

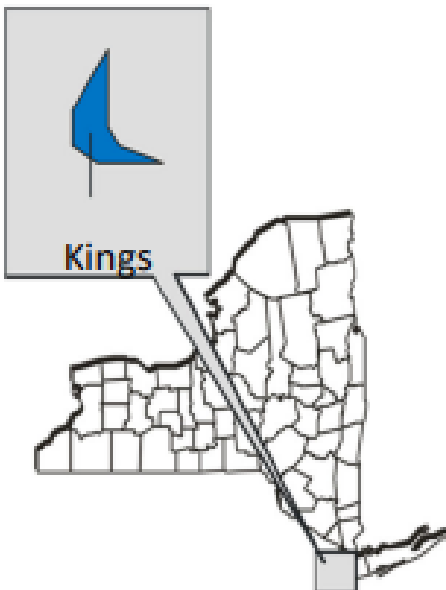
ACCESS JUSTICE BROOKLYN

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Founded in 1990, the mission of Access Justice Brooklyn is to provide high-quality, pro bono legal services and community education to our neighbors in need. Using the collective talents of our dedicated staff and volunteers, we help ensure a more accessible legal system and equitable Brooklyn. During this IOLA grant period, we provided direct civil legal services in 3,945 matters affecting 8,950 individuals and families. We also provided self-help pro se assistance in matters that impact basic rights and necessities, such as housing security and advanced life planning, to a total of 287 people. Through our borough-wide community legal education programming, we provided critical legal information and resources to an additional 601 individuals, and provided referrals for other legal and social service needs to 1,770 individuals. An additional 620 individuals accessed our legal resources via our website, which clarify common questions we receive from our clients about deed fraud, wills, and other legal matters.

Core to our approach is our pioneering pro bono model, which engages private attorneys and other volunteers to provide legal services and community support – allowing us to serve far more people than we could alone. We provide uniquely efficient and comprehensive services via this service model, which involves recruiting, training, and mentoring compassionate pro bono attorneys to serve the Brooklyn community. In the last year we engaged 204 pro bono attorneys, law students, and cross-industry professionals who, with our support, provided 5,524 hours of high-quality, compassionate legal representation, advice and counsel, brief legal services, and community education throughout Brooklyn.



Population Served: Low Income Populations

Total Funding: \$1,837,646.50

Total IOLA Grant: \$212,500

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 14
- Paralegals: 3
- Lawyers: 8
- Other: 3

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

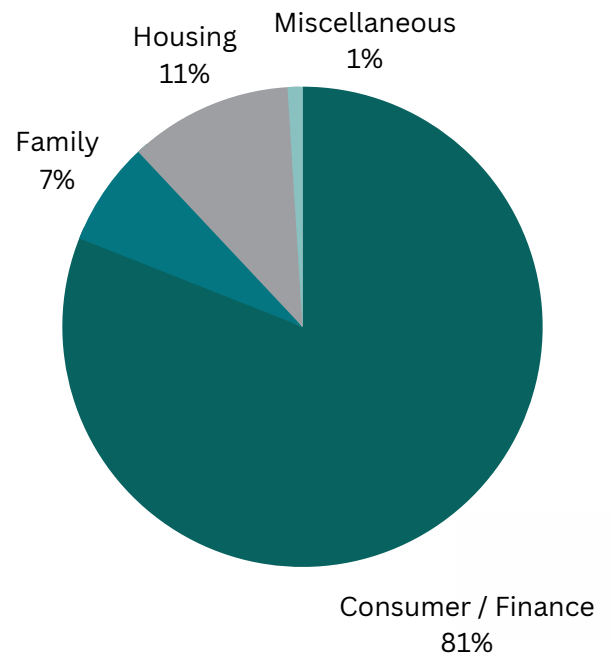
Consumer/Finance:

Mary first came to Access Justice Brooklyn in December 2018 when she was being sued for a student loan debt. According to her records, and to her knowledge, she had taken out four loans to attend school, which she later consolidated.

A lawsuit was brought against her in 2013, even though her loans were in repayment. Mary represented herself in court until January 2019, when Access Justice Brooklyn first represented her through the Volunteer Lawyer for the Day (VLFD) program in Kings County Civil Court. On that appearance, the matter was adjourned to have the plaintiff turn over documentation and proof of the debt. We continued to represent her at court dates throughout 2019 on a limited scope basis through VLFD. At the same time, through our Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office (CLARO) clinic, we helped Mary get her full student loan history from the Department of Education. Upon review of the documents, we determined that Mary had taken out a fifth, private loan which had not been consolidated with her other four loans – a fact Mary could not believe, as she had never made a payment on this additional loan.

