

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

LEGAL SERVICES NYC 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

 Legal
Services NYC
DEMAND JUSTICE



**OUR CITYWIDE FORCE OF
NEARLY 600 STAFF HELPS MORE
THAN 115,000 LOW-INCOME
NEW YORKERS ANNUALLY**

LEGAL SERVICES NYC

Legal Services NYC was founded in 1968 as part of the War on Poverty. What started as a loose confederation of neighborhood-based legal services programs has grown into **THE NATION'S LARGEST CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDER**. Our citywide force of more than 600 staff helps more than 115,000 low-income New Yorkers annually.

FOR LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS FACING A LIFE CRISIS, LEGAL HELP IS OFTEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOL IN RESOLVING IT. Roughly 1.6 million city residents are currently living below the poverty line—a mere \$25,000 for a family of four. They are often made more vulnerable by discrimination, immigration status, age, or disabilities.

FOR THE LAST 50 YEARS, our dedicated staff has challenged systemic injustices and made real, tangible improvements in the lives of communities across

the city. This work includes preventing evictions and preserving housing; demanding access to high-quality education, health care, and economic security; ensuring safety and stability for survivors of domestic violence and immigrants; and fighting for the dignity and respect of all New Yorkers, including LGBTQ communities, New Yorkers with disabilities, and people of color.

WITH DEEP ROOTS IN COMMUNITIES IN ALL FIVE BOROUGHs, LEGAL SERVICES NYC HAS HANDLED MORE THAN TWO MILLION CASES SINCE OUR FOUNDING. We are proud of what we have accomplished and look forward to continuing to expand the scope of our work with the generous support of our individuals, partners, and communities across the city.

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR SUPPORTERS,

The Covid-19 pandemic hit New York City particularly hard, with more than 300,000 confirmed cases, 20,000 deaths, and an unemployment rate that skyrocketed to 20% in June and July 2020. Even before the pandemic, nearly 1.7 million New Yorkers had incomes under the federal poverty level—a mere \$25,000 for a family of four. That reality became much worse for low-income families after the pandemic, but Legal Services NYC was on the front lines to help.

Since March 2020 when we closed the doors to our 16 offices throughout the City, our staff worked tirelessly from their homes to provide the services that New Yorkers have always needed, as well as the services that are newly needed because of this pandemic.

OUR HOTLINE STAFF FIELDDED MORE THAN 700 CALLS A WEEK FROM NEW YORKERS WHO WERE DESPERATE FOR HELP. Each month in 2020, our public benefits advocates opened nearly 1,000 new cases, more than double the number of cases opened before the pandemic. And our social workers and development staff raised nearly \$250,000 to provide small grants to families

to buy food or diapers or books for their kids.

OUR STAFF EDUCATED THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND HOW TO APPLY FOR THEM. We helped kids with special needs get the remote educational services they need so they didn't fall behind during the pandemic. Our immigration advocates made sure our clients didn't get deported or lose their rights to legal status. Our housing and foreclosure advocates fought illegal evictions and predatory lending scams. And our family law advocates helped survivors of domestic violence who couldn't find privacy from their abuser to make the calls needed to find safety.

