

**URBAN  
JUSTICE  
CENTER**

Domestic  
Violence  
Project

# ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2022



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# MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



In the past 12 months, we served 1,696 individuals, and our attorneys and legal advocates carried over 3,000 cases. Despite ongoing obstacles, we continued our consciousness raising through 244 virtual legal clinics, 332 outreach events, and year-round weekly empowerment groups. Those we help reflect the diversity in NYC with 68% being born outside of the United States. And, it is here, where I applaud the most committed and passionate Team we have had and highlight our services, their importance, and their impact on the lives of our clients.

But, this year I want to highlight the abject disregard to equity, peace, fairness, and justice we have witnessed as a nation. We spent the Trump years zealously fighting against the xenophobia baked into immigration legislation which created fear and confusion for survivors. Our Team spent countless hours securing safe measures for our clients, fighting for what is fair and just in the courts and lifting survivor voices throughout New York City. Collectively, we breathed a sigh of relief when Trump's term came to an end.

Our respite was brief.

Our clients – the impoverished, marginalized, undocumented, brown and black individuals, are in the crosshairs. The January 2021 insurrection showed us a brutal picture of the hatred and bigotry, while the recent decimation of reproductive rights made it crystal clear that large swaths of the population simply do not matter. Although we are all gravely impacted by this apparent methodical destruction of democracy, our clients will suffer the greatest. They are the people living in the margins. Our survivors can only hope to live without abuse if the system responds to their needs - proper housing, medical care, food, and a living wage.

But they already knew what we have borne witness to – they don't matter.

DVP will always fight for the rights of every person.

At DVP, everyone matters. We are the foot soldiers. We ask you to join us in securing a future where equity and decency matters.

# Mission and Values

Our mission at the Domestic Violence Project is to help survivors of intimate partner abuse and their children live free of violence and abuse. We consider intimate partner abuse in any type of intimate relationship, regardless of gender or sexual identity, to be a human rights violation.

At DVP we aim to help survivors not only through the legal process but at every stage of their journey such as housing, benefits, 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 recognize 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. We do this by galvanizing the combination of legal and advocacy services to secure justice and equality of life for vulnerable populations.

**Be heard.**

**Be free.**



# OUR HISTORY

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The Domestic Violence Project was originally launched in 2003 when the Brooklyn District Attorney's office donated office space to house an extraordinary new initiative aimed at true survivor empowerment. 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 grown along with the needs in New York City. First only focusing on family law representation in one borough, we have expanded to include a robust immigration law practice, financial empowerment services and groupwork in all five 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.

Today, we are a team of 25 attorneys and advocates, working in a hybrid-model in New York City to serve survivors.





# Advocacy Services

Advocates are the life-line for survivors. They are a support system, a safe space, and a partner throughout a journey wrought with red-tape, intentionally manufactured barriers, and limited justice. Our team of advocates offer survivors a sense of hope. For some, it is simply enough to know that options exist. For others, their journey to safety is difficult and requires all hands on deck.

This year, our program was able to provide survivors with micro-grants to help them make ends meet. We provided over \$150,000 to a group of 149 clients to pay for diapers, food, basic necessities, utility bills, and other basic needs.

Through the Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund, we were awarded over \$180,000 to grant to survivors to improve their housing stability and retention, secure food and clothing related to relocation. With this funding, survivors received help with rental arrears, money for clothes, furniture and other relocation expenses. Lack of financial capacity can hinder a survivor from leaving an abusive relationship. Not only does financial support offer survivors a safe exit, it also avoids them falling into homelessness. This support can truly be life changing.

Participation in our Spanish support groups were at an all time high- clients craved a community to share their hardships in navigating the pandemic, financial barriers, and trauma. In groups, we talk about gratitude and learn from one another. We look forward to putting into action lessons learned from the past year.

