

Standing Up For NYC Communities

Legal Services NYC 2024
Annual Report

LEGAL
SERVICES
NYC



About Us

Legal Services NYC was founded in 1968 as part of the War on Poverty, an expansive set of initiatives introduced in the 1960s under President Lyndon B. Johnson. 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 700 staff helps more than 112,000 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 \$32,000 for a family of four. They are often made more vulnerable by discrimination, immigration status, age, or disabilities.

For more than 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.

12

**office locations across
New York City**

700+

**citywide staff, making us
the nation's largest civil
legal services provider**

112,000+

**low-income New Yorkers
helped annually**



A Note from the Executive Director

Dear Supporters

This past year has been one of both significant challenges and remarkable triumphs, underscoring the vital role that civil legal aid plays in ensuring justice and stability for our city's most vulnerable residents.

Amid persistent housing insecurity, economic disparities, and evolving legal needs, **our advocates stood resolute, fighting to protect tenants, secure benefits for families, defend workers' rights, and safeguard the futures of countless New Yorkers.** We expanded our reach, innovated our strategies, and deepened our partnerships, all with the singular goal of empowering individuals and strengthening neighborhoods. The stories within this report are a testament to the tangible impact of our work – lives stabilized, rights upheld, and dignity restored.

A key focus throughout 2024 was our commitment to addressing systemic inequities in an effort to create lasting change for entire communities. We launched initiatives to combat predatory lending, provided critical support to immigrant communities, and pushed for policy changes that advance justice and equity for all New Yorkers. We are particularly proud of our collaborative work with community organizations, which allowed us to reach more people and address their needs holistically.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary staff, who bring both expertise and profound empathy to every case. We are also deeply indebted to our pro bono partners, funders, and community allies, whose support amplifies our efforts and sustains our mission. Your belief in our work is the bedrock of our success.

It is my privilege to share this note of gratitude. What feels like not so long ago, I was a young attorney at this very organization. And so, it has been my great honor to return to LSNYC in 2024, succeeding the steady and stalwart leadership of Raun Rasmussen, as Executive Director.

Looking ahead, the need for free legal services remains as urgent as ever. With your support, we will continue to be relentless champions for our clients, fighting with compassion, good humor, and world-class legal counsel.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we will continue building a stronger, more just New York City for all.

Sincerely,

Shervon Small

Shervon Small
Executive Director



Who We Serve

New Yorkers Helped
Across All 5 Boroughs



What We Do

Through our offices in all five boroughs, Legal Services NYC (LSNYC) fights 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 poor and persecuted populations including immigrants, veterans, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people with disabilities. Our multifaceted work includes:

Protecting Housing & Preventing Homelessness

56,937 New Yorkers helped

LSNYC 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

36,025 New Yorkers helped

We ensure access to benefits for people with disabilities, veterans, the elderly, and others. We put a stop to employers' practices that deprive workers of compensation, and fraudsters' schemes that often target low-income minorities.

Helping Immigrants & Strengthening Families

23,136 New Yorkers helped

Every year, we help thousands of immigrants and their families gain asylum and get on a path to citizenship. 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

3,292 New Yorkers helped

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

700

Staff Members served approximately 56,000 cases that benefited more than 120,000 vulnerable New Yorkers

\$60,892,261

in cash benefits, settlements, and savings to our clients

\$358,848,316

in NYC taxpayer savings

4,796

volunteers at scores of law firms and companies donated more than 96,000 pro bono hours helping New Yorkers

141,858,582

New Yorkers who now understand their rights through trainings, workshops, and community educational events

63,058

hotline calls answered by staff fluent in 10 languages



Defending New York City's Rent Stabilization Laws

Together with our community partners, LSNYC successfully fought to uphold New York City's Rent Stabilization Law (RSL) and Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 (HSTPA), protecting affordable housing for over a million New Yorkers.

This year, LSNYC successfully intervened on behalf of N.Y. Tenants and Neighbors, Community Voices Heard, and Coalition for the Homeless, to stop several attempts by landlords to have the U.S. Supreme Court rule the rent stabilization laws unconstitutional.

Twice now, the U.S. Supreme Court has rejected the landlords' attempt to topple affordable housing systems in New York thanks to our arguments that the landlords' lawsuits were devoid of merit. The U.S. Supreme Court also refused to hear the cases in 2023 thanks to our efforts.