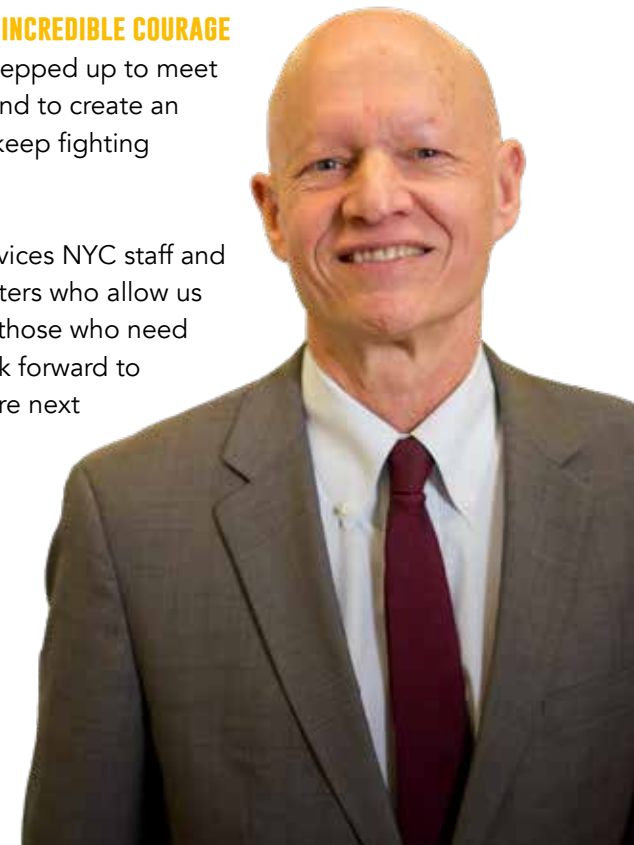
THROUGH IT ALL, OUR STAFF SHOWED INCREDIBLE COURAGE UNDER FIRE. Without pause, they stepped up to meet increased demands from clients, and to create an infrastructure that's allowed us to keep fighting successfully for our clients.

I am incredibly proud of Legal Services NYC staff and eternally grateful to all the supporters who allow us to provide this life-saving work to those who need it the most. Thank you and we look forward to a safer, healthier, and happier future next year.

Sincerely,



Executive Director



WHO WE SERVE

NEW YORKERS HELPED
ACROSS ALL 5 BOROUGHES

BRONX
33,976 (32%)

MANHATTAN
15,367 (15%)

QUEENS
22,471 (21%)

BROOKLYN
25,907 (25%)

STATEN ISLAND
8,358 (7.3%)

WHAT WE DO

Even through a global health pandemic, Legal Services NYC (LSNYC) is on the front lines fighting for the rights of the low-income members of our communities. We coordinate our services across practice areas to address legal problems faced by historically low-income and persecuted populations including immigrants, veterans, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people with disabilities. Our multifaceted work to help people meet basic needs includes:

PROTECTING HOUSING & PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

52,600 NEW YORKERS HELPED

Legal Services NYC prevents thousands of evictions and foreclosures every year. We force landlords to repair unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions. Our advocacy preserves affordable housing and prevents the displacement of poor families caused by gentrification.

SAFEGUARDING INCOME & FIGHTING CONSUMER FRAUD

24,100 NEW YORKERS HELPED

We ensure access to public benefits for people with disabilities, veterans, the elderly, and others. We put a stop to employer practices that deprive workers of compensation, and fraudsters' schemes that often target low-income minorities and make sure New Yorkers have access to unemployment benefits.

HELPING IMMIGRANTS & STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

25,800 NEW YORKERS HELPED

We help thousands of immigrants and their families gain asylum and get on a path to citizenship each year. Our attorneys and social workers also secure safe and stable environments for victims of domestic violence and their children.

SECURING ACCESS TO EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE

3,300 NEW YORKERS HELPED

Our work to protect students' rights includes stopping inappropriate school discipline and ensuring the accommodation of students with special needs. Legal Services NYC also helps uninsured New Yorkers access public health benefits, and safeguards patients' housing, finances, and health care coverage.

BY THE NUMBERS



600 STAFF MEMBERS served approximately 106,000 low-income New Yorkers and 46,000 cases



\$50,900,000 in cash benefits, settlements, and savings to our clients



\$345,800,000 in NYC taxpayer savings



3,000 VOLUNTEERS at scores of law firms and companies donated more than 64,000 pro bono hours helping 8,000 New Yorkers.



110,400 NEW YORKERS who now understand their rights through trainings, workshops and community educational events



21,000 HOTLINE CALLS answered by staff fluent in 10 languages



LEGAL SERVICES NYC'S RAPID COVID-19 RESPONSE

ALMOST OVERNIGHT, LEGAL SERVICES NYC WENT FROM A BRICK-AND-MORTAR LAW FIRM TO A VIRTUAL SERVICE PROVIDER AFTER COVID-19 HIT NEW YORK IN MARCH 2020 THANKS TO THE HERCULEAN EFFORTS OF OUR STAFF.