# Advocacy Services

## Services Include:

- Intake Assistance
- Safety Planning
- 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

**149** Survivors received help meeting basic daily needs

New Case

**151** Management Cases were opened

**\$330,000** In direct support was provided to survivors



# Legal Services

In a system where there are no real wins, often the definition of "justice" is rooted in the client's experience. Access to a free attorney is not enough. Our survivors are paired with a true partner- an attorney who will not only zealously advocate for them in the most difficult moments but also someone who will stand shoulder-to-shoulder, treating them as a valued and multi-dimensional person. We offer our survivors a legal team that will use their platform and voice to advocate for their rights with the utmost commitment and passion. We listen to our clients and offer them an opportunity to be heard by giving them a sense of agency. We unapologetically fight for survivors' rights with empathy, expertise, and passion.

## Family Law Cases:

- Custody and Visitation Proceedings
- Assistance obtaining Orders of Protection
- Child and Spousal Support
- Uncontested Divorce
- Name Change assistance

## Immigration Law Cases:

- VAWA Self Petitions
- Battered Spouse Waivers
- Asylum
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status
- U Non-immigrant Visa
- Work Authorization
- Naturalization Petitions
- Removal Proceedings



# Immigration Law

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A major theme for the past year was *change for the better*. After four years of relentless attacks on immigrants, FY22 brought several welcome policy changes that protect the most vulnerable immigrants, such as survivors of violence. In 2021, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued a directive to its officers instructing them to take a victim-centered approach with non-citizen crime victims. Now, absent exceptional circumstances such as national security concerns, ICE officers are to refrain from civil immigration enforcement actions against immigrants known or suspected to be victims of crimes. Thanks to these crucial developments, DVP's immigrant clients are now at much less risk of deportation, allowing them to begin to feel more stability and safety.

USCIS and the immigration courts are currently mired in unprecedented delays and backlogs, which results in years-long waits for our clients to obtain work authorization, legal status, and stability. It has been heartening for DVP staff and clients that government immigration agencies once again recognize the specific vulnerabilities of survivors, but the structural deficiencies of our immigration system remain. DVP will continue to advocate for reforms and policy changes that will allow our immigrant clients to survive and thrive in the United States.

We are proud to have filed 164 affirmative cases and defended 20 removal cases in immigration court this past year.

# Family Law

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Our family law team has relentlessly advocated for survivors in court. While the Family Courts have made changes to respond to COVID-19, we anticipate a host of issues that lay ahead. Family Courts are experiencing a backlog of cases that we have never before witnessed. Cases that could be settled in a matter of months are now taking years. DVP's family court lawyers work tirelessly to push through the barriers in the court system to get the relief our clients need. Simple and critical pieces of information are not clearly provided to the general public, leaving litigants confused whether the family court is open, how to access online resources, or how to make an inquiry on their case. In response, DVP spends substantial time and effort to break down the complexities of the legal system into manageable pieces.

Working in coalition with our partner legal services organizations, DVP submitted a memorandum of support for the Child Support Legislation (A.9104/s.8554) to streamline the process for establishing child support orders in NY. The bill seeks to alleviate the burdens of court delays by providing a fair and equitable administrative process for undisputed cases that can be easily resolved.

Despite the challenges and delays, we continue to take on new matters for representation, provide new legal clinics for community based organizations, and create outreach and training materials that are accessible to all New Yorkers whenever we can.

We are proud to have advocated and represented survivors on over 670 family law matters this past year.

# OUTREACH & EDUCATION

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Outreach goes to the core of grass-roots legal advocacy. Whether it be through legal clinics, workshops, know your rights trainings, or capacity building to other organizations, DVP adapts to the needs of our audience.

This past year, we held over 322 virtual and in-person outreach efforts. This combination has allowed for us to reach more individuals and groups, catering to their preferences.

Our on-demand training videos continue to be offered for free for anyone and are accessible at anytime through our website or our YouTube page.

