

NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In the last fiscal year, NMIC staff members conducted 4,858 unique intakes and closed 5,949 cases, affecting 12,014 members of the community. As a result, NMIC was able to attain over \$5 million in back awards and settlements as well as \$167,000 in monthly benefits (un-annualized) on behalf of clients. NMIC staff also provided representation to 28 tenant groups and two impact cases, which would potentially impact over 350,000 people, including all young children living in lead-contaminated apartments.

The agency serves a largely Latinx population, many of whom are limited or non-English speaking recent immigrants or undocumented members of the community. NMIC was founded in 1979 to serve these communities and has cultivated linguistically and culturally competent service model by hiring staff that are fluent in Spanish, connected to our community, and have experience serving a predominantly Hispanic/Latinx population. NMIC services are open to individuals living throughout New York City, however 87% of our clients live in either Manhattan or the Bronx, and 99.3% live within the five boroughs.

In 2022, we added several substantial new benefits access programs that impact our legal work:

- Disability Assistance Program (DAP):** Under this program, we provide legal advocacy services to low-income residents whose benefits, when sought or provided under either the Disability Insurance Program or the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSD/I), have been denied or wrongfully terminated. The Disability Assistance Program provided funding for us to hire a Coordinating Disability Attorney, a valuable addition to our staff. In the eight months since we've implemented this program, our DAP legal team has brought in thousands of dollars in Social Security benefits for our clients.



Population Served: General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$10,605,750

Total IOLA Grant: \$864,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 78.7
- Paralegals: 28.43
- Lawyers: 28.98
- Other: 21.29

- **Promise NYC:** A childcare assistance pilot program through ACS serving low-income, immigrant families who are otherwise ineligible for federally subsidized childcare. Covering Manhattan and the Bronx, we are working with families to connect them to childcare options for undocumented children. NMIC pays the cost of childcare through funding from ACS so the service remains free for participants. Recognizing that access to childcare is a burden disproportionately carried by low-income families, we are utilizing our community presence and large network to expand outreach under this program. Our hope is to work with ACS and local elected officials to ensure the funding for this invaluable program is continued in FY24.
- **NYC Benefits:** This program expanded our traditional benefits access work focused on SNAP, SCRIE and DRIE among other programs. NYC Benefits enabled NMIC to increase from one to three staff members who will provide direct case management for clients in need of a range of public benefits.
- **Self Employed Tax Program:** Our new tax assistance program, which technically started in 2022, has brought in a total of \$1.25 million in returns for our clients. This cost-free program assists with filing self-employed and small business tax returns, and educates cash earners, gig workers and the self-employed on all matters relating to self-employment taxes. We also hold workshops to properly report income for growing businesses and one-on-one consultations to prepare for tax season and file quarterly taxes.

Collectively, these program additions allowed us to build a dedicated Benefits Access & Advocacy Unit with a new Assistant Director-level position to better manage these services in coordination with our pre-existing benefits access, health, and legal services. This is an example of how NMIC uses supply-driven funding opportunities to enhance our overall program structure rather than stretching it increasingly thin.

NMIC's Housing Unit continued to provide direct legal services, preventing evictions and expanding our housing advocacy and education work. Our Assistant Director of Housing has been involved in citywide advocacy for Right to Counsel (RTC) funding to ensure that this vital work can continue to be funded. For instance, we have advocated with the Office of Civil Justice to bring these funding issues to their attention and to ensure that agencies providing representation to tenants through the right to counsel have the capacity and resources to do so effectively when housing issues arise. Additionally, our housing team has joined with other legal services organizations and city officials to advocate on a larger scale for more RTC funding to ensure that we have the staff and funding necessary to provide effective representation to our clients.