Mary went to school in New York City in 2004 and graduated in April of 2005. While she was in school her loans were not required to be in repayment; the terms of the loan agreement stated that her loans would come due six months after graduation. Her loans therefore came due in October 2005, but she never made a payment due to the confusion regarding the consolidation. The terms of the student loan agreement also dictated that after a borrower misses a payment, the whole loan becomes due.

8,950 people benefitted from 3,945 legal cases closed



Cases by Legal Problem Area

At that point the statute of limitations also started to run, after which the plaintiff had six years to bring a suit against Mary. Accordingly, any lawsuit should have been brought by October 2011, yet the suit against Mary was commenced in September 2013. When Access Justice Brooklyn's attorney brought the timing of the lawsuit to the attention of the plaintiff's attorney, they chose to go to trial.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused court operations to come to a halt, putting Mary's case on hold. The case finally went to trial in April 2023. At trial, we were able to enter Mary's transcripts into evidence, which indicated when she graduated as well as the promissory note that dictated the terms of repayment and default. The court found that the action was commenced after the statute of limitations had run out and therefore the amount of \$25,721.43 was dismissed with prejudice, in Mary's favor.

Housing:

Julia first came to Access Justice Brooklyn through our Foreclosure Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) clinic in July 2018. Her parents emigrated from Ghana and purchased a home in Flatbush in 1974. They took out a mortgage that they modified several times thereafter to cover household expenses and home repairs. Her parents continued to pay the mortgage until her father passed away in 2001. Her mother then retired in 2002, leaving her with limited income. Julia started paying the mortgage, but struggled financially after losing her job in 2012. As a result, Julia and her mother, Karen, defaulted on the mortgage in June 2012.

A successor in interest to Karen's mortgage lender commenced a foreclosure action against her in April 2018. Access Justice Brooklyn assisted Julia and Karen with pro se answers and with an application for a home loan modification in October 2018. We then helped Julia and Karen obtain a trial loan modification after some back and forth with the servicer. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Julia temporarily lost her job and had reduced work hours, but she continued to make her trial modification payments, and we worked to obtain the issuance of a permanent modification. The servicer finally issued a permanent modification in June 2020 directly to Julia; however, while Julia maintained that she signed and returned it, the servicer contended that they never received the permanent modification and ultimately issued a denial of the permanent modification in September 2020.

Julia was unable to reapply for a modification until January 2022, after she resumed her normal employment schedule. We worked with Julia to reapply for a modification, and she obtained a new trial modification in February 2022. She made the required three trial payments starting in March 2022, and the servicer issued a permanent modification until the end of July 2022. Julia signed and returned the permanent modification in August 2022. The plaintiff's attorney filed a motion to discontinue the case in February 2023, which the court granted in April 2023. As a result of our ongoing support and advocacy, Julia and Karen were able to obtain a modification and remain in their home of nearly 50 years.

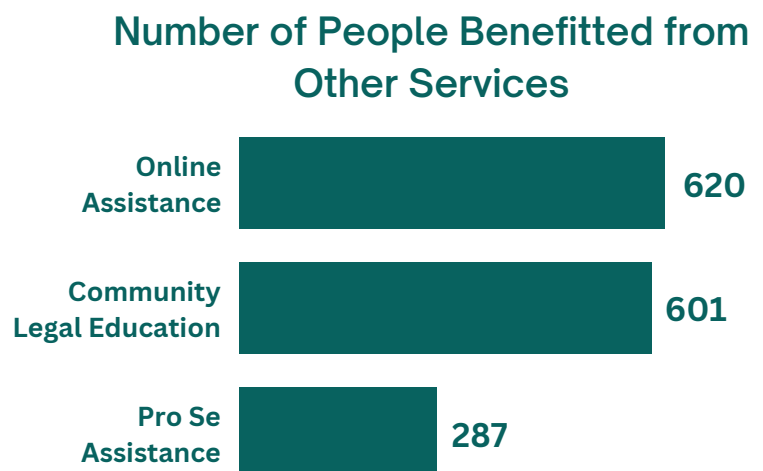
OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

With the relaxing of COVID-19 related public health guidelines we increased our presence at in-person community events and presentations during this grant period. As we successfully adapted our presentations for virtual delivery in response to the pandemic, however, we have also continued to use tools such as Zoom to provide accessible community legal education when requested by our partners. By combining prevention-oriented legal education and access to highly skilled, trusted legal professionals, Access Justice Brooklyn’s community outreach program is essential to alleviating the stress of legal issues for Brooklyn community members and ensures that income does not represent a barrier to obtaining critical legal assistance.