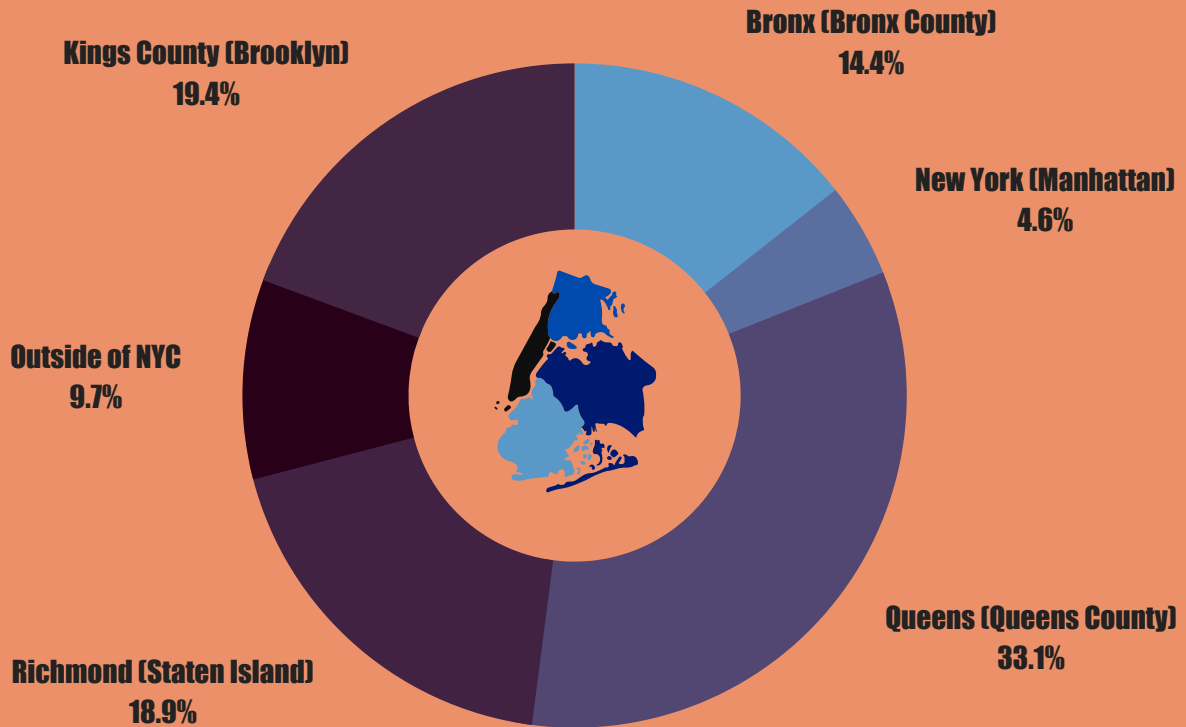
In general, our outreach and trainings cover a number of topics related to intimate partner abuse and best practices for advocates in the field.