NMIC's Housing Unit continued to provide direct legal services, preventing evictions and expanding our housing advocacy and education work. Our housing team has remained focused on ensuring that our clients can access our services. We maintain a hotline with intake that tenants can call to receive advice and counsel for advocacy issues (particularly landlord/tenant conflicts). We have also increased our in-person housing community intake. These efforts have resulted in the prevention of hundreds of evictions and the preservation of affordable tenancies for our community members and other vulnerable tenants throughout Manhattan and the Bronx.

The Buildings and Organizing Unit continued to work collaboratively with community partners to develop tenant coalitions and support community leadership development. We offer training and support for tenant leaders who then work with their neighbors to make their housing more affordable, higher quality, and more stable. Our target portfolio remains diverse and includes a variety of problematic landlords and the financial institutions that lend to them. Looking ahead, we are preparing a proposal with the City of New York to renew our funding under the Partners in Preservation Program to expand these vital organizing services across all Northern Manhattan.

NMIC's Immigration Unit continues to provide high quality and free immigration services to the community, reducing the risk for residents to fall victim to fraudulent predatory immigration practices at a time of heightened need for services. Services include family-based petitions, citizenship application assistance, U-visas, and other culturally and linguistically competent immigration services. Staff were again able to meet and consult with clients in-person, working with caseworkers and attorneys to review documents and applications prior to submission. The Immigration Unit continues to offer monthly, in-person intake days, with the option to schedule Zoom meetings, where residents can reserve an appointment for free immigration advice and to enroll in services. We are also continuing our partnership with MOIA to offer Action NYC immigration services.

NMIC added Family Law to our civil legal services portfolio four years ago and this unit remains a critical component of our ability to offer holistic support, especially for survivors of intimate partner violence. Our in-house Domestic Violence Project, offering social services to victims and survivors, remains the largest sources of referrals to the Family Law Unit. Through the impact of this unit, NMIC is determined to prioritize maintaining and expanding capacity to provide family law advocacy and representation to survivors of intimate partner violence, including offering advice and assistance with orders of protection, divorce, custody/visitation, and child/spousal support.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case #1

EST entered the United States from Guatemala as an unaccompanied minor in 2015. He left Guatemala due to the dire economic conditions faced by his family and began living with an older family friend in Brooklyn. He was referred to NMIC by the Safe Passage Project for representation in Immigration Court and further assistance. Our Immigration Team assisted EST in filing for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) in Family Court and with USCIS.

Unfortunately, during the previous administration, USCIS frequently challenged and denied SIJS cases, including EST's. NMIC worked to appeal and reopen his case, which, years after filing, was finally granted. We then terminated his Immigration Court case, freeing him from the threat of deportation. In April 2023, EST was granted Lawful Permanent Resident Status. He can live and work safely in the United States and will be able to return to Guatemala to visit his family.