Our IT Department set up nearly 600 staff members to work remotely, including Legal Services NYC's Access Line staff who answered calls from their homes from distressed New Yorkers worried about their survival. Legal Services NYC's Access Line saw a nearly 10% increase in calls from March 2020 to December 2020 (over 21,000 calls) compared to the same period last year. The entire staff

at Legal Services NYC mobilized during the pandemic and set up structures to meet increased demands, closely monitored systems and structures to make sure they were accessible to New Yorkers, and helped struggling New Yorkers get the benefits, services, and legal help they needed to survive.



“IT WAS DEVASTATING BECAUSE I ALWAYS PRIDED MYSELF ON BEING INDEPENDENT. IT WAS A VERY SCARY THING AND OVERWHELMING FOR ME. IF I DIDN’T HAVE LEGAL SERVICES NYC, I HONESTLY DON’T KNOW WHERE I WOULD HAVE BEEN. I WANT TO THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART IN THE MOST GENUINE WAY POSSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE FOR ME.”

– Suhagilis Carrero, a single mother who lost her job during COVID-19 and faced eviction. Legal Services NYC helped her fight eviction and stay in her apartment.

NEW COVID-19 HOTLINES

IN RESPONSE TO THE FLOOD OF REQUESTS FROM FAMILIES IN DIRE NEED OF HELP, LEGAL SERVICES NYC SET UP A PUBLIC BENEFITS HOTLINE TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN APPLYING FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS SUCH AS CASH BENEFITS, FOOD STAMPS, AND MEDICAID.

Legal Services NYC’s staff helped families navigate and troubleshoot the NYC Department of Human Resources’ online benefits portal, which continues to be overwhelmed, and helped people overcome technological hurdles that prevented them from accessing benefits. As a result, we helped more than 1,000 families access benefits, submitting online applications, providing advice about eligibility, and offering guidance on further steps related to pursuing benefits.

Legal Services NYC also began staffing a Housing Legal Hotline in partnership with NYC’s Department of Human Resources’ Office of Civil Justice. Legal Services NYC received a flood of calls from New Yorkers worried about eviction moratoriums, lease terms and agreements, repair issues, illegal lockouts, rights and responsibilities, and rapidly changing tenant protections during the pandemic. Housing-related calls to Legal Services NYC increased by 37% since Covid-19 hit New York—receiving more than 7,500 calls for housing help from March to December 2020 compared to over 5,500 for the same period in 2019.

SAFETY IN THE COURTS

LEGAL SERVICES NYC FOUGHT HARD TO KEEP COURTS CLOSED DURING THE PEAK OF THE PANDEMIC TO PROTECT VULNERABLE TENANTS AGAINST EVICTION AND COVID-19 EXPOSURE.

Legal Services NYC sent multiple letters urging the Office of Court Administration to keep housing courts closed, filed an amicus brief in support of tenants fighting landlords' attempts to block the governor's eviction moratorium, and published an opinion piece in *City & State* pointing out that opening housing courts would put thousands of Black and brown lives at risk. Legal Services NYC also sued the Department of Justice's Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR), which oversees NYC Immigration Courts, for refusing to postpone filing deadlines in non-detained immigration cases, which would put immigrants and advocates' lives at risk by forcing them to leave their homes to prepare large evidentiary packets at copy stores and offices, meet in person to review and sign affidavits, and physically go to the post office or NYC Immigration Courts to file or mail documents.

EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR IMMIGRANT CLIENTS

EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC, LEGAL SERVICE NYC'S SOCIAL WORKERS RECOGNIZED THAT A HUGE SWATH OF OUR CLIENTS (PREDOMINATELY IMMIGRANTS) HAD LOST THEIR JOBS AND WERE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR CITY, STATE OR FEDERAL SUBSIDIES.

