



Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc.

2005 Annual Report

Serving Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego and Otsego counties and Farmworkers statewide

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Our Mission:

To ensure equal justice for low-income people facing civil legal problems that threaten basic needs for economic and family stability, shelter, health, safety and other critical legal rights.

Message from the President of the Board of Directors

In 2005, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) released “Documenting the Justice Gap in America: The Current Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans,” a report which concludes that at least 80% of low-income Americans who need civil legal assistance do not receive any, in part because legal aid offices in this country are so stretched that they must routinely turn away qualified prospective clients.



Despite the heroic efforts of our attorneys and staff and the dedication of an expert Board of Directors, the justice gap is worse in Upstate New York than other regions of the nation. This is because concentrated poverty in upstate New York is higher than national averages, and is on the rise throughout upstate New York.

On average, low-income households experience approximately one civil legal need per year. These legal needs arise out of the everyday problems of poor people: matters relating to family law, housing, employment, government benefits or consumer problems, according to the LSC report. Left unresolved, these problems can affect and cost society much more than the expense of providing legal services to address them. Yet, fewer than one in five of all legal problems encountered by the poor are addressed.

Legal services for the poor remain chronically underfunded in New York State. This has truly negative present and future consequences for upstate New York citizens. With current budget shortfalls at all levels of state and local government, our new Governor and elected representatives will face a truly daunting task. There are many competing needs. However, this is not just a question of money; it is a question of priority and of the hierarchy of our values as a society.

Access to justice is a cornerstone of our democracy. LASMNY serves as the foundation of our local democracy, ensuring that access to the civil justice system remains a reality in Upstate New York. It is abundantly clear that we need to rethink and reorder our priorities and our values with regard to the justice system. Justice deserves a far higher priority than it has been given.

This problem has been years in the making and will take time to fix, but equal access to justice is not an area where we can continue to afford to put off payment. Our thanks go out to local United Ways, foundations, donors and volunteers throughout our thirteen-county service area, whose support has helped us to weather this difficult time for civil legal services. Hopefully, governmental funding will begin to keep pace with these local efforts, so that the most vulnerable members of our communities will receive legal assistance when they need it most.

Sincerely,

Thomas Buckel, Esq.
President, LASMNY Board of Directors

2005 CLIENT SERVICE STATISTICS

Summary of 2005 Client Services

Cases closed:
5,098

Persons helped:
7,700

Monetary awards for clients:
\$2,523,207

Estimated savings to county taxpayers:
\$2,122,801

Community legal education events:
51 (attended by 746 people)

Legal education brochures distributed:
14,531

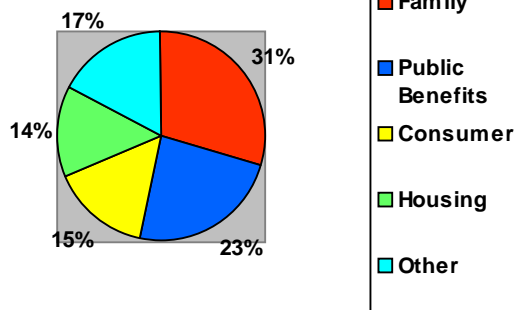
Referrals to other sources of assistance:
5,218

In 2005, LASMNY closed 5,098 cases, benefiting 7,700 individuals. Of the 5,098 cases closed, 31% involved family law matters (with a focus on domestic violence); 23% involved assistance with public benefits (such as Social Security Disability and SSI, Food Stamps, Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation); 15% involved consumer matters (including debtor relief from overzealous debt collection, frauds/scams, etc.); 14% involved housing matters (such as preventing or delaying evictions and enforcing tenants' rights); and 17% involved other matters such as employment, access to healthcare, elder law and future planning. LASMNY staff provided extended services in 50% of all cases, twice the national average for civil legal services programs.

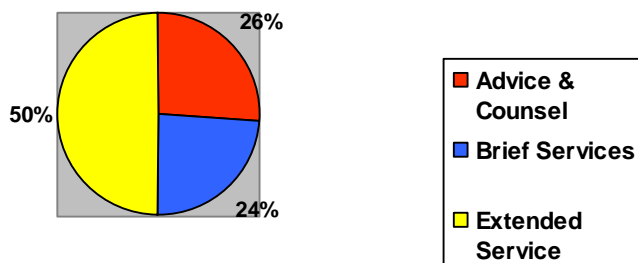
In the course of representing its clients, LASMNY attorneys and paralegals obtained \$2,523,207 in retroactive awards for clients, pumping revenue back into local economies. LASMNY also saved county taxpayers over \$2,122,801 by obtaining federal Social Security Disability and SSI benefits for clients with disabilities, removing them from county welfare rolls, reimbursing counties for welfare benefits paid out while federal disability claims were pending, and bringing federal Medicaid dollars into the community to offset county Medicaid costs.