12,014
people
benefitted from
5,949
legal cases
closed

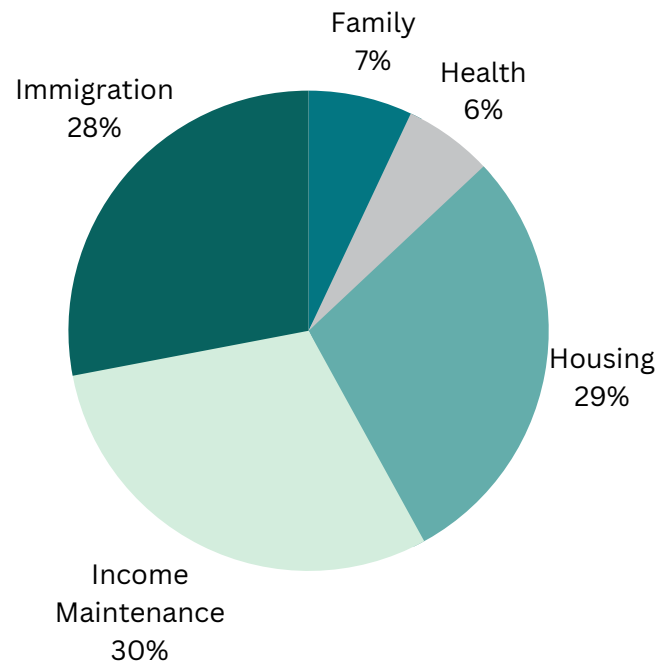
Case #2

AF sought to succeed his deceased brother's NYCHA apartment, where he was born and had spent his entire life. AF suffers from severe mental and physical disabilities and requires daily care from family members. Like AF, his brother, JF, also suffered from severe disabilities. Prior to retaining NMIC's Housing services, NYCHA denied AF's succession because his brother had not listed him as a member of the household on annual recertifications prior to his death as required, a policy that is strictly enforced. Shortly thereafter, he found himself in housing court when NYCHA started a "no defense" holdover case based on the denied succession claim.

NMIC would have not accepted this case for full representation prior to the Right to Counsel due to concerns about the merits of AF's claim. However, he was referred to us through the court's Right to Counsel intake, and AF retained NMIC prior to his administrative hearing at NYCHA – his last chance to convince NYCHA to allow him to succeed JF's tenancy and stay in his home. At the three-day hearing, NMIC presented a relatively new theory to the hearing officer, arguing that the diminished mental capacity of both JF and AF provided a reasonable excuse for JF's failure to correctly

list AF on the household compositions. Ultimately, the fact that JF was also disabled and there was no evidence that he was provided a reasonable accommodation by NYCHA was sufficient to rule in AF’s favor. NMIC was able to discontinue the housing court case after the victory at the administrative hearing.

This was an excellent outcome for AF and underscores the difference an attorney can make in a housing case and how invaluable the Right to Counsel is for tenants in New York City. AF is an extremely vulnerable individual relying on housing of last resort. Through NMIC’s representation, AF preserved the apartment he has called home for his entire life. AF’s cousin, who is his primary caregiver and herself a NYCHA resident and activist, told AF’s attorneys that the decision “renewed her faith that justice could be achieved.”



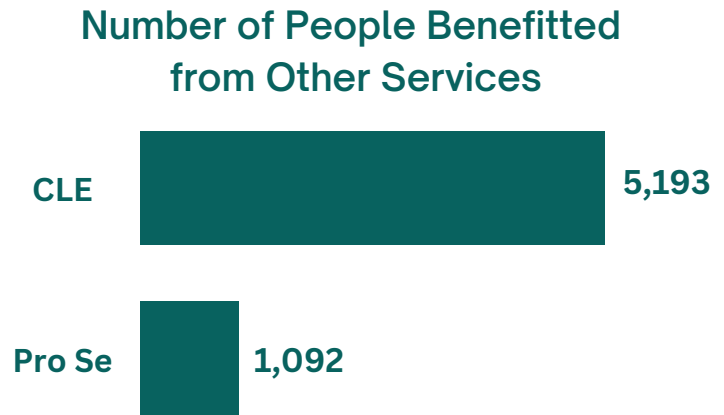
Cases by Legal Problem Area

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

NMIC staff work to address issues that relate to legal service provision, such as our recently expanded Benefits Access program. NMIC has increased funding and leveraged relationships to assist clients in applying for various benefits including Medicaid, SNAP, housing subsidies, Social Security Disability (SSD) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to help promote financial stability and increase self-sufficiency. For example, when clients come in seeking housing assistance, LOA staff screen them for a variety of additional needs, including eligibility to receive public benefits. If a client is eligible for benefits but does not currently receive public assistance, staff work collaboratively to refer clients via a warm handoff to the Benefits Access team. To complement this work, we’ve also increased our advocacy efforts to expand client awareness and participation in these programs. We’ve participated in over 50 events that have provided community members with information about our services and educating them about their legal rights around issues like benefits, housing, and immigration.