They saw clients who were hungry, near homeless, with nowhere else to turn. Legal Services NYC's social workers quickly mobilized to build a fundraising effort and infrastructure that would put critical funds directly into our clients' hand — Legal Services NYC's Emergency Covid-19 Client Relief Fund. In 2020, the Fund successfully raised and distributed nearly \$200,000 in funds to 287 client who desperately needed our help. The funds, which were raised through the generosity of staff, our board, the public, and foundations, were able to help so many of our clients in need by putting food on the table and helping them to get diapers, medicine, and so many other life necessities.

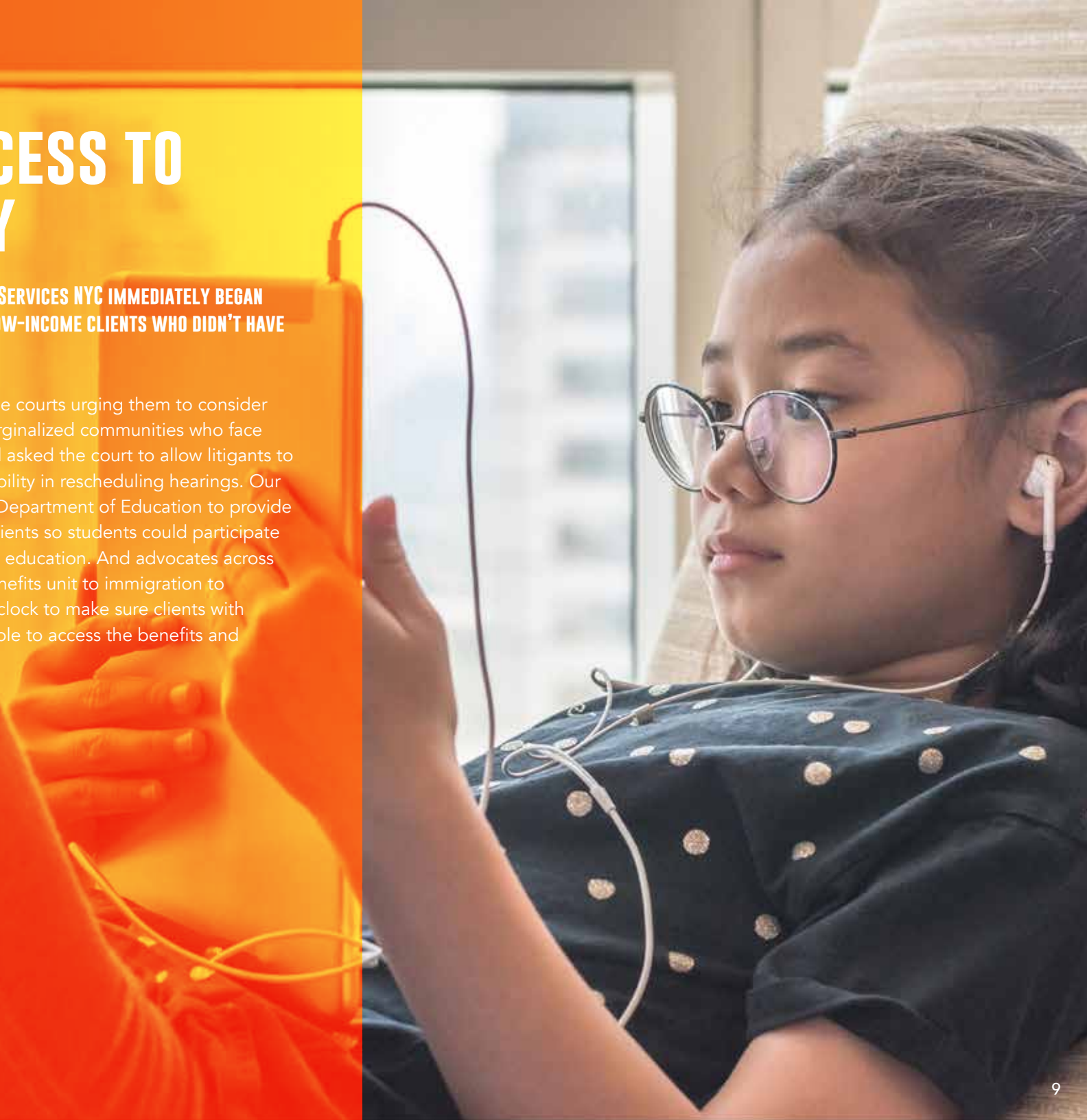
“MY KIDS WERE VERY UNCOMFORTABLE [OUTSIDE OUR HOME]. I HAD TO TELL THEM WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND MY DAUGHTER WAS CRYING. MY SON ASKED ME, “DAD, WHEN ARE WE GOING TO GO HOME?” I COULDN'T HOLD IT ANYMORE AND I BROKE DOWN CRYING. I TOLD HIM EVERYTHING WAS GOING TO BE OKAY AND THAT WE WERE GOING TO GO TO COURT AND FIX THIS. WITH LEGAL SERVICES NYC'S HELP, WE DID. GOD BLESS YOU GUYS. YOU GUYS WERE LIKE ANGELS WHO CAME OUT OF NOWHERE AND HELPED ME.”

