

**URBAN
JUSTICE
CENTER**

Domestic
Violence
Project

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 21

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Message From Our Director
- 2 Mission and Values
- 3 Our History & Approach
- 4 Legal Services
- 5 Advocacy Services
- 6 Outreach & Education
- 7 Successes & Impacts
- 11 Our Supporters



MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Madeline Garcia Bigelow, Managing Director

For the past 20 months, survivors of intimate partner violence have had to navigate the brutal consequences of both Covid-19 and their abusers. Simultaneously, for 20 months, DVP staff has shown resolute steadfastness in addressing the unprecedented trauma, impact and unmet needs faced by survivors. As I write this, there remains only limited access to court relief; housing insecurity remains at an all-time high; employment opportunities available to our clients often pose a greater health risk to themselves and their children; and overall services across systems and agencies continue predominately virtual.

Where in-person community events have sharply declined, if not wholly disappeared, DVP created access to life-saving information through educational videos; forged community through live Facebook and Zoom events; offered survivors peer to peer support through virtual empowerment groups; and, relieved crippling stress by providing over \$100,000 in direct client support in the form of food, rental assistance, bill payments, and transportation.

This access was only made possible through the herculean effort of DVP's team of advocates and attorneys.

This year, I wish to celebrate and honor the resiliency of each member of DVP. Each DVP member has lived through their own private Covid-19 related trauma. 20 months of working from our homes, with little to no in-person interaction with each other, while addressing some of the darkest and most difficult issues for our clients – and for ourselves. Irrespective of our individual struggle and fear, DVP's Team has prevailed, providing survivors with individualized care, compassion, support, and services. They have done so without fanfare and without failure. Each day, staff greeted one another with kindness and understanding and shared their strength with each other and their clients. Although the days have been long and arduous- with some days more difficult than the ones before - this Team has engaged in true change and has done so with grace and sincerity.

I am honored and humbled to be a member of this Team.

OUR MISSION AND VALUES

OUR MISSION

The Urban Justice Center's Domestic Violence Project (DVP) considers intimate partner violence nothing less than a human rights violation – regardless of gender, sexual identity, religion, disability, socioeconomic, immigration or other status, age, etc. Our efforts focus on protecting and defending each survivor's human rights. We do this by marshaling the combination of legal, advocacy and social work services to secure justice and equality of life for vulnerable populations.

We are a team of 21 passionate, determined lawyers, advocates, pro bono counsel, interns, and volunteers. Together we provide vital, holistic wraparound support and services to help survivors and their children of intimate partner violence establish safe, independent lives, free from violence and abuse.

Be heard. Be free.



OUR HISTORY AND APPROACH

HISTORY

The Domestic Violence Project was originally launched in 2003 when the Brooklyn District Attorney's office donated an office space. DVP was formed in response to the clear need for a better intersection between legal and social services providers for survivors of intimate partner abuse. Since then, DVP has expanded from 1 staff member to 21 full time staff members in all 5 boroughs.

In order to address a broad range of survivor issues, we are co-located with over 30 other agencies at the Family Justice Centers, serving survivors Citywide. Our community-based model enables survivors to access services closer to home, and within their communities through partnerships with known and trusted neighborhood based community organizations.

APPROACH

At DVP we aim to help survivors not only through the legal process but at every stage of their journey such as housing, healthcare, etc. so that they can be in charge of their own future. We understand that every survivor's story and experience is different. We understand that survivors still have challenges they need to overcome and move forward from. Our team is full of advocates and attorneys ready to take on the role of empowering our clients and putting them first.





LEGAL SERVICES

At DVP we offer a range of legal services. These include, civil legal assistance in family law and immigration law. Throughout these services we provide free representation and advocacy for our clients. We understand that our clients have various reasons why they chose to stay with their abusive intimate partners. Common reasons client stay is often to preserve the safety and stability of their children.

DVP values our clients' concerns and believe they are all valid. We understand the process can be extremely difficult and uneasy. Because of this we help our clients in every phase while also recognizing the importance of prioritizing safety. We give survivors tools to guide them in moving forward and to keep persevering. We seek to bring justice to communities by giving a voice to those who need, and respecting the choices of survivors.

DVP's **family law** team of attorneys help survivors obtain safety. Specifically, they assist survivors in obtaining orders of protection, child custody/visitation and child support in New York City Family and Integrated Domestic Violence Courts. Our team also provides consultations on uncontested divorces. Lastly, we advocate for survivors who are involved in the criminal justice system and child protective system.

DVP's **immigration law** team provides legal assistance on VAWA Self-petitions, Battered Spouse Waivers, Asylum, U and T non-immigrant status, Naturalization, Adjustment of Status, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and removal defense.

