

LEGAL ADVICE & REFERRAL CENTER (LARC)

Final Report on the IOLTA Program for Grant Year 2018

(June 1, 2017 - May 31, 2018)

Amount of Grant: \$28,500 awarded and funded.

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www.nhlegalaid.org

IOLTA Funds Critical Legal Services.

IOLTA funding is a crucial element of funding for New Hampshire's legal services delivery system. LARC, New Hampshire Legal Assistance and the Pro Bono Program of the New Hampshire Bar are partners in a collaborative delivery system that seeks to maximize our scarce legal aid resources and minimize duplication of effort.

IOLTA Funds the Primary Intake Operation for Civil Legal Aid Services in New Hampshire.

LARC is the primary point of first contact for people in New Hampshire seeking legal assistance. Through telephone, internet and face to face meetings, LARC connects with over 5000 people trying to find help every year. Working together, the three main legal aid programs in the state have built a legal services system that seeks to meet the basic legal needs of New Hampshire's low-income community.

Building our network, we have sought to minimize duplication of effort, maximize the resources of each program, and strive to serve the entire state. LARC's telephone and online based intake system allows the state to be served without geographic bias. LARC screens applicants seeking legal assistance, performs triage to determine the best source of assistance, refers qualified applicants to partner agencies, and provides advice and counsel or brief services over the telephone. LARC works closely with our partners to maintain knowledge of program priorities so applicants may be directly transferred to the other agencies capable of providing services. Clients not eligible for a referral to one of our partner agencies, due to the substance of their case or other case acceptance restrictions, or who need immediate assistance before a referral, are provided education, information, and legal advice by LARC.

The online intake system also improves overall client access and ability to utilize the assistance provided. LARC's website, www.nhlegalaid.org, minimizes confusion among those in need by presenting as a "single point of entry" to the online application. Online intake provides access per each person's schedule, being "open" 24/7. The website provides public information on areas of greatest demand, and can provide an initial education, allowing applicants to be more prepared to absorb the information provided by the advocate.

Despite the efforts of all of New Hampshire's legal programs, the last legal needs study funded by the Bar Foundation found that these organizations meet approximately 6% of the legal needs of our client community.¹ And, while we strive to improve this level of access, we know that nationally low-income people seek help for only 20% of the legal problems they face.² Raising awareness within our client community and among other providers has become a crucial component of our planning for the future at LARC.

During the period of the grant, LARC provided legal assistance to 69% of the 5893 people whose applications for services were completed. Services included advice and counsel, provision of information and self-help materials, referrals to other providers of assistance, and in most cases a combination of the three. 263 people were referred to the Pro Bono Program of the New Hampshire Bar, and 366 were referred to New Hampshire Legal Assistance.

Occupying the place directly between New Hampshire's scarce legal aid resources and the overwhelming demand for assistance, LARC staff exhibit extraordinary dedication to the needs of our clients. Staff are regularly complimented on their compassionate treatment of applicants, some of whom are distraught by their situation. Clients call our staff their "saviors" "lifesavers" and "angels" and are very grateful to find a safe and reliable place to turn for legal help.

These intake services account for a substantial part of the services that LARC provides to the client community and to our sister organizations and for which IOLTA funding is critical. LARC does not receive compensation for these services from our sister organizations, seeking instead to maintain the collaborative relationship between these programs. We estimate that these services exceed the IOLTA funding to LARC several times over.

IOLTA Funds Legal Services Provided by LARC Advocates.

The overwhelming need for legal services makes it necessary, vital even, for LARC to leverage its scarce resources. In pursuit of full access to services, and thereby access to justice, LARC invests in educating our client community.

Teaching clients to represent themselves is one way LARC leverages these resources. This delivery method allows LARC to spread its advocates' skills widely and address all corners of the state without regard for proximity or access to a physical office. Our clients are empowered by the experience of exercising their own rights, and their successes inspire our advocates.