- Milton Perez, client who Legal Services NYC helped fight an eviction due to a clerical error

LACK OF ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

AS THE WORLD TURNED DIGITAL, LEGAL SERVICES NYC IMMEDIATELY BEGAN ADVOCATING FOR AND ASSISTING OUR LOW-INCOME CLIENTS WHO DIDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO INTERNET OR TECH DEVICES.

Legal Services NYC sent letters to the courts urging them to consider the needs of unrepresented and marginalized communities who face obstacles to virtual appearances and asked the court to allow litigants to opt out of appearances and for flexibility in rescheduling hearings. Our education team began pushing the Department of Education to provide devices and internet access to our clients so students could participate in remote learning and a meaningful education. And advocates across the organization, from our public benefits unit to immigration to unemployment, worked around the clock to make sure clients with limited access to technology were able to access the benefits and services they needed to survive.





TRAUMA IN OUR SCHOOLS

RECOGNIZING THAT STUDENTS ACROSS THE CITY WERE GRAPPLING WITH THE TRAUMA OF A GLOBAL HEALTH PANDEMIC AND A NATIONAL RECKONING WITH ANTI-BLACK VIOLENCE BY POLICE, LEGAL SERVICES NYC'S EDUCATION TEAM, IN CONJUNCTION WITH A COALITION OF PARENTS, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS AND ADVOCATES, ISSUED A NEW REPORT.

Community Roadmap to Bring Healing-Centered Schools to the Bronx lays out a first-of-its-kind Roadmap for how NYC schools can replace longstanding and problematic punitive responses to behavioral issues, including overuse of suspension and police, with healing-centered practices that allow students with trauma to heal, grow, and learn. The Education Team continues to engage the Department of Education on taking steps to implement this roadmap.

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING AGAINST ANTI-API ATTACKS

FOLLOWING THE STRING OF ATTACKS AGAINST ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS (API) IN NEW YORK CITY AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY, LEGAL SERVICES NYC HOSTED A BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING FOR ITS STAFF THROUGH THE JUSTICE LEARNING CENTER, ITS INTERNAL EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT.

The webinar showed staff build solidarity and taught them critical bystander intervention techniques and tips, always prioritizing their own safety as well. Legal Services NYC's own API Affinity group, part of its Diversity Equity and Inclusion effort, continues to monitor these attacks and provide resources and safe spaces for impacted staff to process their feelings and thoughts.

HELPING IMMIGRANTS BECOME U.S. CITIZENS

LEGAL SERVICES NYC HELPED CLIENT NICOLE TITUS, AN ASYLEE FROM BENIN WHO CAME TO THE U.S. OVER 30 YEARS AGO, BECOME A U.S. CITIZEN THIS YEAR.