LOA staff also work closely with our Wellness Services program. Oftentimes, clients seeking legal services will have other health related concerns that impact their overall wellbeing. Through a new partnership, our community health workers are collaborating with community stakeholders to assess social determinants of health. Clients who have experienced trauma that goes untreated can suffer setbacks when seeking legal aid. By providing necessary support, we assist them with that trauma and ensure that our attorneys and paralegals are given the tools they need to provide the best representation possible.

6,285
 people benefitted
 from Services Other
 Than Direct Legal
 Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

NMIC is at the forefront of creating innovative tools to increase attorney efficiency. Philip Duncan, NMIC's Assistant Director for Housing, has developed two tools for document automation, one distributed internally and available as a button in MS Word, and the other an online Webapp targeted toward other legal services organizations. The tools produce well-formatted and professional documents with a few mouse clicks, including more complex documents like Answers and Motions. The tools save significant time for attorneys in the initial stages of document production, and also serve pedagogical functions for our more inexperienced staff attorneys. We introduced the MS Word tool internally at the beginning of February, and our attorneys have reported that the tool both saves time and suggests defenses and arguments that they previously had not considered. Externally we demonstrated the MS Word tool at a Roundtable attended by about 100 attorneys, who expressed a strong interest in the technology. We have subsequently developed and soft-launched the Webapp, and are planning a more public launch in the next few days. It is viewable at www.rtcdocs.org

Andrew Goodman, our Coordinating Attorney for Housing Litigation, has developed an excel-based tool, which automates the calculation of rent overcharges. When done manually, calculation of rent overcharges can be a laborious process, requiring dozens of individual calculations and reference to a complex table for rent stabilized rent increases since 1984. Andrew's tool greatly expedites this process, performing the calculations automatically and minimizing the required amount of data entry. A few weeks ago, Andrew conducted a training, advertised across RTC and attended by over 230 attorneys, to share the tool and demonstrate its manner of use. He has held discussions with justfix.org in order to make the tool available to the public.

NMIC continues to use ClientTrack, our proprietary case management system, to collect and store client information and service provision data. The ClientTrack system has been specifically designed for NMIC and is fully customizable, allowing designated staff to alter frameworks within the system to meet the agency's evolving needs. We also simplified intake by connecting web-based forms to our database. Ultimately, the information entered by the client will automatically create a client record in ClientTrack, allowing staff members time to research relevant options for services before the intake and decreasing administrative burden for both staff members conducting the intake and new clients.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

NMIC is committed to professional development and encourages its staff to pursue training and workshop opportunities that help build skills and knowledge to support them and their work. Over the last year, NMIC staff had access to 18 different in-house training sessions that focus on both general and nuanced issues within housing litigation (e.g. Overview of the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, Illegal Lockouts, nuisance cases, and several Housing 101 topics).

NMIC's involvement in a variety of coalitions has cultivated a wide range of both subject and skill development training. We still collaborate with LEAP to maintain a robust offering of training to our staff. A notable training series that legal staff members are strongly encouraged to attend is the LEAP CLE Training series. This is hosted externally by the LEAP coalition and MFJ Legal Services. We also have an experienced staff member who conducts in-house training on a range of subjects including mock trials. We have an attorney who is in charge of ensuring new staff are properly trained upon on-boarding. Our staff also provides training for external staff partners completing similar work which includes those previously mentioned on Discord. Lastly, we are a registered agency with the Practicing Law Institute, and immigration staff take yearly trainings to maintain accreditation.

IMPACT CASES

New York Coalition to End Lead Poisoning v. Koch

NMIC continues to represent the New York Coalition to End Lead Poisoning in a class action lawsuit that seeks adequate and timely enforcement of the NYC childhood lead poisoning prevention laws. This law affects at least 250,000 children living in NYC rental apartments, the majority of whom come from low-income and working-class families. NMIC has been involved in this case for over 20 years and continues to participate in ongoing negotiations with the city. Matthew Chachere, our Attorney Emeritus, recently sat on a panel at a joint hearing of the NYC Council's Housing and Health Committees on Lead Poisoning in April 2023. At this hearing, six different bills that were drafted by our attorney were on the agenda, potentially expanding much needed protections for our community. Included among these were Intros 5, 6, and 193, which would address issues like peeling lead paint in common areas of residential buildings.