At LARC we help low-income people to access a fair process through our court system and otherwise by teaching them to understand and exercise their rights. The legal system is designed by and for lawyers yet we teach people how to use that system to escape a violent domestic partner, defend against evictions and foreclosures, and assert their rights to subsistence benefits. We teach our clients "how to fish" rather than fishing for them. Our advocates have mastered the ability to communicate in plain language, regardless of the complexity of the

¹ See Legal Need Study by the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College, <http://www.nhlegalaid.org/about/>.

² Legal Services Corporation. 2017. *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans*. Prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago for Legal Services Corporation. Washington, DC.

subject matter. We educate people to persuade judges of the merits of their case. We maximize our resources by teaching our clients to access justice for themselves.

Time and again our clients succeed in that foreign realm of the court system. They persuade the black-robed judge, the landlord, or the lender, of the justness of their position and they are thrilled. Many of our clients feel powerless, lost and overwhelmed within the legal system. They are afraid to voice their problems and desperately need a neutral and supportive setting. They volunteer this term “empowering” to describe the help we provide to them.

LARC’s clients attest to positive outcomes when guided by LARC advocates’ advice. Surveys of clients are uniformly positive. LARC knows that most of our clients successfully represent themselves in court and in conflicts. This is based on the clients that call us back and report their outcomes and upon studies of other similar programs.³

The following is an example of a client’s experience, and the outcome of LARC’s efforts:

“Amy” called the Legal Advice & Referral Center (LARC) in mid-May for help avoiding homelessness. The Belmont Mom was just 2 days away from an eviction hearing at Laconia District Court. Amy’s landlady wanted her out of the rented home because Amy fell behind on rent.

Amy agreed she was late with the rent when her landlady stuck an eviction notice on her door in early April. But later in April, just a few days after the sheriff served her a summons for court, Amy was finally able to gather up the money and put it in her landlady’s hands. Thinking the payment had avoided a disaster, Amy said she was “really shocked” when her landlady appeared a couple days later with a letter announcing the eviction was still on - despite Amy’s recent payment.

“She got her money,” Amy said. “Is it legal for her to still kick us out? If I knew she could still evict us, I would have used that money to get a new place!”

LARC advised Amy that the law does allow landlords in such cases to take money from a tenant and still proceed with the eviction. But the written notice about the eviction still going forward, LARC continued, must be given right then and there, so the tenant understands....

Amy finished LARC’s sentence: “So the tenant can decide whether she still wants to pay even though it doesn’t stop the eviction, or use her money to get a new place, right?” “Bingo!” LARC responded.

LARC helped Amy put this argument into a written motion to dismiss so the judge would get a clear picture of the events as they unfolded. LARC also promised to call Amy back for an update.

Amy had good news to share when LARC called her an hour after the hearing. “Judge Carroll said we were right! He dismissed the case!” Amy said she and her husband and their son all did high-5s when they got out to their car.

³ See studies from District of Columbia, Maryland, Georgia, Pennsylvania and others occurring within the past few years at: <http://www.legalhotlines.org/measuring-outcomes.html>

With her shelter issue resolved for the moment, Amy told LARC a little bit about her lifelong struggle with mental illness. Amy revealed that she heads up a peer group at Laconia Hospital for folks who also suffer with mental illness. “This winter was really tough for me,” she said. “And this eviction just brought me to my lowest point. But getting this case dismissed today was the lift I needed. I feel like I can do anything now.”

Amy has her name on the waiting list for subsidized housing. She’s also networking with the Belmont Welfare Officer, whom Amy describes as “a lovely person,” to find new, better housing. Amy said she will encourage members of her peer group to call LARC should any of them face a problem like the one she just experienced.

“You guys do such important work for people,” Amy advised LARC.

IOLTA Supports Outreach and Educational Efforts.

