

CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEE CENTER

**2023 – 2024
Report**

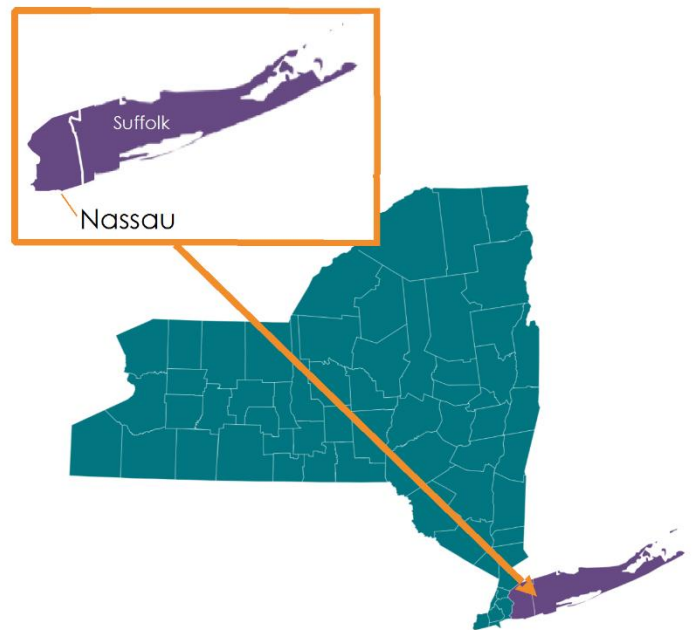
OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During the 2023-2024 grant year, CARECEN expanded our legal services capacity to continue providing the high-quality legal services that have been our hallmark for four decades. Our legal services program grew exponentially during the grant year, increasing 164% since April 1, 2023. Notably, this growth occurred across all of our legal programs. This growth has allowed us to take on more complex cases and expand into new practice areas, while continuing to reduce docket size to help avoid staff burnout. It has also allowed us to implement new best practices that were previously difficult to implement due to more limited capacity.

Legal Services: During the grant year, CARECEN provided a wide array of pro bono and low bono direct legal services to 1,856 immigrants on Long Island. Services included lighter-touch cases, such as advice and counsel and screenings for immigration benefits, green card renewal and applications for work authorization, as well a representation on naturalization applications, adjustments of status, and complex removal defense cases.

Because CARECEN orients our services towards low-income immigrants, approximately 98% of clients assisted during the program year fell below 150% of the federal poverty line. This income level made these clients eligible for a reduction or waiver of federal immigration fees for various immigration benefits, amounting to a total savings of \$301,985 to these individuals.

In addition to expanding all of our legal programs, CARECEN launched two new legal programs during the grant year. The first new program is the Youth Immigration Program. This program provides specialized immigration legal services to immigrant children, with a focus on



Service Area: Nassau and Suffolk

Population Served: Low Income Immigrants and Refugees

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 28	Lawyers: 14
Paralegals: 10	Others: 4

unaccompanied minors, a high-need segment of the immigrant population. In early 2024, CARECEN commenced a new partnership with Terra Firma National (TFN). CARECEN is the first organization to partner with TFN now that it is a national organization. Through this Further Justice-funded collaboration with TFN and our healthcare partner Harmony Health, we will provide co-located legal and medical services to our unaccompanied minor clients. CARECEN anticipates a program launch date of May or June 2024.

The second legal program launched during the 2023-2024 grant year is our Rapid Response Program. With the increase in asylum seekers arriving on Long Island since 2022, CARECEN identified the need to create a program dedicated to meeting their urgent legal needs. This program provides screenings for potential asylum seekers, assists them with the completion and filing of their asylum applications, and helps them apply for work authorization. Since launching in June 2023, this program has provided services to 504 recently-arrived immigrants.

Community Education and Outreach: During the grant period, CARECEN continued to offer various community education opportunities. These services were provided both in-person and online using platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live.

This blended model allowed us to reach immigrants across our region whose work schedules and family responsibilities make it difficult to attend in person events, as well as those with more limited access to technology or lower levels of digital literacy.

Because of our close ties to the immigrant community and our longstanding relationships with local organizations, CARECEN was well-positioned to keep the immigrant community informed of changes that affect them. During the 2023-2024 grant year, CARECEN provided community education sessions to 4,322 immigrants on a variety of topics identified as priority by the immigrants we serve. On emerging issues – such as changes to federal immigration law and policy – CARECEN aimed to offer the community information session within a week of the announced change.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example One – Immigration

Gloria, a citizen of Honduras, left her country in 1996 due to a lack of economic opportunity. She lived in the United States undocumented for two years, before being granted TPS in 1998. She has remained in TPS status since then. In 2023, her U.S. citizen son turned 21 and was able to file a family petition for Gloria. Gloria’s green card was granted in March 2023.