350,000
beneficiaries
were
affected by
2
Impact
Cases

Reynolds v. Giuliani

The 2005 judgment in Reynolds requires timely processing of benefits applications. This includes issuance of expedited SNAP and immediate need grants given eligibility, and issuance of timely and adequate notices, as well as separate determinations for SNAP benefits and Medicaid where public assistance is denied. To expand benefits access, we work with our clients to seek relief under this decision to increase food, health, and cash benefits. Our new Coordinating Attorney for Policy and Advocacy is working with a coalition of agencies specifically seeking to enforce the Reynolds decision. This has the capacity to reach 100,000 New Yorkers applying for emergency SNAP benefits.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Recognizing the importance of pro bono attorneys, law students, and volunteers in the delivery of our legal services, we continue to develop partnerships that will benefit this vital form of recruitment. With the support of our Managing Attorney for Pro Bono and Internship Programs, we maintain collaborations with many organizations, both within the community and across the city. This staff member utilizes our professional networks to employ the valuable skills and experiences of private attorneys and volunteers to increase capacity for service provision. LOA Director Rodrigo Sanchez-Camus began the Tenants' Rights Project (TRP) in 1999 while a student at Columbia Law School. Currently, the TRP student group remains active and volunteers annually with the NMIC Housing Unit. Ongoing relationships like these help NMIC provide free legal assistance to clients. It also provides industry-specific support to attorneys and allows students increased exposure to community-based legal work.

Law schools remain a valuable resource that allows NMIC to provide high-quality, free legal services to community members while also giving law students practical experience working in a nonprofit environment. In FY23, NMIC received eight interns



10 Attorneys volunteered 400 hours

8 Law Students volunteered 2,472 hours

42 Other Volunteers volunteered 9,226 hours

Each  icon is equal to 6 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

from several different law schools. Law students typically assist NMIC attorneys and paralegals with activities such as preparing legal documents, case research, and other administrative tasks. In a sector where attorneys are increasingly in demand, law school partnerships create a valuable pipeline that allows student attorneys to become familiar with non-profit legal service providers and potentially develop professional relationships and opportunities post-graduation.

NMIC's LOA Department continues to participate in the Train & Earn (formerly Out-of-School Youth, OSY) Program in collaboration with NMIC's Adult Education & Career Services Department. Train & Earn is an initiative of the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Train & Earn is a vocational training program that engages low-income youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not working and not in school. It offers participants occupational skills training across many industries, as well as placement assistance, counseling and supportive services and career planning. This year, NMIC hosted eight Train & Earn Program participants that, to date, have contributed hundreds of service hours to LOA.

NMIC hosted a number of volunteers and interns from schools across the city, including City University of New York Service Corps members. NMIC also partnered with Fordham University again to implement a Spanish Service Learning Placement where nine students participated in a volunteer internship experience to support programs like Immigration, Tax-Services, and Program Administration. Through this program, students are placed in positions at non-profits throughout the city where they can practice their Spanish with community members while learning about social justice issues and the immigrant experience. In total, NMIC Legal Service Department hosted 50 interns and volunteers who contributed thousands of service hours over the last year.

Finally, NMIC continues to maintain strong partnerships with private law practices to increase service capacity. Our Buildings and Organizing Units formed active housing group litigation that we have developed through relationships with private law firms such as Schulte Roth & Zabel and Crowell & Moring. We are also partnering on two programs that will allow us to host externs from NYLPI and Sullivan & Cromwell.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

LEAP Coalition, Founding Member: LEAP is a NYC, member-based partnership composed of direct civil legal service providers. 18 member groups and over 400 lawyers, LEAP benefits nearly 120,000 individuals each year. NMIC, one of the founding members, continues to participate in the LEAP coalition and serves as the borough lead organization in the Bronx. The Director of LOA serves on the LEAP Steering Committee, granting opportunities to engage with local and state elected officials and agency representatives, advocating for the preservation and expansion of legal services funding.