LARC always looks for ways to connect with the client community, and to expand the reach of the Legal Services Network in New Hampshire. In the past year and a half, LARC has been a part of a joint effort with New Hampshire Legal Assistance and the Pro Bono Program to serve victims of crime who have civil legal needs. With Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funding from the NH Department of Justice, LARC has the opportunity to connect with other providers of services to this client group, and to provide direct services to victims. With IOLTA funding available as a part of the required match, LARC can broaden the reach of our programs.

Starting with New Hampshire’s crisis centers, LARC has thus far provided in-service training on legal services in six locations. In addition, LARC staff met with the direct service providers from the Catholic Church, the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence direct services group and Housing First Coalition, and a grand-families support network.

Reaching out to other providers of services to our client community is the most effective way to maximize the reach of our services, and maximize the effective use of the court system by our clients.

Another way LARC educates the community is through online resources. IOLTA partially funds LARC’s legal aid website which provides legal educational materials for the public.⁴ The site serves many organizations in New Hampshire.⁵

NHLegalaid.org was heavily trafficked in the last year. Approximately 120,000 unique users accessed the site. Most people read the site’s self-help pages on subject matters such as tenants’ rights, eviction, foreclosure and family law matters, and well over 300,000 pages were viewed during the year.

In part due to the high volume of use, in the last year LARC recommitted to website maintenance. Training one staff person in-house has allowed for a complete review of the

⁴ See the www.nhlegalaid.org home page.

⁵ NH Legal Assistance, the Pro Bono Program of the New Hampshire Bar Association, The Disabilities Rights Center, the University of New Hampshire School of Law Legal Clinics, and the New Hampshire Public Defender provide representation, legal advice, information and support to clients with legal problems in New Hampshire.

content and layout of the site. Our re-building efforts continue, but we hope to completely revise the design of the layout in order to maximize readability and facilitate use. A part of this review involves insuring that all navigation and content is mobile-optimized. As more and more of our client community transitions to mobile-only internet access, the re-design of internet-based resources must keep pace.

Clients without access to a mobile device or a home computer can access the website via a public library, and they can rely on LARC staff to walk them through their legal problem, and assist them in obtaining the forms necessary to their legal issue.

Carry Over of FY 2017 Funds.

During the 2017 grant cycle, LARC reported unexpended grant funds which was due in part to staff turnover and the launch of a new project. In the 2018 grant year, LARC expanded its outreach efforts as describe above, and increased its investment in updating and improving the website. Both of these endeavors would have been impossible without the generosity of the IOLTA Grants Committee and Bar Foundation.

In addition, it is important to point out that IOLTA is one of LARC's only unrestricted sources of funding, and this is crucial to LARC's ongoing operations. LARC's annual budget shows a positive revenue expected at the end of the year. However, the vast majority of LARC's funding is from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). LARC's anticipates excess expenses allocated to the LSC grant, requiring unrestricted funding from another source to cover. Without IOLTA funding, it is not clear that LARC's services would continue to be available. LARC remains grateful for the support of the Bar Foundation.

Thank you for your generous funding of these important programs.



Breckie Hayes-Snow, Executive Director

July 9, 2019

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**LEGAL ADVICE AND REFERRAL CENTER
SUMMARY OF SERVICES TO CLIENTS
JUNE 1, 2017 – MAY 31, 2018**

Direct Legal Services: The number of financially eligible clients receiving legal advice services by problem type and county during the grant year is listed below. The number includes cases currently open and those closed for financially eligible clients.