**322** events held  
reaching over **2,000**  
people

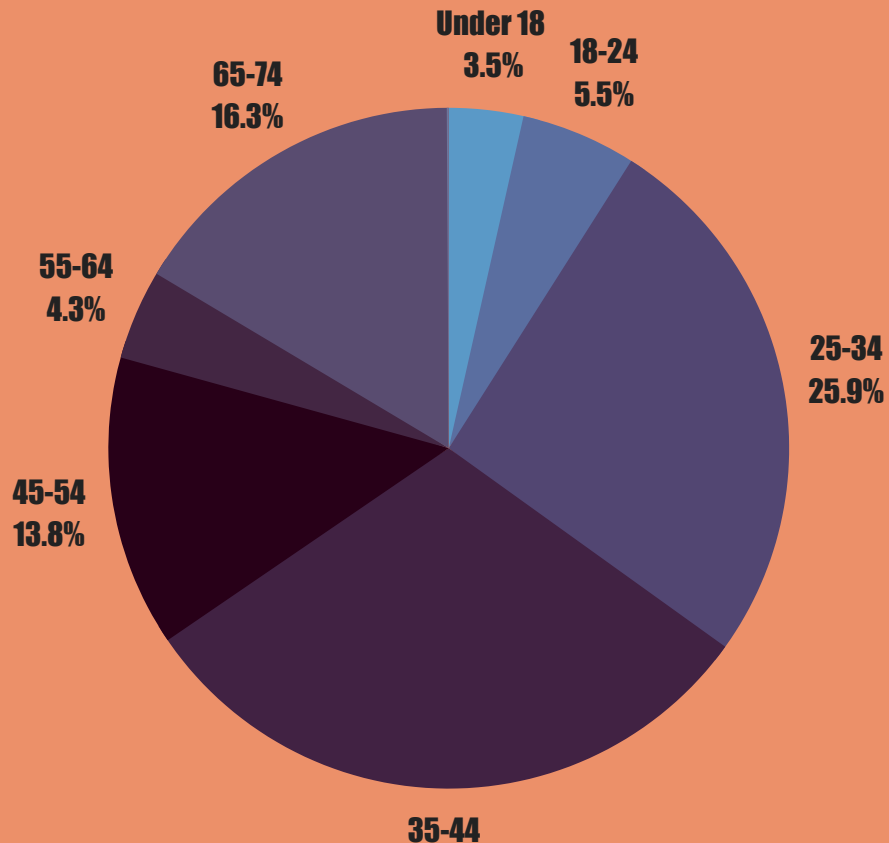


# WHO WE SERVE

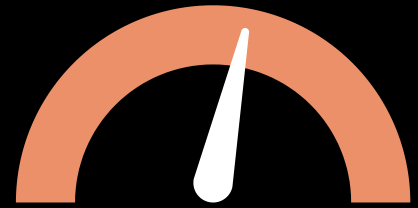
## Where they live



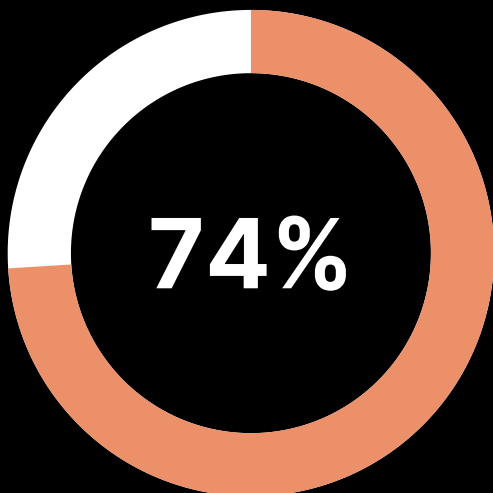
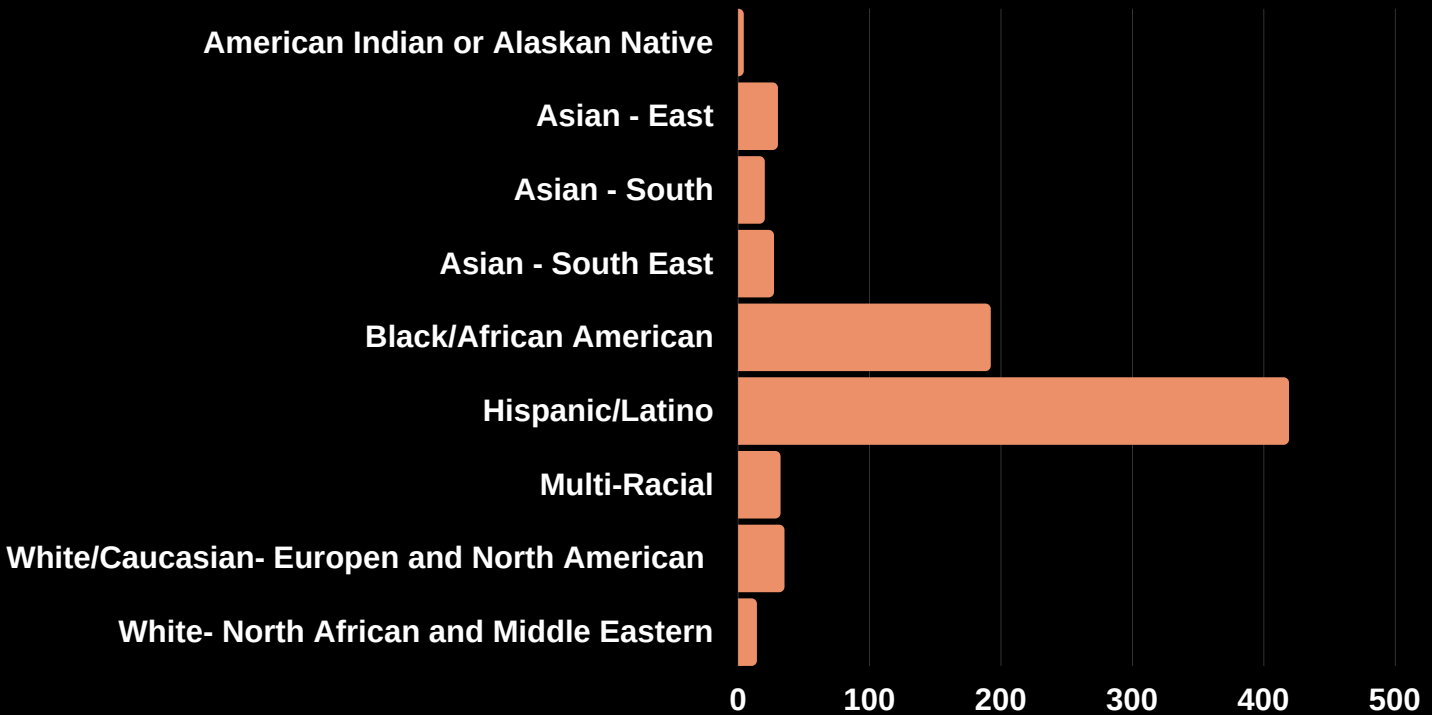
## Age Groups Served



