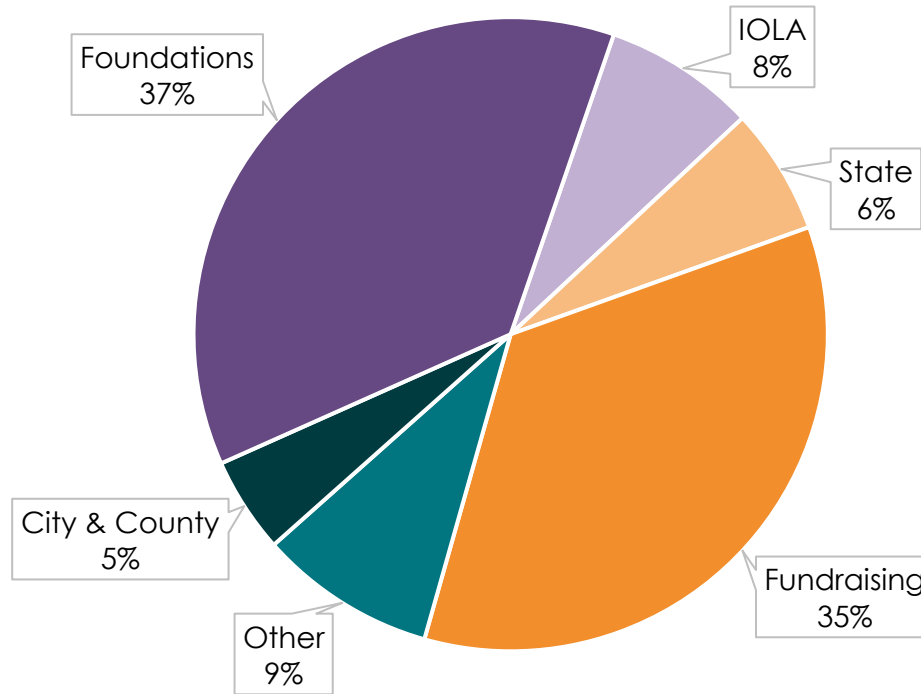
VOLS' community partners during the reporting period, by project, include:

- VOLS SLP:** ARC XVI Fort Washinton Inc.; Bay Ridge Senior Center; BRC Senior Center; Breaking Ground; Brooklyn Public Library; Carter Burden Network; Catholic Charities; Center for Urban Pedagogy; Central Harlem Senior Citizens' Centers, Inc.; Chinese-American Planning Council Inc.; Community Access; Cooper Square Committee; Encore Community Services; Entertainment Community Fund; Fort Washington Consolidated; Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School; Greenwich House; Grow Brooklyn; Goddard-Riverside Older Adults Center; Hamilton-Madison House; Harlem Advocates for Seniors; Heights and Hills; Henry Street Settlement; Housing and Services, Inc.; Hudson Guild Adult Services; JASA; Lennox Hill Neighborhood House; Lighthouse Guild; Little Brother's – Friends of the Elderly; LiveOnNY; Lifeforce in Later Years; MJHS; Neighborhood SHOPP; New York Foundation for Senior Citizens; NYS Division of Veterans Services; New York Public Library; NYC Department of Veterans Services; NY Connects; OATS; Osborne; Penn South Program for Seniors; Phipps Neighborhoods; Project Find; Project Guardianship; PSS; R.A.I.N. Senior Center; RiseBoro; Riverstone Senior Life Services; SAGE; Search and Care; SelfHelp; Selis Manor; Service Program for Older People; Services Now for Adult Persons (SNAP); Senior Planet; St. George's Society; St. Nicks Alliance; St. Margaret's House HDFC; Stanley Isaacs Senior Center; Stonewall Community Development Corp.; Sunnyside Community Services, Inc.; Trinity Church Wall Street; Tuttle Fund Stipendiary Program; United Jewish Council of the East Side; University Settlement; VA Harbor NY Health Care System; Visions; Visiting Nurse Services of NY; VillageCare; VetConnectNYC; Washington Heights Inwood Council on Aging; West Side Federation for Senior & Supportive Housing, Inc; YM&YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood; YWCA of Brooklyn.
- VOLS Veterans Initiative:** City Bar Justice Center; Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School; Legal Services NYC Veterans Justice Project; NYC Department of Veterans Services; NYLAG Veterans Rights Project; New York State Division of Veterans Services; SAGEVets; VA Harbor NY Health Care System; Veterans Advocacy Project; Veterans Mental Health Coalition.

- **VOLS MEP:** Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation – Brooklyn; Black Chamber of Commerce of New York City; Black Entrepreneurs NYC; Business Center; Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce; Brooklyn SBDC; Evergreen; Fedcap; Harlem Business Alliance; Local Development Corporation of East New York; Bronx SBDC; Columbia University – Harlem SBDC; Manhattan SBDC; NYC Business Solutions – Upper Manhattan; NYC Business Solutions Washington Heights; Chhaya Community Development Center; NYC Business Solutions – Queens; Queens-LaGuardia SBDC; NYC Business Solutions – Staten Island; Business Outreach Center Network; Progress Playbook; Small Business Legal Relief Alliance; Hot Bread Kitchen; Eterra Kitchen; CAMBA. VOLS IP: Brooklyn College Immigrant Student Success Center; Academy of Government and Law; Academy for Language and Technology; City-As-School High School; Community Health Academy of the Heights; CUNY John Jay College Immigrant Student Success Center; Essex Street Academy; Internationals Network (including Flushing, LaGuardia, Lafayette, and Prospect Heights); High School for Dual Language and Asian Studies; James Baldwin High School; Lower Manhattan Arts Academy; New Design High School; New York Collective of Radical Educators; P.S. 188; Union Settlement Esperanza Preparatory Academy; Urban Academy School for Law & Justice; William E. Macaulay Honors Program at CUNY; Ali Forney Community Center; Chinese American Planning Council; Community Healthcare Network; Consulate General of Mexico in New York; DSI International; Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project; Henry Street Settlement; ImmSchools; Jewish Child Care Association; La Jornada; Mixteca; New York Collective of Radical Educators; New York Immigration Coalition; New York State Youth Leadership Council; Riseboro. VOLS BLP: Breaking Ground; Chhaya CDC; DSI International; Garden of Hope; Hamilton-Madison House; Heights & Hills; Jahajee Sisters; La Colmena; Nido de Esperanza; Mixteca; Sakhi; Voces Latinas; University Settlement NORC. VOLS IMLP: Osborne Association; Hour Children.
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CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 3,126,404



IOLA Funding	\$ 235,000
City & County Funding	\$ 147,750
State Funding	\$ 195,144
Foundations	\$ 1,116,449
Fundraising	\$ 1,053,553
Other Funding	\$ 273,185