As part of our outreach initiative, NGF Senior LEAP, Access Justice Brooklyn maintained and strengthened our relationships with senior centers and other nonprofit partners throughout Brooklyn during the period, including Park Slope Center for Successful Aging, Jewish Association Serving the Aging (JASA), and Millennium Development, which allow us to make our services as accessible as possible and reach seniors in their own communities. We also established new relationships with St. Boniface Social Justice Action, Bay Ridge Center for Older Adults, Amico Senior Center in Borough Park, and Willoughby Older Adult Center in Fort Greene, all of which helped increase our presence in these Brooklyn neighborhoods.

In total, we reached 290 seniors through 15 NGF Senior LEAP education presentations, of which 11 were held in-person and four (4) were conducted virtually via Zoom. These presentations covered an array of topics that are critical areas of concern for older adults, including advanced life planning, debt collection, homeowner-related concerns, and financial abuse – ensuring seniors know their rights and can access legal help from trusted professionals.

1,508 People Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

As part of our organizational rebrand in mid-2022, Access Justice Brooklyn made significant changes to our website so it would be more user-friendly for clients, donors, and other site users. These changes included a designated “Get Help” page where website users can find information about our services and access downloadable, issue-specific legal resources; a public calendar of upcoming community events and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings; and a language selection tool which has six different page translation options for limited English proficient users. We are currently planning a website “resource hub” where all of our legal resources will be available in a single place, which we hope to complete later this year.

Access Justice Brooklyn engages an external vendor, RoundTable Technology, to provide IT support and ensure the organization’s technology needs are met. In addition to our cybersecurity platform through RoundTable, Defendify, we recently implemented additional security measures through two-factor authentication and a password manager, LastPass, which securely generates and stores passwords. We also transitioned to a new phone system in early 2023, DialPad, which allows staff to make calls and send messages from either their desktops or phones. DialPad efficiently directs intake calls to points of contact for specific practice areas, dependent upon the issue identified by a caller, and provides referral information for users seeking assistance with legal issues outside our scope of services.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

Access Justice Brooklyn is committed to the professional development of our staff and volunteers; we encourage staff to attend CLEs or other beneficial trainings whenever such opportunities arise and regularly pay for staff trainings. In addition, we cover membership fees for our attorneys to join two bar associations, which offer training and professional development opportunities, and have a Pro Bono Privileged Membership through the Practising Law Institute (PLI) which enables staff to attend PLI trainings and webinars for free. We also regularly send staff to state and national trainings, such as the Equal Justice Conference, Pro Bono Institute Conference, New York State Bar Association Annual Meeting, New York State Partnership Conference, and Fair Debt Collection Practices Conference, to network with other legal professionals and keep up to date on current practice area trends and legal strategies. During this period, our homeowner assistance program attorneys attended the New York State HOPP conference in Albany in October 2022, and our consumer law attorney participated in the Consumer Rights Litigation Conference in Seattle in November 2022.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Central to our mission and essential to our service model, Access Justice Brooklyn maintains partnerships with private law firms, in-house counsel, and law schools to provide pro bono assistance to our clients.


During the period we continued to design and present Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings that allow us to recruit and train new pro bono volunteers and prepare private attorneys to provide critical community legal support in our areas of civil legal practice. We offered trainings and clinics both virtually and in person, maximizing attendees' ability to complete our training programs. For those unable to attend live trainings, we record our presentations and make them available to pro bono volunteers upon request. We also offer written materials with relevant case law, statutes, and forms to supplement CLEs, and we match volunteers with experienced practitioners and mentors to ensure they have sufficient support and guidance to effectively represent our clients. In total, we held or participated in 15 CLE trainings for 860 attendees during the period.

We have ongoing partnerships with Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Willkie Farr & Gallagher, Goodwin Procter LLP, Kelley Drye & Warren LLP, and AXA XL, whose staff routinely provide pro bono assistance to Access Justice Brooklyn clients. We also recently established an ongoing partnership with Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver, and Jacobson LLP, through which their employee volunteers provide citizenship application assistance to clients at CUNY Citizenship NOW! clinics held monthly at locations across the city.