2005 Cases Closed by Problem Type and Depth of Service

LASMNY

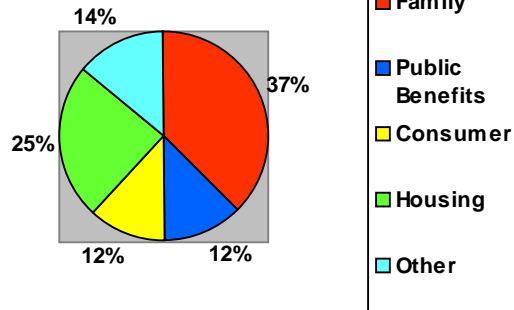


Cases by Problem Type (LASMNY)

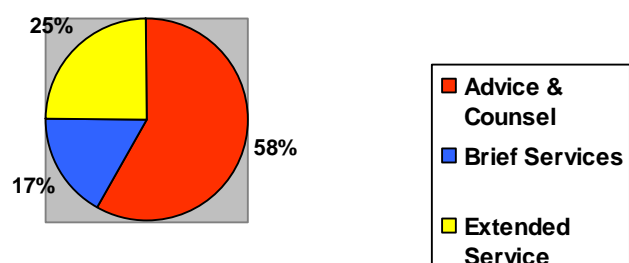


Cases by Depth of Service (LASMNY)

National Average for LSC-Funded Programs*



Cases by Problem Type (National Average)

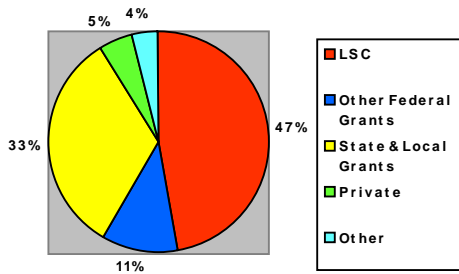


Cases by Depth of Service (National Average)

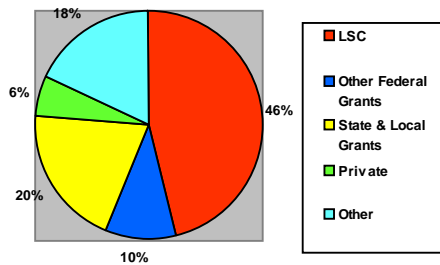
*Source: LSC Fact Book 2005

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION 2005

2005 LASMNY Funding by Source



National Average for LSC-Funded Programs*



Excerpt from Audited Financial Statement 2005

SUPPORT & REVENUE

Grants & Contracts	3,590,934
United Way	155,961
Foundations	37,252
Donations & In-Kind Contributions	16,284
Other	135,849

TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE 3,936,280

EXPENSES

Program Services	3,236,152
Management & General	578,665

TOTAL EXPENSES 3,814,817

ASSETS

Net Assets	470,172
Change in net assets	121,463

*Source: LSC Fact Book 2005

Spotlight on Special Projects

Central New York Victim Assistance Project

With the assistance of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, New York State and Broome County Family Court, Project staff opened 725 cases for victims throughout a twelve-county area. Project staff closed 517 of these cases impacting 1,123 people, with 60% of cases involving extended representation: 123 victims received a divorce, separation or annulment; 89 victims obtained custody orders; 47 victims obtained orders of protection (not including women who received orders of protection in the context of other proceedings); 19 victims obtained child and/or spousal support; and 27 victims received other relief, such as bankruptcy discharges, resolution of landlord/tenant problems, preservation of public benefits and immigration relief. As part of a massive outreach campaign to refugee/immigrant and limited English proficient women, LASMNY staff distributed 6,970 brochures in English, Spanish, Arabic, Bosnian, Russian and Vietnamese.

Customized Employment Grant

LASMNY participated in the Customized Employment Grant (CEG), an initiative by the Workforce Investment Board of Herkimer, Madison and Oneida Counties to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining quality employment. LASMNY staff closed 81 CEG cases in 2005, assisting clients in removing legal barriers to employment such as credit problems, driver's license issues, employment discrimination and other legal problems.

Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program

In 2005, volunteer private attorneys with LASMNY's PAI program closed 523 cases, contributing a total of 1,457.4 hours toward representation of indigent clients.

Disability Advocacy Program (DAP)

In 2005, LASMNY's DAP Program won federal SSD and/or SSI disability benefits for low-income clients in 270 cases, removing them from county welfare rolls and saving county taxpayers over \$2,122,801 across the region.

Farmworker Law Project

LASMNY's Farmworker Law Project distributed 2,672 bilingual legal education materials, including "harvest calendars" and a newsletter for H-2A workers, at labor camps and social service agencies across the state.

