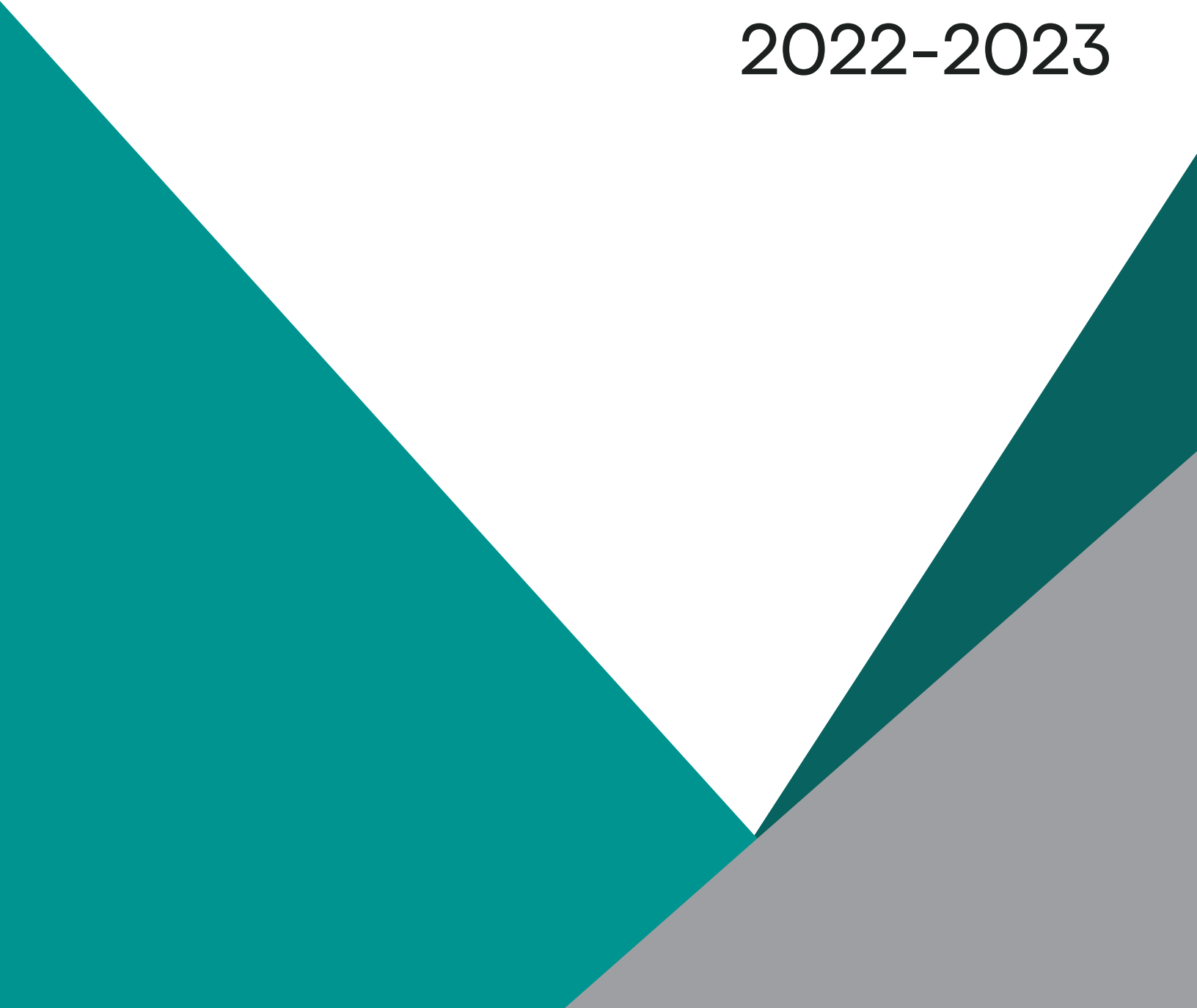


# NEIGHBORS LINK CORPORATION

2022-2023



# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In this grant period, of April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023, Neighbors Link Community Law Practice (NLCLP) closed 829 cases, directly benefitting 2,138 people (clients and their family members). NLCLP, the legal department of Neighbors Link that is housed in Ossining, NY (Westchester County) provides direct representation, community legal education, consultation, and legal advocacy for low-income immigrants throughout the lower- and mid-Hudson Valley regions.