“ Since 1969, New York's Rent Stabilization Law has provided affordable housing for millions of New Yorkers, preventing displacement and combating homelessness, and we will continue to challenge any and all efforts aimed at eroding the well-established and lawful protections that the communities we serve rely on. ”

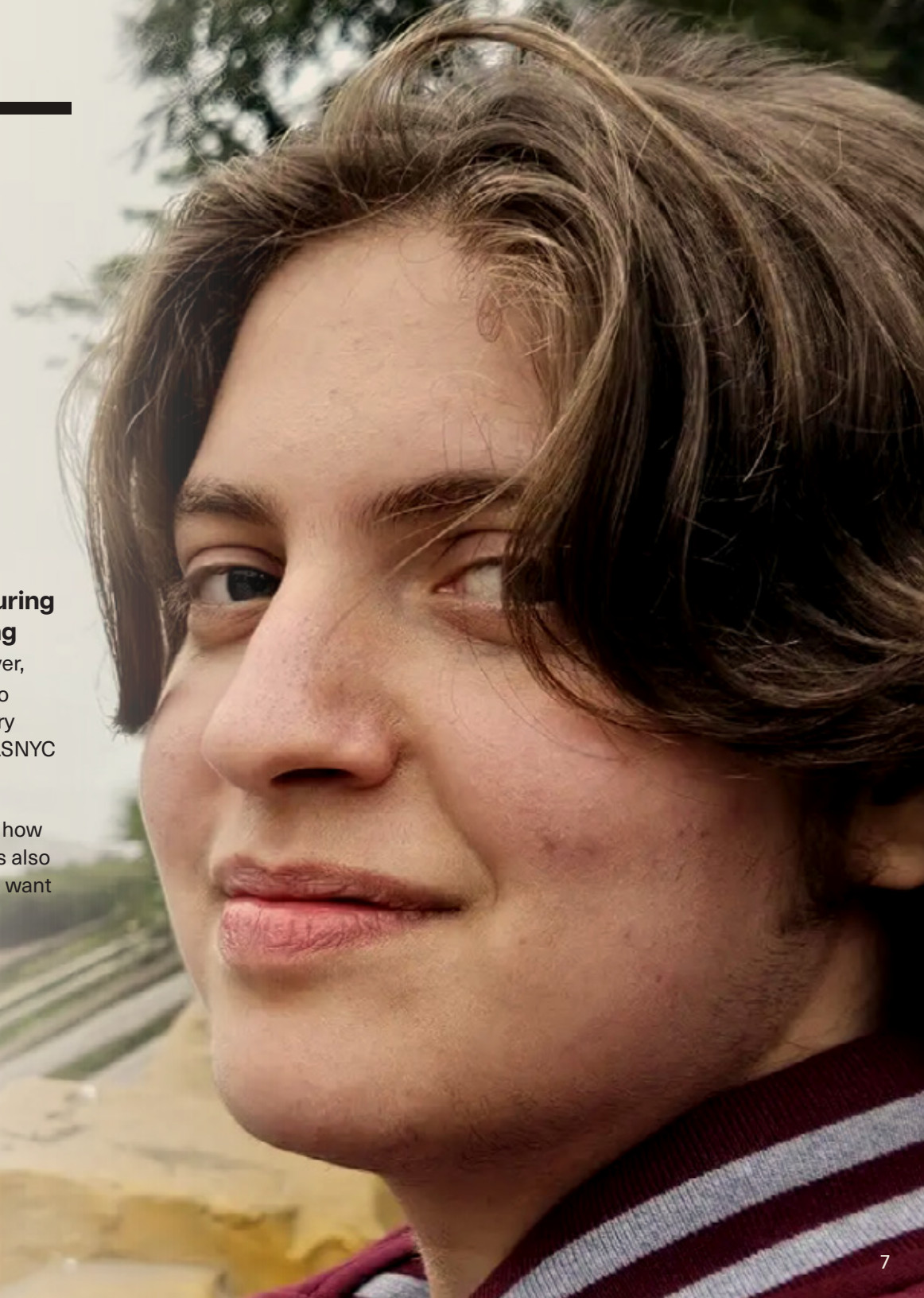
Making Name Changes Easier for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers

For trans and gender nonconforming New Yorkers, securing a legal name change is an important step toward making their legal identities match their lived experience. However, LSNYC found that court clerks were making it difficult for individuals to change their name, making them jump through additional unnecessary hoops and were denying applications inconsistently and incorrectly. LSNYC filed a legal challenge and the courts settled.