Office for Aging Program

With the help of Office for Aging funding in Broome, Delaware, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga and Otsego Counties, LASMNY closed 818 cases for the area's most economically needy and vulnerable seniors.

Office Locations

Main Office:

255 Genesee Street
2nd Floor
Utica, New York 13501
Phone: (315) 732-2131
(877) 203-1062
Fax: (315) 732-3202

Binghamton Office:

30 Fayette Street
Binghamton, New York 13901
Phone: (607) 723-7966
Fax: (607) 724-7211

Cortland Office:

111 Port Watson St.
Cortland, New York 13045
Phone: (607) 753-1134
Fax: (607) 753-7257

Oneonta Office:

P.O. Box 805
387 Chestnut Street
Oneonta, New York 13820
Phone: (607) 433-2600
(800) 821-9895
Fax: (607) 433-1433

Oswego Office:

108 W. Bridge St.
Oswego, New York 13126
Phone: (315) 342-2191
Fax: (315) 342-1891

Syracuse Office:

472 South Salina St.
Suite 300B
Syracuse, New York 13202
Phone: (315) 475-3127
Fax: (315) 671-0062

Watertown Office:

44 Public Square
Watertown, New York 13601
Phone: (315) 788-2072
Fax: (315) 785-9118

Farmworker Law Project:

52 S. Manheim Blvd.
New Paltz, New York 12561
Phone: (845) 256-9096
(800) 804-8575
Fax: (845) 256-0494



Funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation

CLIENT STORIES

FAMILY



LASMNY's Binghamton office assisted a woman in a rural area, who was suffering from severe mental health problems as a result of domestic violence and the sexual abuse of one of her children. The client had not previously felt comfortable coming forward about the abuse, but with LASMNY's help, she was able to discuss it with her doctor and begin receiving crime victim's counseling. With the doctor's support, a LASMNY staff attorney successfully avoided a workfare sanction by the local Department of Social Services, and permanently removed the client from the county welfare rolls by winning her SSI appeal. The client was awarded over \$40,000 in retroactive SSI benefits, allowing her to finally have her own home and provide a college education for the child.

HEALTH



LASMNY assisted an elderly woman in Onondaga County, who was wrongfully denied Medicaid due to a 15 year-old divorce decree. After undergoing emergency heart surgery, the woman was being harassed by creditors over her medical bills. LASMNY obtained clarification of the divorce decree from the court, resulting in payoff of the creditors by Medicaid.

HOUSING



A woman and her two children, one of whom was disabled, were being wrongfully evicted from a mobile home park in the Oneonta area. If evicted, the family would have effectively lost their mobile home as well, since they could not afford to move it and had no place to move it to. In addition, the lot rent was very affordable in comparison to apartments in the area. LASMNY prevailed in court, and the landlord had to offer the woman a renewable year-to-year lease as required by state law.

CONSUMER



LASMNY's Utica office assisted a young woman who had attempted to earn a degree in nursing, but was forced to drop out of school due to health problems. She eventually recovered, but was unable to re-enroll because her student loan was in default. LASMNY negotiated a low pay-off amount with the lender and obtained a small grant from a community agency, enabling the client to pay off the loan in full with her savings. The client is now working in the healthcare field and attending nursing school.

Coming Attractions...The Central New York Legal HelpLine

LASMNY and partner agency Legal Services of Central New York, Inc. (LSCNY) are bringing civil legal services for low-income clients into the digital age. LASMNY and LSCNY plan to launch the first centralized intake system for the Central New York region in fall 2006, utilizing cutting-edge "voice over-IP" technology to manage telephone calls and data traffic over an internal computer network.

Modeled after a highly successful centralized intake system in Ohio, the Central New York Legal HelpLine will provide toll-free or local call access to a central telephone server for clients anywhere in a thirteen-county service area. Existing clients will now be able to route their calls directly to their advocates, while new clients will be served by a central intake unit of four to five skilled attorneys. The central intake unit will specialize in providing telephone advice and counsel, referring clients in need of more in-depth services to specialized practice units within both agencies.

Other programs nationwide switching to a centralized intake model have experienced a substantial increase in numbers of clients served, while continuing to maintain or even increase in-depth services. The system will erase previous county service boundaries, providing the same access to clients regardless of where they live, and increase access to clients who cannot visit an office due to work hours, disabilities, lack of transportation or other barriers. Pro bono attorneys will even be able to sign on to the system and take client calls from the convenience of their own offices. Other exciting features of the system include a pre-recorded "law library" of tele-topics that clients can browse after hours or while on hold, the ability to route limited English proficient callers directly to a bilingual advocate, and the ability to quickly set up toll-free hotlines for clients affected by disasters.