Nicole came to the United States from Benin almost 30 years ago where she was held as a virtual prisoner by her brother until she escaped in 2010. Nicole is also a member of the Deaf community, overcoming adversity to teach herself American Sign Language and how to read, lip read, and speak English after coming to the United States. After our legal team helped her secure a work permit in 2010, she got a job at Macy's where she still works and hopes to retire later this year when she turns 70 years old. Her resilience is inspirational, and she is a reminder that ordinary people can live extraordinary lives.

“LEGAL SERVICES NYC HAS BEEN AMAZING THROUGHOUT THIS ENTIRE PROCESS; I CAN'T THANK THEM ENOUGH. I FEEL FREE — FREE TO FINALLY SEE WHAT'S BEYOND THE WALL, FREE TO APPLY FOR JOBS THAT I WANT, FREE TO SEE MY FAMILY- I HAVEN'T SEEN MY MOM IN FIVE YEARS. FREEDOM IS WHAT I FEEL RIGHT NOW. I HOPE TO ONE DAY HELP OTHERS FEEL THIS WAY.”

-Amadou Diallo, client whom Legal Services NYC helped get a green card

RESTORING DIGNITY TO TRANSGENDER NEW YORKERS

LEGAL SERVICES NYC CLIENT GIANA DESIR GOT A LITTLE OF HER DIGNITY BACK AFTER SHE WAS SEXUALLY HARASSED AND DENIED AN APARTMENT BECAUSE OF HER GENDER IDENTITY.

When Giana went to look at an apartment, the landlord said he could not let her near the other tenants and children, then made sexually explicit comments about her body. With the help of Legal Services NYC's Brooklyn Office, Giana filed a case with the NYC Commission on Human Rights, which ordered the real estate broker to pay her \$50,000 in damages and \$25,000 in civil penalties.

NEW COVID-19 WEBPAGE

COVID-19 HIT NEW YORK CITY QUICKLY, SENDING THE ENTIRE CITY INTO A TAILSPIN. INFORMATION WAS CONFLICTING AND RAPIDLY CHANGING, MAKING IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR OUR CLIENTS TO KNOW WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO TURN.

Legal Services NYC quickly convened a taskforce to compile the most up-to-date resources, information, and updates on benefits, services, and supports for low-income New Yorkers and posted them in seven languages on Legal Services NYC's website. The information is updated regularly and disseminated across all of Legal Services NYC's social media channels.

PROTECTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS IN THE NYC HOUSING AUTHORITY

LEGAL SERVICES NYC NEGOTIATED A POLICY CHANGE WITH THE NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY (NYCHA) AS A RESULT OF A LAWSUIT THAT NOW PROTECTS THOUSANDS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS ACROSS THE CITY.

Following a lawsuit, NYCHA agreed not to pursue backrent from domestic violence survivors which accrued between the time survivors left their apartments after an Emergency Safety Transfer and the date they were selected for a new apartment. NYCHA also agreed not to remove domestic violence survivors from waiting lists for other NYCHA units because of any action taken against the remaining members of the tenant's household. In addition to this policy change, Legal Services NYC also got our client back into a NYCHA apartment, which is close to her disabled son's school, as well as \$2,000 in damages.

“IT WAS AN EXTREMELY STRESSFUL TIME FOR ME. TO ADD INSULT TO INJURY, I FOUND OUT MY SNAP BENEFITS AND MEDICAID HAD BEEN TERMINATED, WHICH MEANT THAT I HAD NOTHING. I AM SO GRATEFUL TO LEGAL SERVICES NYC.”

- Zeretha Jenkins, who lost her job during COVID-19 and could not get the Department of Labor to award her unemployment benefits. Legal Services NYC was able to get all her \$11,000 in unemployment benefits. She is now also an Legal Services NYC board member.