As a result, NYC courts issued new guidance to clerks to inform them how they should process name change applications. In addition, the courts also agreed to publish more information about the process for people who want to change their name.

“When I imagine other people saying my name, it’s a warm feeling, because it feels like something that belongs to me.”

Lain, LSNYC client who was involved in the legal challenge



Helping New Arrivals to New York City

LSNYC has always risen to meet the changing needs of NYC communities, and nowhere is that more apparent than in our work supporting newly arrived immigrants. Across the city, staff are on the ground supporting newly arrived families, including partnering with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and community organizations to hold free legal clinics, workshops, and events that ensure newly arrived families get resources and information on public benefits, housing, education, and immigration assistance.

In the Bronx, we provide over 260 newly arrived New Yorkers with resources on public benefits, housing, and immigration assistance at one of the city's largest Humanitarian and Emergency Response & Relief Centers. Our Manhattan office shared resources with bilingual families at an East Harlem Bilingual Head Start Partnership Expo. Brooklyn staff continued to advise families on how to extend their stays in shelters. And this is on top of all the amazing immigration and asylum work our staff regularly does to keep families safe.



Holding NYC's Most Notorious Landlord Accountable

For years, the tenants of 705 and 709 West 170th Street in Manhattan requests for repairs were ignored by notorious slumlord Daniel Ohebshalom – a man named New York City's worst landlord by the Public Advocate's office.

Building conditions deteriorated and the HPD violations grew to over 500 between the two buildings, threatening tenants' safety.


Manhattan Legal Services' Tenant Rights Coalition and the Met Council on Housing got involved and a court ordered Ohebshalom to make repairs. However, after months of inaction, advocates moved for contempt and a judge finally ordered Ohebshalom to be arrested and sent to jail on two separate occasions.

Tenants are still fighting for their home and are currently working to take the buildings out of Ohebshalom's ownership and convert it into co-ops.



“The lack of maintenance and negligence of the landlord Ohebshalom has been astounding. He needs to be held accountable. We, as tenants, deserve better living conditions. We aren't asking for any luxury – just respectable living conditions.”

Bianca L., 705- 709 West 170th Street



“There are hundreds if not thousands of [people] throughout the state that give up. They say, ‘I don’t have time to go to these hearings. I don’t have time to call this advocate and wait for them to call me back.’”

Victor Brito, Legal Services NYC paralegal

Helping New Yorkers Keep Their Unemployment Benefits

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some New Yorkers who applied for unemployment benefits were overpaid through no fault of their own. Despite desperately needing the money, however, New York State is attempting to force people to pay back the money, even though the federal government does not require it. Legal Services NYC, however, is fighting to help people keep the money.

When one LSNYC client applied for federal pandemic assistance, the New York Department of Labor processed her application incorrectly, confusing her gross income with her net income, and ultimately overpaying her \$10,000. Six months elapsed before the DOL realized its error, but rather than forgive the overpayment, it attempted to clawback the full amount. She applied for a hardship waiver but was denied and later accused of fraud. With no way to pay the DOL back, she contemplated taking funds out of her retirement account. However, with help from an advocate from Legal Services NYC, she fought back. Her advocate appealed directly to the DOL’s Deputy General Counsel Laura Campion, getting the fraud charge rescinded and the overpayment forgiven.

Fighting Deed Theft Scammers, Holding Banks Accountable

One homeowner's decade-long battle to get back ownership of his home came to a victorious end with help from Legal Services NYC.

Vincent Holmes was targeted by the notorious Launch Development firm and its owner, Herzel Meiri, in a wide-ranging deed theft that targeted numerous Black and Hispanic New Yorkers across the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. "These criminals targeted us," Mr. Holmes said. "They called us and forced themselves into our lives. They preyed upon us and took advantage of our struggles."

After the Meiris were convicted for their crimes, however, Mr. Holmes still struggled to get his home back because of a \$650,000 lien with a 24% interest the banks who funded the Meiris put on the home. After a two-day hearing, Mr. Holmes prevailed. A judge found that the lenders knew or should have known that they were funding an illegal, predatory, and devastating scam.

"This victory is a testament to Mr. Holmes' determination to keep the home that was rightfully his. Judge Ramos' order puts all lenders on notice: There is no worse investment than a deed theft scam."