All of our attorneys provide free legal clinics in various New York City Council district offices and other community based organizations. In addition to our regular family and immigration legal screenings, our legal clinics often screen individuals for consumer debt, identity theft, victims of crimes and more. By bringing DVP into communities, it makes it possible for us to reach the survivors where they are.

ADVOCACY SERVICES

DVP's success has stemmed from our most vital element - our dedicated team of advocates. Our advocates stand side by side with the clients and legal team throughout the process.

Often, the advocate is also one of the first people to hear the survivor's story and quickly becomes a crucial ally to the survivor. They partner with the survivor in every phase of their journey, providing judgment-free support and most importantly a space to be heard. They assist the survivor navigate complicated legal and public benefit systems that are not built for easy access. Without this, often survivors give up advocating for themselves.

DVP tailors its services to the changing needs of survivors. Currently, all of our advocacy services are offered virtually due to the continued concerns of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although legal assistance plays a large role in the process, it is more common for non-legal interventions to encourage and create a survivor's success to move forward from the abuse. Any survivor of DVP that seeks assistance is provided a full safety and legal assessment.

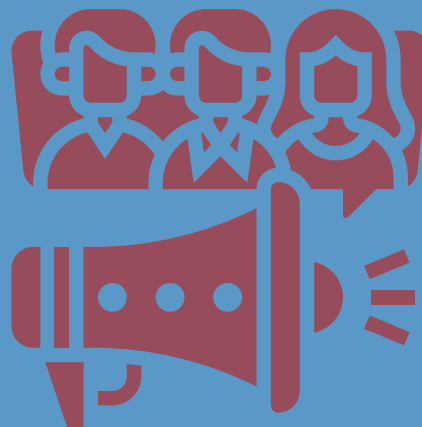
SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Intake Assistance
- Safety Planning
- Immediate and Long Term Crisis Counseling
- Facilitated Support Groups Focused on Empowerment and Stress Reduction
- Case Management Assistance
- Housing Advocacy, Assistance, and Shelter Placement
- Public Benefits Application Assistance
- Financial Literacy and Empowerment Services
- Court Accompaniment
- Referrals and Technical Assistance

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

DVP offers free education to service providers and the community at large to spread DV awareness and best practices. Throughout the 5 boroughs of NYC, our attorneys and advocates provide legal clinics onsite at schools, hospitals, local libraries and more. We also provide legal education through technical assistance in group and individual environments. Since moving to a largely remote world, our outreach efforts have pivoted to online platforms. The result was shocking- we held 4x the number of events and reached 6x the number of individuals as the previous fiscal year. Facebook and Instagram Live along with Zoom events have enabled us to engage at a whole new scale.

At the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, we launched a series of virtual on-demand training videos, covering various topics that affect survivors in NYC. Since then, we have continuously improved and expanded these training videos, adding to our library and even using them as in-house training tools. These trainings are offered for free for anyone and are accessible at anytime through our website.



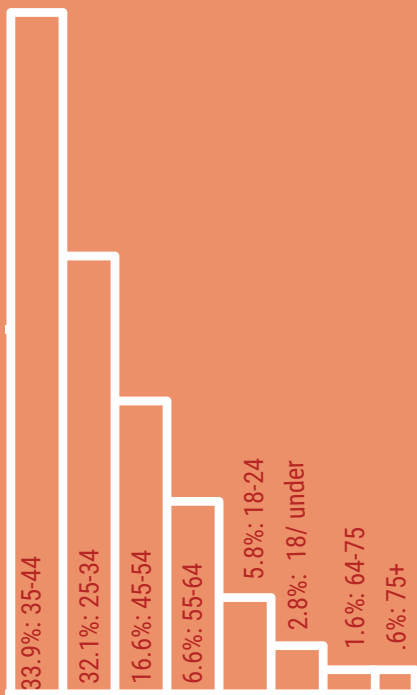
In general, our outreach and trainings cover a number of topics related to intimate partner abuse and best practices for advocates in the field.

