

UNITY HOUSE OF TROY

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During this reporting period, we closed 475 cases. The primary target populations are victims of domestic violence and County residents of lower income. Many clients received monetary benefits as the result of our efforts. We obtained back awards of \$24,011 in child support and \$28,340 in equitable distribution of assets for clients. Additionally, we obtained \$9,852 of monthly child support benefits and \$601 of monthly maintenance payments for clients. By offering litigation defense to clients faced with eviction, our attorney was able to negotiate settlements that afforded clients additional time to seek alternative housing as well as avoid or obtain redress for nearly \$30,000 in charges by the Landlord.

In October, our offices moved to a brand-new facility that significantly improves our program’s capacity to deliver services. The new facility is bright, fully accessible, has plenty of parking and is on a bus line. It also has conference spaces, a youth area and a playground with play equipment (coming soon), basketball courts and high-speed digital Wi-Fi. The location is in the heart of Lansingburgh and is a great place to meet with clients, meet with outside counsel or conduct depositions or conferences.



Population Served: General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$548,046

Total IOLA Grant: \$60,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 4.78
- Paralegals: 2
- Lawyers: 2.2
- Other: 0.58

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

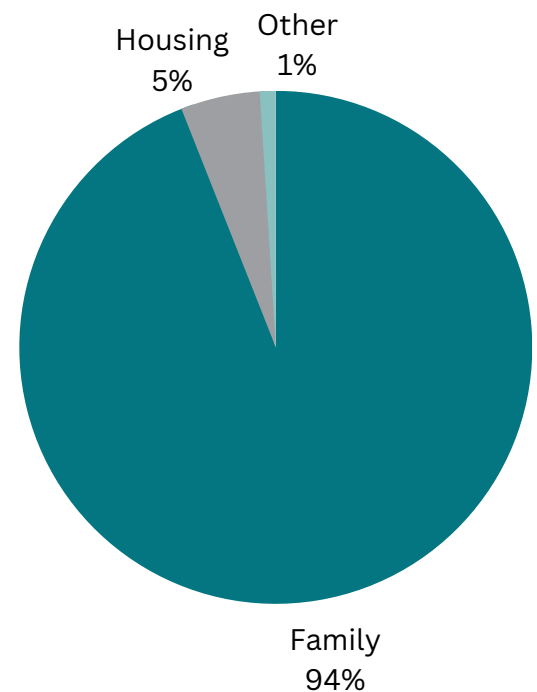
Case #1

The first example of a typical case is a client that received legal assistance with a matrimonial matter. Client was married and had three children with her abuser who suffered from increasing paranoia which he treated with alcohol. This led to both physical and verbal abuse. By the time the client sought our services, she had already obtained an order of protection and order of custody and the abuser was no longer residing at the marital residence. We helped the client work with another program to obtain home surveillance cameras after the client observed the abuser patrolling her neighborhood and parking outside of her house, despite the order of protection.

We also helped the client obtain a divorce. The abuser fought us every step of the way, often yelling at the client, the attorney, and, at times, the Judge, to voice his disgust with our client and what she was doing to their family. Ultimately, this case went to trial because the abuser refused to acknowledge our client’s right to a divorce or engage in any form of settlement communication. At trial, he was determined to be a hostile witness and refused to answer many of the attorney’s questions or even look in her direction.

During the pendency of the proceeding, the abuser hit the parties’ oldest child and we were able to obtain an order of protection for the benefit of the children. We were able to modify custody so that our client was awarded primary physical and sole legal custody. The abuser was ordered to pay child support to our client, including an award of arrears in the amount of nearly \$10,000.

1,114
people
benefitted from
475
legal cases
closed



**Cases by
Legal Problem
Area**

Since finalization of the divorce, the client reports she and her children are doing well. The client has since started her own home business and is taking night classes to pursue her degree.

Case #2

Another example of a typical case involved helping a client to re-obtain custody of her two special needs children. The client's children were removed from her custody several years ago by court, and custody was given to her domestic violence perpetrator. The client was a victim of physical, emotional, and financial abuse for many years, and the Father was indicated by Child Protective Services for inadequate guardianship of the children. There were several allegations that the Father failed to foster a positive relationship between the children and our client, their Mother, and that the Father "coached" the children to tell their court appointed attorney that they were afraid of our client, and did not wish to see her.

In the late Summer 2022 the Father was arrested for perpetrating acts of physical violence against another woman in the children's presence. Law enforcement contacted Child Protective Services, and an investigation was conducted. The children confirmed the Father's acts of domestic violence and also reported to caseworkers that their Father woke up each morning and had an alcoholic beverage for breakfast. The Father proceeded to consume alcohol throughout the day, and he failed to give the children medications prescribed by their developmental pediatrician.

The client was awarded emergency sole legal and primary physical custody. Orders of protection were also issued on behalf of the children. The attorney also assisted the client in getting an order of child support for the children. The Mother was granted court permission to remove the children from the Father's school district, where they both were bullied by fellow classmates, due to their learning disabilities. The Father is presently incarcerated at a county jail, but prior to his incarceration he was relegated to brief periods of custodial access in a public place. According to the children's lawyer, their speech, vocabulary, and manners have greatly improved since the Mother was awarded custody.

During the 2022 holiday season, Unity House was also able to provide this family with a Thanksgiving basket and Christmas presents.

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

A total of 335 brochures were distributed through all Unity House programs and through our collaborative partners.