171 Attorneys volunteered 1,788 hours

33 Law Students volunteered 3,736 hours

Each  icon is equal to 20.4 volunteers.
Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.
Law Students are represented through the Grey Figure.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

All of our court-based clinics are collaborative efforts with the NYS Supreme Court, NY Civil Court, Brooklyn Law School, OCA's Access to Justice Programs, and Brooklyn Legal Services. Our homeowner representation project in Department of Buildings cases is in collaboration with the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) and Brooklyn Law School. We are the designated CLARO program provider in Brooklyn, through which we partner with Brooklyn Law School to provide advice and resources on consumer debt matters.

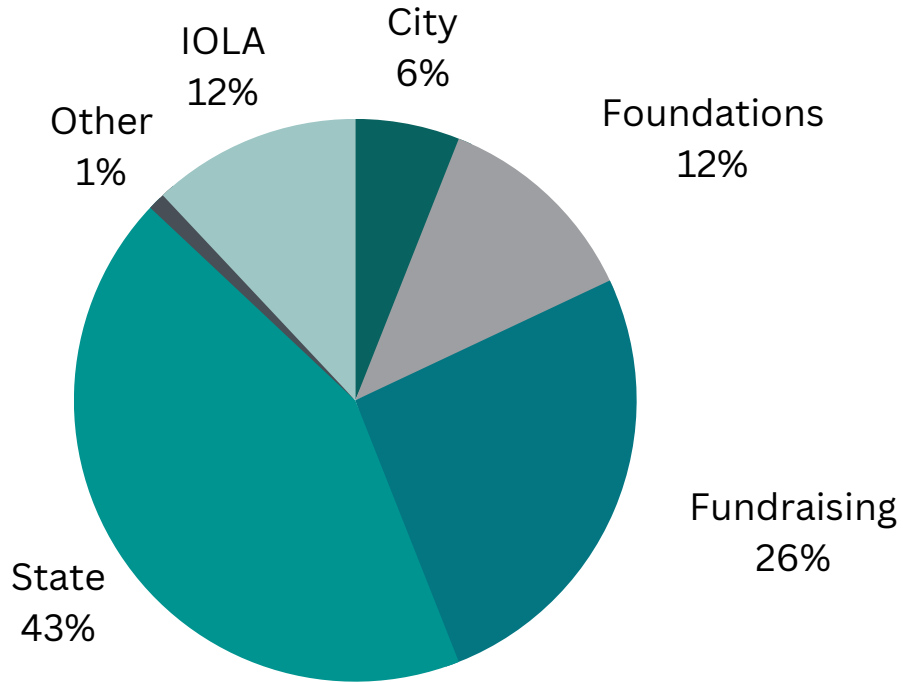
Along with the New York Legal Assistance Group and New York County Lawyers Association, Access Justice Brooklyn is a partner in the Consumer Debt Consortium which staffs the court-based Volunteer Lawyer for the Day (VLFD) Access to Justice programs throughout New York City, and we are the sole VLFD provider in Kings County. To assist Brooklyn residents with citizenship applications and other immigration matters, we partner with organizations such as Dominicanos USA, NALEO Educational Fund, and CUNY Citizenship NOW! who hold immigration clinics throughout the city. We leverage our law firm relationships to recruit volunteers who then participate in these clinics, and we provide CLE credits to volunteers who complete training prior to an event.

Access Justice Brooklyn maintains an ongoing dialogue with members of the community and the judiciary at state and federal levels to identify and address common legal obstacles as well as unmet needs among self-represented individuals. We are a member of the New York Legal Services Coalition, enabling us to remain up to date about emergent legal issues and participate in advocacy campaigns with other providers. Our staff also participate in practice-specific advocate groups, bar association committees, and task forces relevant to their areas of expertise. Our director of legal services participates in the Brooklyn Bar Association's Pro Bono and Judiciary Committees and is chair of the New York City Bar Association Civil Court Committee, through which he regularly meets with other advocates and the Administrative Judge of the New York City Civil Court to discuss updates to court operations.

Our pro bono director is a member of the New York State Bar Pro Bono Coordinators Network as well as the Public Interest Pro Bono Association (PIPBA), an association for professionals who oversee pro bono programs at nonprofit and public interest law organizations in the New York City area.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Access Justice Brooklyn received **\$1,837,647** in total funding this past year



State Funding	\$796,075
Fundraising	\$492,414
Foundations	\$218,750
IOLA Grant	\$212,500
City and County Funding	\$106,250
Other	\$11,658