TOPICS INCLUDE:

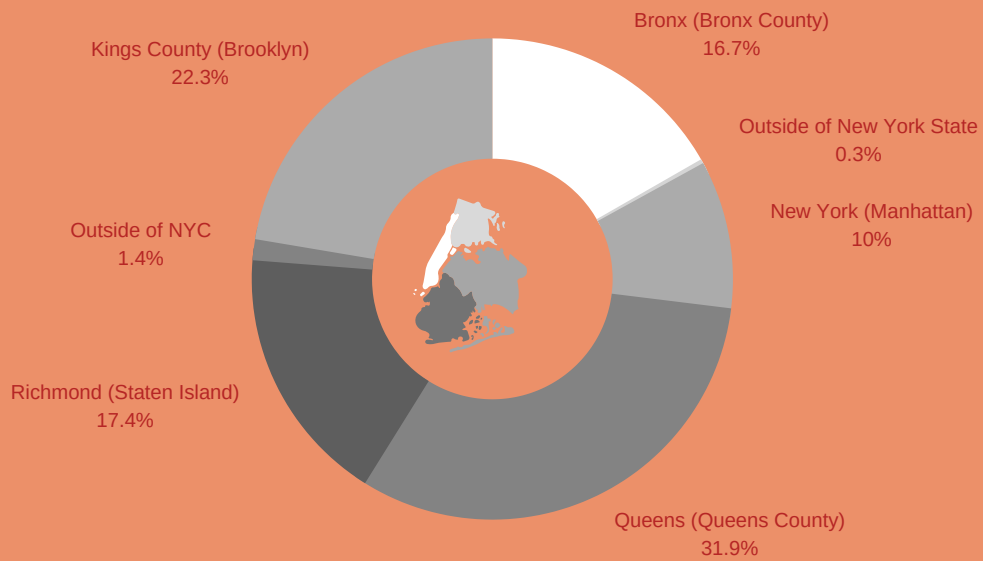
- Intimate Partner Abuse 101
- Family Law trainings
- Immigration Law trainings
- Financial Abuse
- How to E-File Family Offense Petitions
- Cultural Competency Trainings
- Best Practices When Working with DV Survivors with Disabilities
- Know Your Rights Workshops for Immigrant Survivors