BY COUNTY

BY LEGAL PROBLEM

| COUNTY | CASES | LEGAL PROBLEM | CASES | PEOPLE HELPED |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Belknap | 133 | Parenting issues | 424 | 1218 |
| Carroll | 78 | Divorce | 456 | 1201 |
| Cheshire | 118 | Adult Guardianship | 4 | 20 |
| Coos | 91 | Child support | 47 | 123 |
| Grafton | 173 | All other family | 147 | 391 |
| Hillsborough | 714 | Total Family | 1078 | 2953 |
| Merrimack | 275 | Housing (subsidized) | 291 | 572 |
| Rockingham | 314 | Home Ownership | 161 | 408 |
| Strafford | 231 | Private LL/T | 634 | 1767 |
| Sullivan | 97 | Total Housing | 1136 | 2881 |
| All others (out of state) | 99 | Consumer | 6 | 6 |
| | | All other matters | 103 | 233 |
| TOTAL | 2323 | TOTAL | 2323 | 6073 |

If all members of client households are counted, LARC provided direct legal help to **6,073** people during the period of this grant.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

| | |
|--|---------|
| NHLegalAid.org unique users: | 119,960 |
| NHLegalAid.org page views: | 314,110 |
| NHLegalAid.org sessions ¹ : | 158,830 |

Categorical Case Numbers: Legal advice, brief services, referrals and information were provided to applicants in the following categories and numbers.

| | | | |
|-------------------|------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Consumer Matters: | 80 | Income Maintenance and Employment: | 106 |
| Family Matters: | 1125 | Individual Rights: | 9 |
| Health Matters: | 10 | Other Civil Legal Matters | 516 |
| Housing Matters: | 1323 | <u>Total Civil Legal Matters:</u> | <u>3168</u> |

¹ Each session represents a user's complete "session" on the website. These numbers show that our users are viewing approximately two pages per visit.

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Collaboration Partners

LARC works to build collaborative relationships with all programs serving our client community. The primary agencies with whom LARC maintains formal partnerships are:

New Hampshire Legal Assistance
The Pro Bono Program of the New Hampshire Bar Association

In addition, LARC maintains informal working relationships with:

Disabilities Rights Center
The Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
New Hampshire's 14 independent domestic and sexual violence crisis centers
Greenpath
Lawyer Referral Service of the New Hampshire Bar
New Hampshire's Community Action Programs
The Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services
New Hampshire's Courts, particularly the Circuit Court
2-1-1 NH

Legal Advice & Referral Center
Revenue & Expense - IOLTA
June 2017 through May 2018

| | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Income | |
| Grants - IOLTA | 28,500.00 |
| Total Income | <u>28,500.00</u> |
| Expense | |
| Salaries | 4,666.74 |
| Employer Payroll Taxes | 302.14 |
| Employee Benefits | 558.83 |
| Occupancy | 452.34 |
| Office Expenses | 129.45 |
| Communication | 183.30 |
| Library | 7.26 |
| Meetings | 5.01 |
| Travel | 255.02 |
| Training | 50.00 |
| Insurance Expense | 31.10 |
| Dues & Fees | 565.57 |
| Contract Services | 375.00 |
| Other Expenses | 0.00 |
| Total Expense | <u>7,581.76</u> |
| Net Ordinary Income | <u>20,918.24</u> |
| Net Income | <u><u>20,918.24</u></u> |

New Hampshire Legal Aid

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|--|--|------------------------------------|
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| Housing / Foreclosure / Eviction | Senior Citizens | Student Loans |
| Taxes | Veterans | Youth Law Project |
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News

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 You could earn \$30 in Amazon eGift Cards by [participating in a research study](#)



It's tax season

[Tax identity thieves](#) are out to get your tax refund.
 Report tax-related identity theft to the IRS on [IdentityTheft.gov](#)

NH's Official Source of Information during STATE EMERGENCIES.
[www.ReadyNH.gov](#)

Call 2-1-1 for homeless shelter and warming shelter information, or if you have no fuel or no heat.

Welcome to New Hampshire Legal Aid

This Website

We help low-income people find free legal help for their problems in New Hampshire. We offer information, advice, legal representation, or referral to the right source of help to those who qualify for services. This website is a cooperative effort of [New Hampshire's Legal Services](#).

Free Legal Information

Read our [Self-Help Guides](#) on a range of topics to find information about your legal questions.

Get Legal Help

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