Members of the low-income immigrant population we serve find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position; a lack of English-language skills and low levels of literacy can make scams by unqualified lawyers more likely and living on a low income makes it impossible to afford costly legal fees charged by for-profit immigration lawyers. The legal services this population seeks can be confusing at best and disastrous at worst. Affordable, trustworthy, and language-accommodating services are essential to avoid detention or deportation for these individuals. The benefits of the services to NLCLP clients that improve access to justice are: A) Low or no-cost services for those who are living in poverty; B) Services that accommodate language needs and effectively overcome communication barriers; C) Trustworthy services from a reputable source with a client’s best interest at the center of the work increases the likelihood of favorable case completion. Additionally, because we are a not-for-profit organization serving the needs of the low-income immigrant community, we are able to provide filing fee waivers, which help low-income clients save money. During this grant period, clients successfully obtained \$26,940 in immigration filing fee waivers.



**Population Served:** Low Income Immigrant Population

**Total Funding:** \$1,355,818

**Total IOLA Grant:** \$75,000

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 12.8
- Paralegals: 4.5
- Lawyers: 7
- Other: 1.3

It is our priority to constantly improve capacity so that we can more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of the community we serve. This year, we expanded our practice in a variety of ways. 1) We were selected by the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA) to serve as a regional ONA Legal Counsel, and we were also selected to operate an additional ONA Opportunity Center, allowing us to operate a total of two in Westchester County. Through this work with the ONA, NLCLP is positioned as a primary provider of direct representation in immigration legal services in the eastern Hudson Valley region. This work has also significantly shifted the structure of our practice to focus more heavily on consultations and direct legal services. These ONA programs allowed us to hire one new legal attorney and one new community outreach legal liaison. Our new community outreach legal liaison has expanded our capacity by taking on a large portion of our outreach and community education functions, which allows the time of attorneys and paralegals to be directed toward consultations and direct services. 2) We also increased our capacity this year by welcoming a legal fellow through the Westchester County Bar Foundation fellowship program.

In addition to this year's capacity-increasing strategies, we continue to use strategies implemented last year, as they continue to benefit our service delivery. Those include: our 12-hour legal helpline; a contract with GLOBO interpretation and translation services; and expanded use of secure online formats to aid in the delivery of services and increase access to justice.

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## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

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### *Dina's Story*

I was born in Cusco, Peru. After I graduated high school, I decided to pursue a career in law enforcement. After studying Law and Political Science, I received my degree and simultaneously studied for and successfully passed my police officer exam. I began my work as a police officer in 2012. In 2014, I married my husband, also a police officer, and we had two beautiful children. In 2015, there was a major land dispute between a local gang and some residents. One of the local gang leaders was arrested and as officers, my family and I began receiving threats. I requested a job transfer and my family moved about seven hours away in hopes that the threats would stop. In 2021, when the gang leader was sentenced, the threats worsened. I tried to file police reports but the police did not do anything to protect my family. In August 2021, I received a call from the prosecutor's office informing me that I was required

to testify against the gang members. I knew that if I testified I would be killed; a man with a gun came to my house, held me at gunpoint, and told me that if I opened my mouth he would kill me without mercy. I went to the prosecutor and asked to be placed in the witness protection program, but they refused to enroll me. We needed to leave, so my husband, my two children (9 and 3 years old), and I flew to Mexico and presented ourselves at the southern U.S. border. We were processed by immigration and then placed in removal proceedings. We had no money and no ability to pay an attorney to help us apply for asylum. We called every legal service provider we could find to try to find someone to help us. Finally, we called Neighbors Link and were able to obtain a free immigration attorney who helped us file for asylum and represented us in our removal proceedings. We were granted asylum and now are able to stay in the United States, where we are safe and where our children can grow up without fear of threats.