Rachel Geballe, supervising attorney with the Neighborhood Economic Justice Project of Legal Services NYC's Brooklyn Office.



Helping Asylees Get a Path to Citizenship

Thanks to a restrictive immigration policy from the first Trump administration known as “Last In, First Out,” asylum seekers with existing asylum claims are caught in a permanent limbo where their cases might never be heard, putting their lives on hold indefinitely.

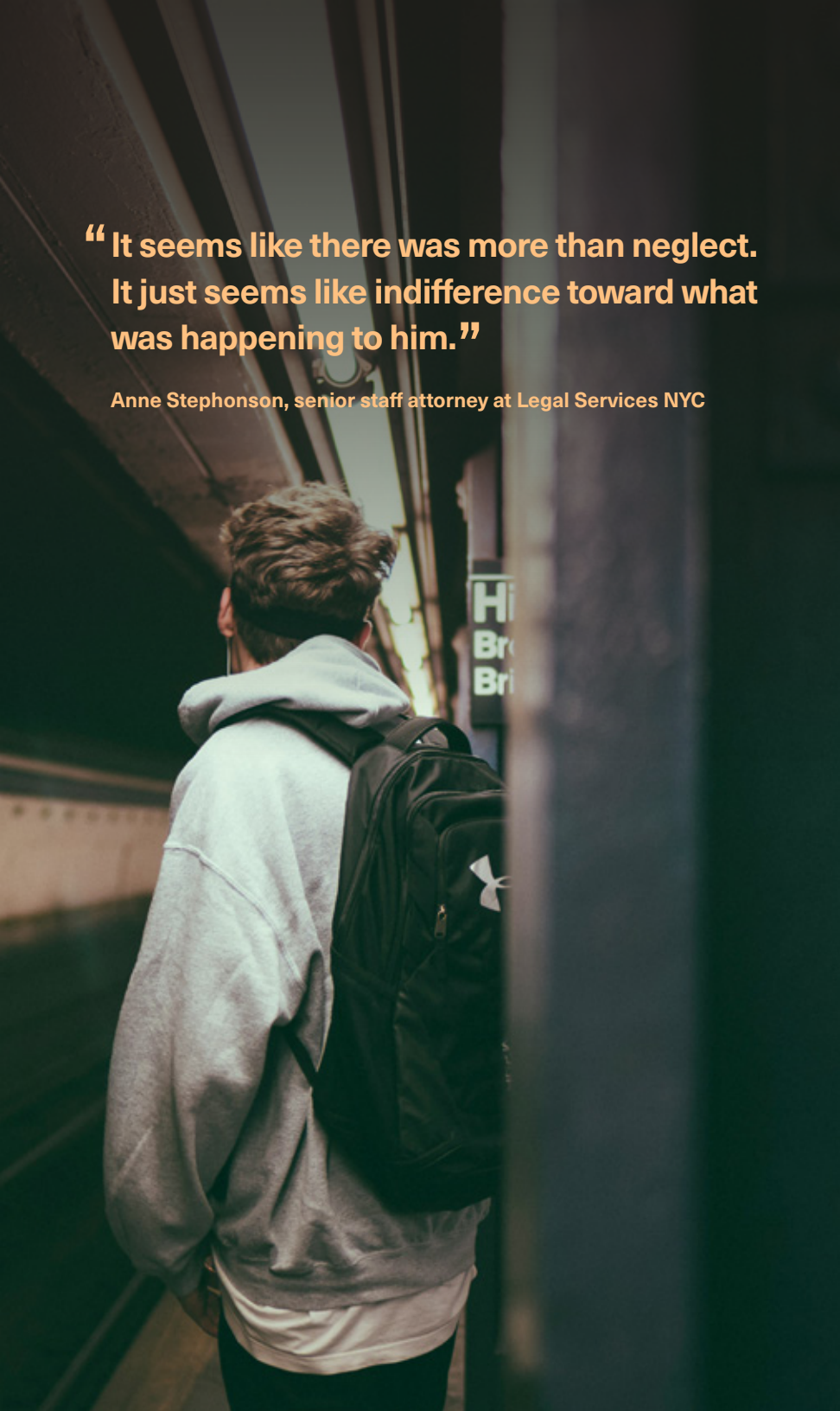
USCIS has a growing backlog of over one million applications and is required to hold an asylum hearing within 45 days of an application and adjudicate a claim within 180 days.