WHO WE SERVE : A Diverse group of Survivors

Age Range of Our Clients



Where Our Clients Live



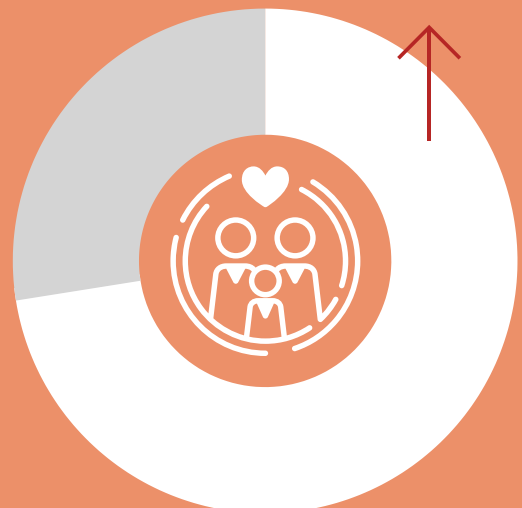
70%

Are non-US citizens

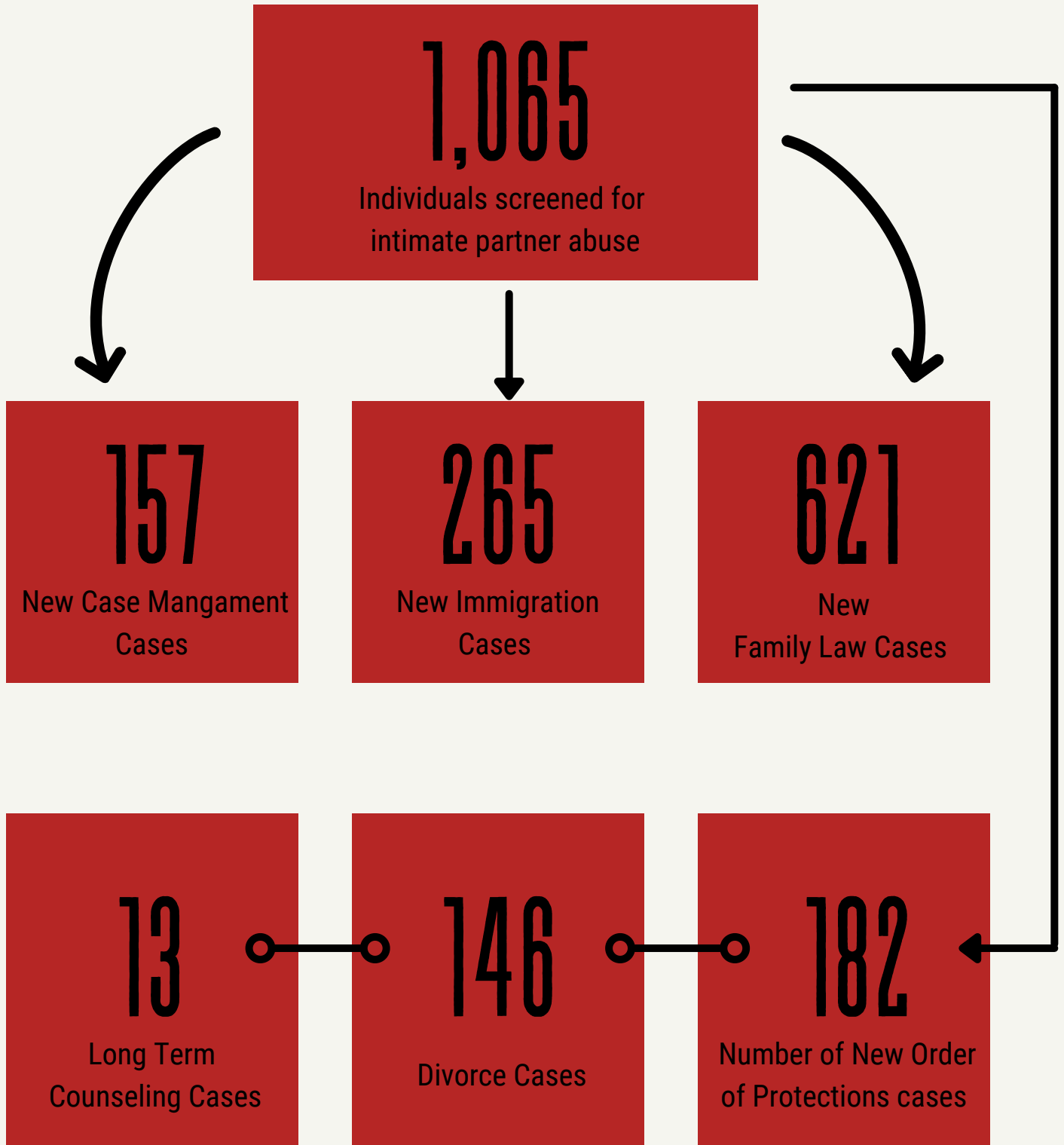
53%

Non-native English speakers

73% of our clients are families



OUR IMPACT - CASES



OUR IMPACT - OUTREACH

6,793

People reached through outreach

1,355

Outreach Events

183

Family Law Clinics

104

Immigration Law Clinics

646

Legal Consultations
Provided in Clinics

461

Pro Bono
Hours

287

Free Legal
Clinics

GUADALUPE'S STORY

My name is Guadalupe Miranda Garcia, and this is my story. I was 15 when I met my husband. We decided to move here in 2006. Our intention is to have a better life, a better job. To have a better future. Three or four years went by, and I realized that he was seeing someone else. Then I told him, "You know what? I'm going to leave. I'm going to find some way to leave; I don't want to be with you anymore." And I was looking for a way to get out of that house, but I didn't have anyone to help me. I was alone. Alone.

One night, he raped me. I remember that we struggled, I told him please no. And because of that, I became pregnant with my daughter. Several months went by, my daughter was born. Three days after I left the hospital, he hit me. I tried to defend myself but still, a woman who has just given birth is not strong enough. I felt how my spine cracked. I decided to report him, I said "I need help. I need help. I can't take it anymore." When I arrived to the police station, a female police officer was there. I told her, "I'm here to report my husband because he is assaulting me." She looked at me and said, "But you are not hurt. You are fine. You have to go back home and, if your husband hits you again, let him hit you in the face, where it shows, because you don't have any marks." I thought, "Why is this all happening to me? Why is there no justice for me? Nobody listens to me. With everything I've been through, everything I've lived through, why doesn't anyone listen to me?"

I once attended a meeting with my counselor. That's where I met Ms. Ashley. If I hadn't met Ms. Ashley that day, I don't know what would have become of me. She was the one who helped me see a glimpse of hope after all I'd been through.

We are listened to. We are valued. That is the most important thing- to have someone who listens to you, who values you, who sees your worth as a woman, as a person, as a human being. "Love yourself. Be kind to yourself." That's the nicest thing I've ever heard. To have someone that tells you "Guadalupe, don't worry, we're here if you need anything. We're not going to leave you alone." These words mean, "Take my hand and let's walk together."

OUR FY21 SUPPORTERS

- New York City Human Resources Administration
- New York City, City Council Discretionary Funding
- New York City, City Council DOVE Initiative Funding
- New York State Interest on Lawyers' Account (IOLA)
- New York State Office of Court Administration (OCA)
- New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)
- Brooklyn Community Foundation

In Kind Support From:


- The Mayor's Office to End Gender Based Violence
- Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton
- Ashurst LLP
- McGuire Woods LLP
- KPMG
- Schulte, Roth and Zabel, LLP

WE THANK YOU

To take action, consider making a tax deductible donation to DVP. It is your support that helps survivors be heard.

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