**2,138**  
people  
benefitted from  
**829**  
*immigration*  
legal cases closed

### **"A's" Story**

I am 29 years old and I was born in Andarab, Afghanistan, where I lived with my mother and six siblings. I received my General Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree in Economics and earned a position as a Professor in the Economics Department of Tabesh University. Tabesh University is a co-ed private school where many professors (myself included) believe that men and women have equal rights and should receive an equal education. When the Taliban insurrection began, I was terrified. I knew that, as a professor, I would likely be targeted because of my views and I would be in great danger if I remained in Afghanistan.

In August 2021, while the Taliban were attacking and invading Afghanistan, I sought assistance from the United States military at the Kabul International Airport. The airport had four gates, two were operated by the Taliban and two by the U.S. military and the Afghan Army. I went to the U.S. military and explained my fear of remaining in Afghanistan. I showed them documents on my phone that proved that I was a professor. The U.S. Army allowed me to go with them. While still at the airport, because I speak English as well as Dari and Pashto, I helped other Afghans seek assistance from the U.S. by informally translating for them. Along with other refugees, I boarded a U.S. Army airplane and after an almost two-week journey with two stops, we arrived in Washington D.C. We were then taken by bus to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where there were thousands of refugees. I was interviewed by a U.S. official and I

volunteered to help with translation, as there were not enough official translators for the number of refugees. In late October 2021, I left New Jersey to go live in New York where I received assistance from volunteers to secure employment. These volunteers introduced me to Neighbors Link, where I was able to obtain a free immigration attorney who helped me file for asylum. Now, I have received asylum in the United States and I am on a pathway to citizenship.

## OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

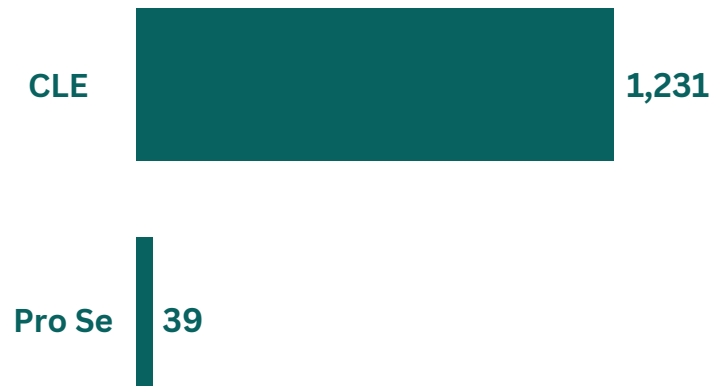
In addition to consultations and direct legal services, NLCLP works to disseminate accurate and current immigration legal information to the community through community legal education efforts. This year, through the work of our new community outreach legal liaison, we standardized our presentations for more efficient information dissemination. In the past, we provided large numbers of presentations, all of which focused on very specific immigration legal topics. The reason for this was that we had limited capacity for direct services and it was important to provide many educational opportunities so that community members could be educated consumers of immigration legal services, even if we did not have the capacity to provide direct representation. However, because of our expanded capacity this year, and our ability to focus more on consultations and direct services, we have been doing fewer presentations.

**1,270**  
people benefitted  
from Services Other  
Than Direct Legal  
Services

The presentations we do now act as a general overview of immigration legal services that encourage participants to schedule a consultation or to call the 12-hour legal helpline for an assessment of their legal needs directly with an attorney. This is a very positive shift in the structure of our practice because it allows us to provide direct support to higher numbers of people. Because of this restructuring, we saw a decrease in the number of individuals reached through community education during this grant period of April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023, totaling 1,231 individuals. We served 90 individuals in interactive online presentations; these took place in online forums such as through Facebook Live educational events and/or Zoom presentations. We served an additional 646 individuals in pre-recorded/static online

content; this content included videos that we pre-recorded and posted through our YouTube page and then shared widely across our social media platforms. Lastly, we served an additional 495 individuals through in-person community legal education events, including Know Your Rights presentations, and Train-the-Trainer workshops, where we train school staff and community leaders on the rights of immigrants in their communities. We know that information shared in our community education potentially reaches much larger numbers of people because those who attend often share information learned with family, friends, and colleagues, however, we do not have data to measure that impact.