PREVENTING EVICTION FOR VETERANS

LEGAL SERVICES NYC HELPED JR, A 35-YEAR-OLD VETERAN WHO RESIDES IN THE BRONX WITH HIS WIFE AND FIVE CHILDREN, FIGHT OFF EVICTION, STAY IN THEIR HOME, AND CONTINUE RECEIVING A LIFE-SAVING RENTAL SUBSIDY TO CONTINUE PAYING RENT.

JR is the recipient of a LINC (Living in Communities) subsidy. Unbeknownst to JR, his LINC subsidy was terminated without notice and he was no longer paying his rent. His landlord took him to housing court to evict him but luckily JR was able to connect with Legal Service NYC's Bronx office which helped him pay off his back rent with help from the Rental Assistance Unit, Home Base and

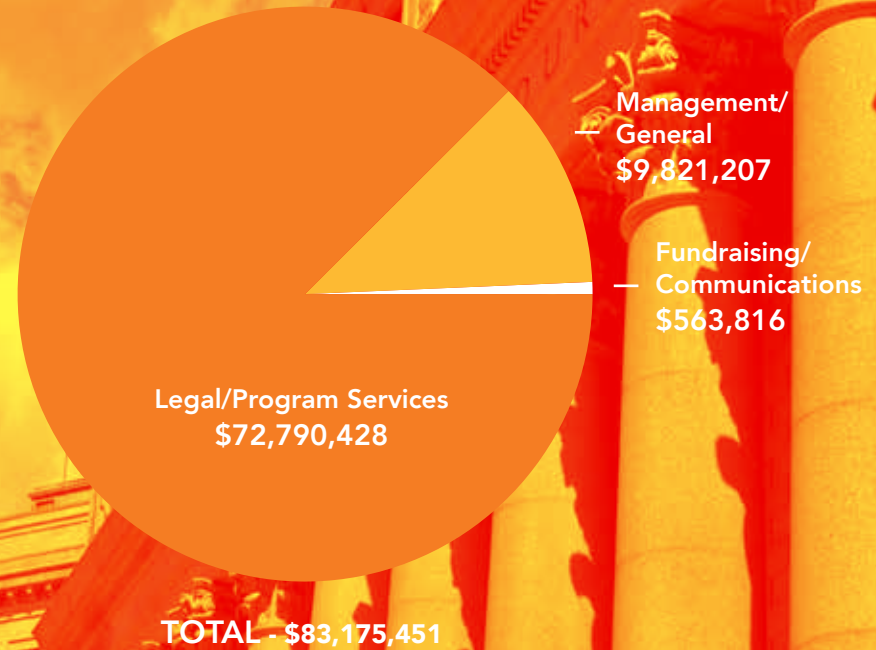
JR himself who paid a portion of the arrears and the non-payment case was discontinued. Legal Services NYC was also able to prevent his eviction and got his LINC subsidy restored.

FINANCIALS*

REVENUE

Legal Services Corporation and Other Federal Contracts	\$14,159,080
Interest on Lawyers Accounts	\$5,528,335
New York State Contracts	\$16,935,195
New York City Contracts	\$39,551,640
Events and Individual Donors	\$1,537,192
Foundations	\$5,072,235
TOTAL	\$82,783,677
DONATED PRO BONO SERVICES	\$42,207,330

EXPENSES



*The financial information above is from FY2019 and will be updated once FY2020 audit is complete.

“UNEXPLAINABLE JOY RADIATED FROM MY HEART WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I WAS GRANTED ASYLUM TO LIVE IN THE U.S. PERMANENTLY AND MOST IMPORTANTLY LEGALLY. I CAN NOW ENJOY BENEFITS THAT I ONCE THOUGHT WERE ONLY A DREAM, LIKE AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE TO BETTER MANAGE MY NOW-UNDETECTABLE HIV CONDITION. MY WHOLE LIFE IS CHANGED THANKS TO LEGAL SERVICES NYC. THEIR WORK ENSURES THAT PEOPLE LIKE ME GET THE HELP THEY NEED.”