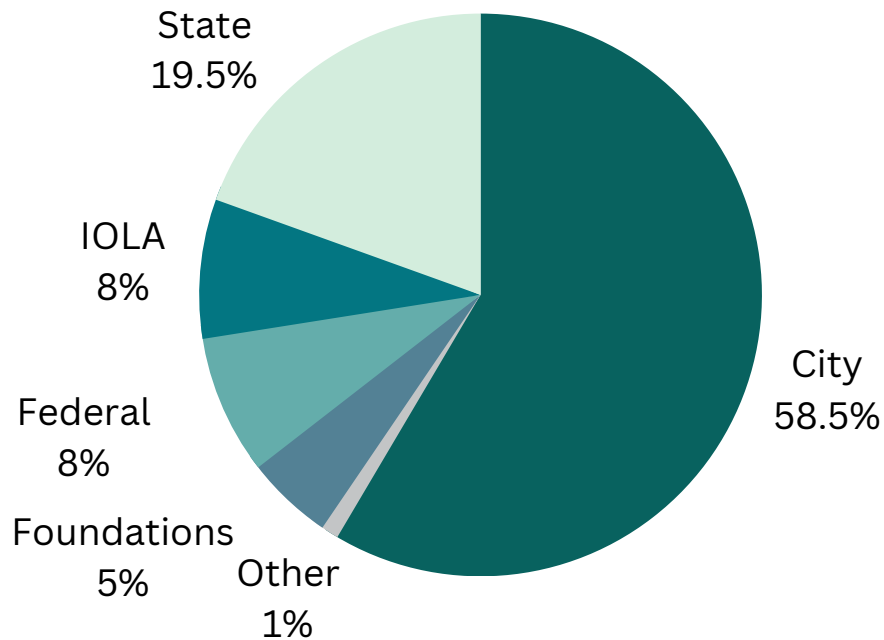
New York Legal Services Coalition, Founding Member: The New York Legal Services Coalition (NYLSC) is a collection of 50 legal service providers from across the state committed to ensuring fairness for all in the New York judicial system. With the Director of LOA serving as a board member, NMIC continues to collaborate with NYLSC to deliver effective legal services to low-income New Yorkers. Activities include the provision of educational opportunities; advocacy on legal issues affecting low-income communities and the delivery of civil legal aid; identifying and promoting best practices in the civil legal aid community; and providing technical assistance and capacity building resources for our members.

United Neighborhood Houses: UNH is a coalition of 45 settlement houses throughout NYC who work together to advocate for and provide essential services to underserved New Yorkers. As an active member, NMIC works with UNH to consolidate resources to distribute among settlement houses. In the past year, this collaboration led to more NMIC clients receiving relief through rental assistance and helped fund the addition of a new Counselor Advocate to our Domestic Violence Project.

Partnerships with Community Stakeholders: This year, NMIC continued partnerships with several agencies including New York-Presbyterian (NYP) and the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). We continue our partnership with NYP to manage a community health worker program to serve elderly and homebound clients. We continue to partner with WSCAH's mobile pantry. WSCAH provides all the food for our monthly pantry days. We distribute 27lbs bags of food to 210 clients each month, allowing them to access a variety of healthy and culturally inclusive foods. Our pantry has been so successful that we have developed other partnerships with companies like Purina to distribute pet food.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation received **\$10,605,750** in total funding this past year



| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Foundations | \$558,686 |
| IOLA Grant | \$864,000 |
| City and County Funding | \$6,187,223 |
| Federal Funding | \$878,114 |
| State Funding | \$2,052,239 |
| Other | \$65,488 |
| Total | \$10,605,750 |