Case Example Two – Immigration

Luis, his wife Rosa and their 18-month-old daughter Kenia fled their native Venezuela in August 2023 due to severe government restrictions and a lack of economic opportunity.

They traveled by land to the United States, crossing the Darien Gap on foot. They arrived on Long Island and in December 2023, CARECEN helped them apply for asylum.



CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

CARECEN has a robust community education program that empowered thousands of immigrants through education and access to information and resources. This community education is geared towards all immigrants across Long Island.

During the grant year, CARECEN provided community education sessions on a variety of topics relevant to the immigrant community. These topics were selected based on expressed community need, with a particular focus on emerging issues in immigration law. Examples of topics offered include “Updates in Immigration Law”, “Eligibility for TPS” and “How to Avoid Notario Fraud”. These community education sessions were provided both virtually and in-person. CARECEN provided citizenship classes to 215 immigrants via Zoom. These free, volunteer-led services are geared towards preparing immigrants to represent themselves at their naturalization interviews. These classes were supplemented by ESOL classes and English conversation classes, which assisted an additional 335 immigrants.

Citizenship Classes: Through our volunteer-led citizenship classes, CARECEN helped prepare 215 immigrants across Long Island to represent themselves at their naturalization interviews. These classes, offered during the evenings to accommodate most work schedules, focus on the fundamental English skills, as well as the U.S. history and civics, that are required to pass the naturalization test.

Community Education Workshops: With the increase in asylum seekers to Long Island and the lack of legal services capacity to represent all of the cases, CARECEN has prioritized providing critical, timely community education to inform this population. These community education presentations have been geared towards helping this population understand their immigration legal process, key case deadlines, and the risks of notario fraud.

1,142

people
benefited from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

5,311

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal Education**

978

people
benefited from
**Web-Based
Assistance**

IMPACT CASES

CARECEN et. al. v. Nassau County, et. al.

In July 2023, CARECEN sued Nassau County for its failure to provide language access to limited English language proficient residents of Nassau County. The case was filed in federal court in the Eastern District of New York. This litigation is ongoing.

TECHNOLOGY

During the 2023-2024 grant year, CARECEN has continued our use of technology in service provision. In addition to continuing to utilize the technology platforms we have implemented over the past three years, CARECEN expanded our use of CampLegal, our online case management system that we implemented in 2023. Incorporating CampLegal into our practice has been revolutionary as it has allowed for more efficient, streamlined case management.

The system allows clients to submit information and documents directly to the online portal, reducing the case processing time and facilitating more rapid communication between the client and their legal representative.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

CARECEN used our 2023 technology grant to purchase four high-capacity Xerox printers and monthly servicing for these printers. These printers were a much-needed upgrade for our organization as they allow staff to more quickly and easily print, copy and scan documents, including voluminous legal filings.

The grant supported our organization's strategic technological goals as a major priority is to move away from outdated technology and update the devices used across our organization.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

With the launch of our new Special Programs team in late 2022, CARECEN redoubled our efforts to recruit and train talented law students and young attorneys to practice in the immigration field on Long Island. These efforts have strengthened our law student participation over the grant year. Through this program, during the summer of 2023, CARECEN hosted 10 law students for a 10-week internship. Finally, CARECEN is hosting a Pro Bono Scholar during the spring 2024 semester who will transition into a Skadden Fellowship with CARECEN in the fall of 2024.

A total of 10 law students assisted CARECEN staff in the analysis and preparation of cases. An additional 14 volunteers assisted with citizenship class instruction, translation, administrative and other tasks.

10

law students volunteered **4,500** hours

14

other volunteers volunteered **1,210** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

During the grant year, CARECEN built on our long-established cooperative relationships with other organizations serving Long Island's immigrant community to improve services provision and increase outreach effectiveness.

Immigration Collaborative of Long Island (ICLI): This year, CARECEN continued to run the Immigration Collaborative of Long Island (ICLI), which we founded in January 2023. This interdisciplinary coalition, composed of legal service providers and social service providers from across Nassau and Suffolk counties, strives to provide a proactive, collective response to the needs of Long Island's immigrants. ICLI members meet on a monthly basis to share trends,

resources, and best practices to ensure that the services available for new Americans in our region are made widely available.

Immigrant Justice Corps: One of the major collaborations was our partnership with the Immigrant Justice Corps. Through this partnership CARECEN hosted three IJC fellows during the grant period. Under the supervision of a supervising attorney at CARECEN, these IJC fellows provided direct representation to more than 250 Central American immigrant children and families at risk for deportation.

Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC): As a founding member of Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC), and a member of the Steering Committee, CARECEN continues collaborating with organizations state-wide around immigrant advocacy issues. CARECEN participates in monthly I-ARC Steering Committee meetings and regular general membership meetings which focus on sharing resources and best practices with other practitioners.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 2,979,429

IOLA Funding	\$127,703
Foundations	\$ 590,422
Fundraising	\$228,949
State Funding	\$1,806,467
Other	\$ 225,888