- Joy Paa Kwesi Wefum, LGBTQ asylum seeker from Ghana and Legal Services NYC board member

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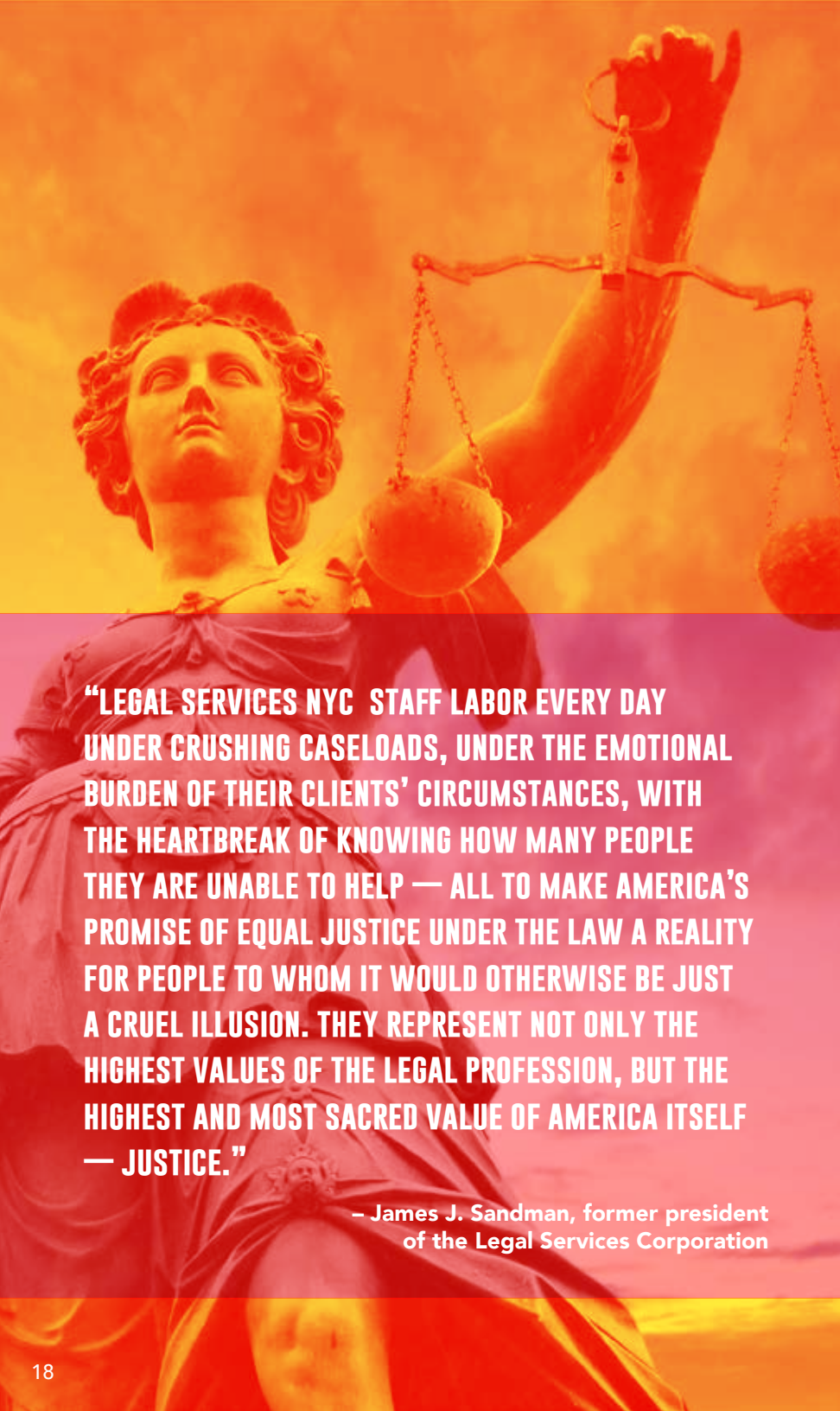
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