### Number of People Benefitted from Other Services



In September 2022, the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) issued a rule that clarified the circumstances in which practitioners may provide limited scope legal services to individuals and set up rules and procedures for doing so. The rule prohibited providers from providing strictly pro se representation and directed them to submit such filings to EOIR and BIA utilizing the new “limited scope” rules and forms, NLCLP has provided limited scope assistance since the rule went into effect in November 2022. We held monthly limited scope clinics wherein we assisted with asylum, motions to change venue, change of address, and prosecutorial discretion.

## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

In this grant year, we started using LexisNexis, a data analytics software tool, to help with research and writing which is critically important for preparing motion and legal briefs before the immigration court, BIA, and court of appeals. In addition, we continue to utilize the technology-related strategies that we implemented last year, including the Helpline, our contract with GOLBO, and our increased utilization of the Zoom and WhatsApp platforms. The 12-hour telephone-based Helpline, which runs weekly on Thursday from 8am to 8pm, has continued to drastically improve NLCLP’s ability to perform screenings for potential clients. Our contract with GLOBO allows NLCLP staff and clients to access on-demand interpretation and translation services via audio and visual formats in over 250 languages. Our use of Zoom and WhatsApp has been incredibly effective in improving communication with clients. Depending on the

transportation challenges and/or other needs of our clients, we can meet virtually via Zoom to discuss case matters face-to-face in a secure platform, just as if we were sitting with them in an office. WhatsApp has become a secure and safe tool for communicating with clients about upcoming appointments and reminders about documentation that they should gather and bring with them.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

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Neighbors Link's goal is to provide opportunities for professional development for all staff members to encourage them to explore personal growth and to enable them to perform their responsibilities at Neighbors Link as effectively as possible. With each new hire to NLCLP, we assess the level of the employee's prior experience with immigration law and tailor training to their specific background. For basic immigration law training, we utilize programming provided by legal services nonprofits such as the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) Immigrant Concerns Training Institute, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC). We also cover the cost of participation in annual conferences based on the employee's work and professional development interests. These include the 4-day intensive American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual (AILA) Conference in New York City and the New York Law School Annual Conference. Additionally, Neighbors Link covers the cost of membership and supports participation in relevant professional organizations in which employees gain access to additional resources and professional development opportunities. Such professional organizations include the Westchester County Bar Association, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and the Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative.

In this grant year, we have had three paralegals and our community outreach legal liaison obtain DOJ accreditation, two in September 2022 and two in February 2023. This means that all non-attorney, full-time staff of NLCLP now have partial DOJ accreditation. In addition, one of our senior paralegals is in the process of pursuing full accreditation, which means she will not only be able to represent clients before USCIS but also before immigration court.

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# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

The capacity of NLCLP is expanded by using highly-qualified volunteer attorneys and paralegals. NLCLP benefits from pro bono work donated by three large, for-profit law firms: Davis Polk & Wardwell, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. The total pro bono time donated by 22 volunteer attorneys during this grant period totaled 1,149 hours of volunteered time. We also had 4 Law Students who volunteered with us for a total of 732 hours, providing support in case-related matters.


During this grant period, we had an additional 14 volunteers (including non-practicing, or retired attorneys) who contributed a total of 1,380 volunteer hours. These volunteers helped NLCLP with document preparation and translation, facilitating transportation, obtaining underlying documents, assistance with naturalization-related guardianship arrangements and alternatives to guardianship, accompanying individuals to check-ins, and getting disability accommodations including through USCIS. All pro bono and volunteer work is closely supervised by our attorneys.



**22 Attorneys volunteered 1,149 hours**

**4 Law Students volunteered 732 hours**

**14 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,380 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 4 volunteers.  
 Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.  
 Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.



# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

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NLCLP has engaged in significant collaborations during this grant period to streamline legal services and minimize duplication of efforts. We have worked closely with Westchester Women’s Bar Association (WWBA) and our Director of Legal Services and Managing Attorney serve on their ad-hoc immigration rights committee. Through this partnership, we co-sponsored a continuing legal education (CLE) course on the intersection of immigration on immigrant law, and ethical considerations.

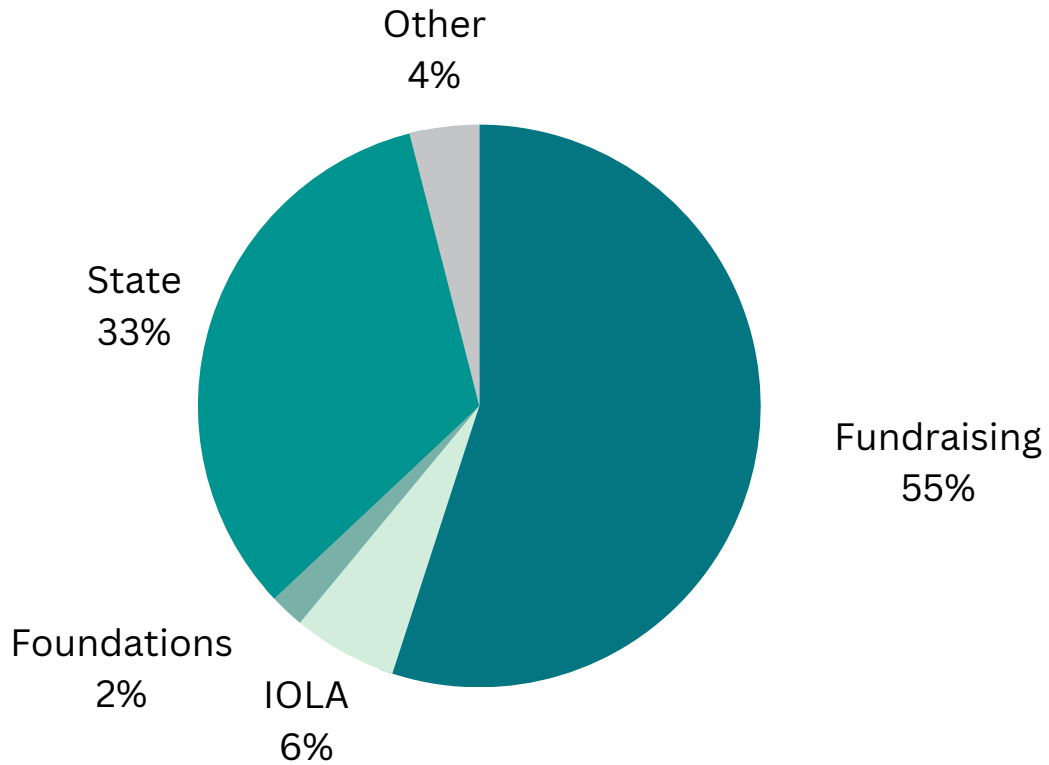
We also partner with other legal service organizations including: I-ARC (Immigration ARC) as a member organization and through which our Director of Legal Services serves on the steering committee of Immigration Advocates Resource Collaborate; the New York State Bar Association, through which we participate in creating CLE programs and advocacy supporting laws and policies in the interest of immigrant New Yorkers, issues; the Westchester County Bar Association, to which we are able to provide reliable legal referrals for cases we cannot take on at NLCLP; and we have served on the conference committee and as a panelist for the 9th judicial district Immigration Rights and Services Sub-committee’s “Access to Justice” conference. Additionally, our Director of Legal Services and Managing Attorney play leadership roles in the Westchester County Steering Committee of the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC).

In addition, we also partner with the Westchester County Police Department, Putnam, and Northern Westchester BOCES, and local school districts to conduct Know Your Rights workshops and other community education events for allies and other service providers.

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

Neighbors Link Community Law Practice received **\$1,355,818** in total funding this past year



IOLA Grant	\$75,000
Foundations	\$32,900
Fundraising	\$751,598
State Funding	\$441,320
Other	\$55,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,355,818</b>