The attorney provided a total of two trainings for 145 total participants. The topics of the trainings were domestic violence awareness in family court and the basics of Crawford hearings. The attendees for both trainings were a variety of advocates and community members from different agencies such as Samaritan Hospital, probation, and Albany Law 2nd and 3rd year students.

480
people
benefitted from
Services Other
Than Direct
Legal Services

OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

In the Fall of 2021, we moved to a new database called Empower. We have continued to work on expanding use of this database and its ability to generate accurate reporting. Over the course of the past year, we have slowly added all reports needed for the various funding sources we have at the Law Project. We are still learning how to use all the features to the best of its capability but it is making data collection and reporting much more accurate. We are also able to adapt it to collect different data points as we determine new need. For example, we added a new data point to collect information related to whether a client is or has been a migrant worker.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

We believe that training is very important for all of our attorneys. Each one regularly engages in a variety of training, both skills-based and related to domestic violence and trauma informed care practices. An example of trainings attended include MatLaw 2022 Ultimate Update which focused on divorce, custody, support, evidence and ethics among other topics, Enlightened Family Court Representation, NY Crime Victims Legal Help -Eviction and Moratorium Update, NY Statewide Civil Legal Aid Technology Conference, Human Trafficking Awareness Conference and a mental health awareness seminar.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

UHLP had an Albany Law School intern work with us during the Spring 2023 semester. The intern works 12 hours per week for the length of the semester. The intern accompanies the attorney to court and drafts custody, violation and family offense petitions. Additionally, the intern conducts legal research and drafts memos of law, review discovery production, draft discovery demands and demands for verified bills of particulars. Interns are a wonderful resource to the attorney because of the work they are able to perform. Working in our program also offers interns a great opportunity to see the many benefits and challenges of working with victims of domestic violence and low-income residents of Rensselaer County.

1 Law Student volunteered 102 hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

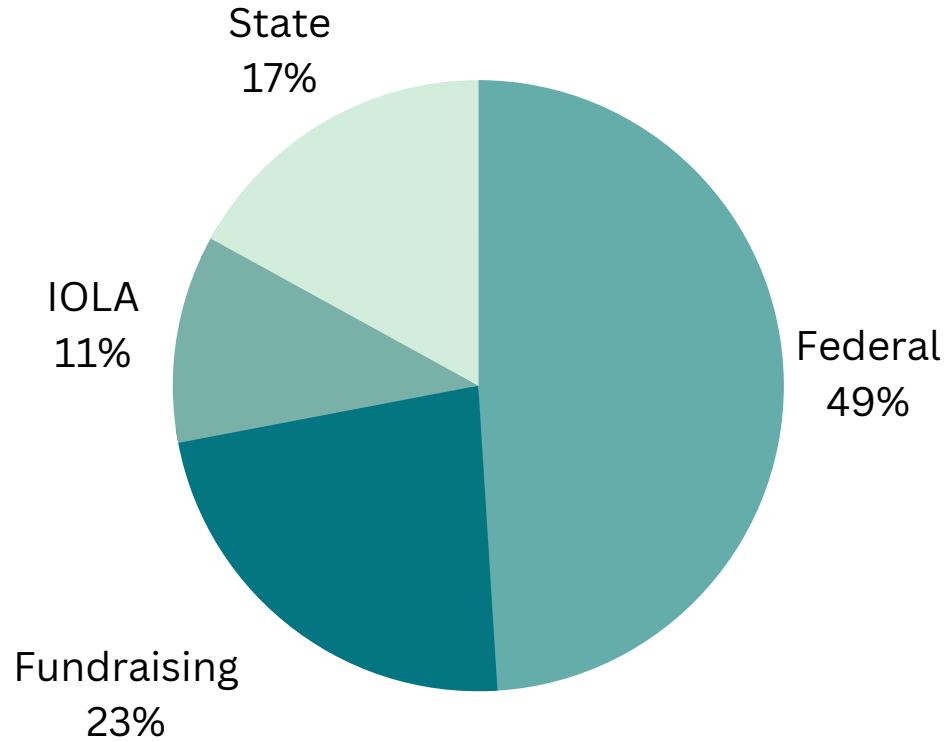
UHLP benefits from several collaborations that are part of the Domestic Violence Services program. These include a partnership with the Troy Police, Hoosick Falls Police, District Attorney's office, and probation. We receive many referrals from our collaborative partners on an on-going basis. Frequently, clients who are victims of abuse work with local police to press criminal charges. The police make referrals to UHLP which allows us to assist them to obtain Orders of Protection in Family Court and to file for custody of common children. In this way, clients are able to receive early intervention and know their rights as soon as they enter the justice system.

Having an office within Domestic Violence Services facilitates the provision of holistic services when our clients are victims of domestic violence. Referrals to housing, therapeutic counseling, and other services are easily facilitated on site. This holistic approach to services is highly beneficial to clients and connects them to services they may need to separate from abusive relationships.

We have had a great collaboration with Albany Law School for many years. Over this time, we have engaged in a variety of ways including hosting interns, speaking to classes, etc. Starting in January, 2023, we are now hosting a 12 hour per week intern for the Spring semester. This is a great opportunity for both our program and a student who is very interested in learning more about domestic violence and serving as a lawyer in a practice for low income clients.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Unity House of Troy received
\$548,046
in total funding this past year



| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Federal | \$268,678 |
| IOLA Grant | \$60,000 |
| Fundraising | \$125,543 |
| State Funding | \$93,826 |
| Total | \$548,046 |