LSNYC and Wilmer Hale sued USCIS over the policy on behalf of a number of clients and USCIS settled, giving our clients asylum hearings and with it, a chance at citizenship in the United States. In fact, LSNYC staff had the honor of accompanying clients to their asylum interviews.

**“ I never lost hope.
I kept praying and believing.
I didn’t lose my faith. ”**

LSNYC client



A photograph of a person from behind, walking away on a city street at night. The person is wearing a light-colored hoodie and a dark backpack. The street is dimly lit, with some blurred lights in the background. The image is used as a background for the text on the left side of the page.

“It seems like there was more than neglect. It just seems like indifference toward what was happening to him.”

Anne Stephenson, senior staff attorney at Legal Services NYC

Suing a City Shelter for its LGBTQ+ Discrimination

When Isaiah Morris had a falling out with a family member he lived with, he ended up at Cooper Rapid Rehousing Center, a Queens shelter operated by Westhab Inc.

However, not long into his stay at the shelter, Ms. Morris found himself subject to homophobic encounters, turning his time there into what he calls “a long-running nightmare” filled with physical attacks, threats to his life, homophobic slurs, and unwanted sexual advances.

Employees at Westhab, which has \$1.84 billion dollars in contracts with New York City and the Department of Homeless Services, also denigrated Mr. Morris for his sexuality and failed to take action to protect him from residents who harassed him. “There was no safe space. Nobody really wants to talk about what is actually happening there,” said Mr. Morris.

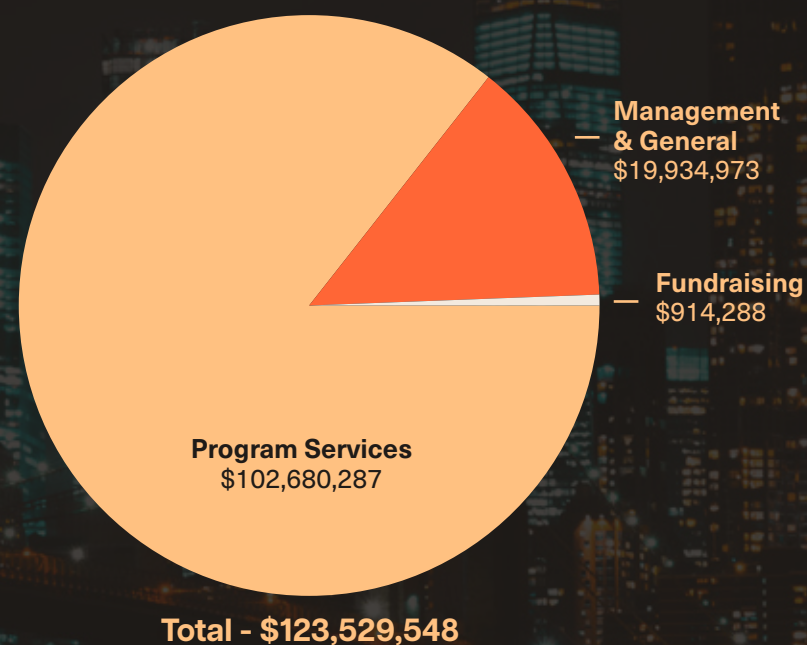
With help from Legal Services NYC, Mr. Morris, who has since moved into an apartment, is suing the Department of Homeless Services and Westhab, and in doing so, taking on a long-standing issue within New York City’s shelters.

Financials

Revenue

Legal Services Corporation and Other Federal Contracts	\$17,853,779
Interest on Lawyers Accounts	\$9,346,077
New York State Contracts	\$32,788,660
New York City Contracts	\$58,754,958
Events and Individual Donors	\$1,881,221
Private Grants and Contributions	\$1,693,609
Foundations	\$668,779
Attorney Fees	\$548,032
Interest	\$15,069
Other Income	\$14,052
Total	\$123,564,237
Donated Pro Bono Services	\$80,007,964

Expenses



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\$100,000+

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“Legal Services NYC staff labor every day under crushing caseloads, under the emotional burden of their clients’ circumstances, with the heartbreak of knowing how many people they are unable to help — all to make America’s promise of equal justice under the law a reality for people to whom it would otherwise be just a cruel illusion. They represent not only the highest values of the legal profession, but the highest and most sacred value of America itself America itself — justice.”

James J. Sandman, former president
of the Legal Services Corporation

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