# OUR CLIENTS ARE DIVERSE



Over 55% of our clients are non-U.S. citizens



74% of our clients live with one or more dependents. This means that the majority of our clients have children who we also serve.





# Our Impact

**1,696**

Survivors served

**3,024**

Active cases

**907**

Legal and safety  
screenings

**1,266**

Family law,  
immigration law, &  
case management  
cases opened

# **OUR IMPACT**

**670**

**Family Law Cases**

**431**

**Immigration Law  
Cases**

**155**

**Case Management  
Cases**

**184**

**Order of Protection Cases**

# SURVIVOR STORY

"The Urban Justice Center- DVP has been such a blessing in my life when I was at my lowest and everything seemed to be falling apart. Things with my husband slowly started falling apart. It was like I said "I Do" and he turned into a completely different person. It started with raised voice conversations that turned into yelling, hitting the wall next to me, throwing things in my direction without hitting me, needing to know where I was at all times, calling constantly when I was at lunch with a friend, blaming me for things that didn't happen, etc. He then refused to go to work any longer and told me I needed to figure out all of the finances on my own. He started drinking excessively as well on top of everything else. Then it just started to get worse. He'd grab my arm, almost broke the car window one night when I tried to leave because I was scared, and then COVID hit. The City locked down and his abuse got worse. One night as I was setting the alarm for work, he got angry with me for setting the alarm, lunged at me and tried to strangle me. I was able to kick him off of me and lock myself in the bathroom. I didn't know what to do. My whole family was living on the other side of the country and everything was closed because of COVID. I reached out to DVP and they talked me through my options. At the time, with everything closed there wasn't much they could do, but they kept records of everything that happened and continued to check in on me. They gave me strategies to use to stay safe as well. I had to have a surgery over the summer and my husband proceeded to rape me during my recovery and things were not improving. They'd be okay for a week or two and then the abuse would escalate again.

I reached out to DVP again and they helped me through getting out of my apartment and leaving him safely. Once I was safe, Heather, a lawyer with the Urban Justice Center, proceeded to walk me through all of my options and helped me to file for divorce. She was there every step of the way with phone calls and emails. It took some time, but the divorce is finalized and I'm safe. I would not have been able to do all of that without the support, care, and dedication of Heather and the rest of DVP staff. I'm finally starting to get back to my normal self again and no longer have to worry about my safety or what I'm walking into when I get home. They'll help you to be safe and to get your life back on track. They're extremely supportive and everything is confidential. They're a true blessing to our community and I'll be forever grateful for all of the kindness and support I've received from them." - Anonymous Survivor





# FY 2022 SUPPORTERS

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- 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)
- Alfred & Lucille Bronson Foundation
- DONT WALK Charity

## In Kind Support From:

- Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann LLP
- Latham & Watkins LLP
- Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett, LLP
- The Mayor's Office to End Gender Based Violence
- Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton
- Ashurst LLP
- McGuire Woods LLP
- KPMG



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

# We Thank You

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