



Annual Report 2017



Introduction

At Legal Hand, our trained non-lawyer community volunteers provide free legal information, assistance and referrals to help members of low-income communities resolve issues that affect their lives, in areas like housing, family law, immigration, divorce, domestic violence and benefits. Legal Hand volunteers make referrals, help complete applications, make advocacy calls, and provide specific information to help prevent visitors' issues from becoming legal actions. Volunteers operate out of easy-to-find, neighborhood storefront centers in Crown Heights and Brownsville, Brooklyn, and Jamaica, Queens. Volunteers are trained by attorneys from partnering legal service organizations-- the Legal Aid Society, New York Legal Assistance Group, and Queens Legal Services. Legal Hand is supported by a grant from an anonymous donor and is operated by the Center for Court Innovation.

As of November 2017, Legal Hand has been in operation for two years. This second year of operation has been marked by significant growth in all areas. Not only has the number of visitors increased, but so has the volume and depth of outreach, workshops, and volunteer training. By providing quality information to visitors, Legal Hand not only seeks to help visitors resolve issues without court involvement, but also help visitors and volunteers feel a greater sense of empowerment in their lives.



Legal Hand Neighborhood Storefront Centers

Legal Hand has three storefront centers in New York City; two in Brooklyn and one in Queens. To accommodate as many visitors as possible, each center is open about 35 hours a week, including night and weekend hours. During these hours, visitors are free to walk in for help, without any appointment. Also, all three centers work with partnering organizations to provide workshops on topics frequently encountered at the centers. ¹

¹ <http://www.new-york-city-map.com/>>New York City Map

Crown Heights

Legal Hand Crown Heights is staffed by a volunteer coordinator and a New York Legal Assistance Group attorney. The two most common visitor issue areas are housing and employment. Over the past year, Legal Hand Crown Heights partnered with a variety of legal services organizations and nonprofit organizations, including NYLAG, Housing Court Answers, Legal Aid Society, JustFixNYC, and Sanctuary for Families. These organizations led informational workshops on topics ranging from child support to rent stabilization. This year, Legal Hand Crown Heights also hosted resume writing workshops and computer literacy sessions.

Brownsville

In 2017, Legal Hand Brownsville moved to a new storefront space at 650 Rockaway Avenue. This new space is just steps away from the subway. In the past year, Legal Hand Brownsville has built relationships with a number of tenant associations. In addition to the on-site Legal Aid attorneys, Legal Hand Brownsville also has a Human Resources Administration representative come in twice a week to answer questions and assist visitors with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications.

Jamaica

In its second year of operation, Legal Hand Jamaica opened its own storefront center. Legal Hand Jamaica is staffed by a volunteer coordinator and a Queens Legal Service attorney. Each week, Legal Hand Jamaica hosts a Know Your Rights workshop to educate and empower community members, and fine-tune volunteers' knowledge on specific topics. This past year, workshop topics have included New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing and rights, introduction to government benefits, and domestic violence victim services. Partnering organizations for the workshops have included Housing Court Answers, Sanctuary for Families, and Stabilizing NYC. Legal Hand Jamaica also partners with organizations to provide on-site clinics. For example, each month the NYC Commission on Human Rights runs a human rights clinic for visitors facing employment or housing discrimination.

The Volunteers

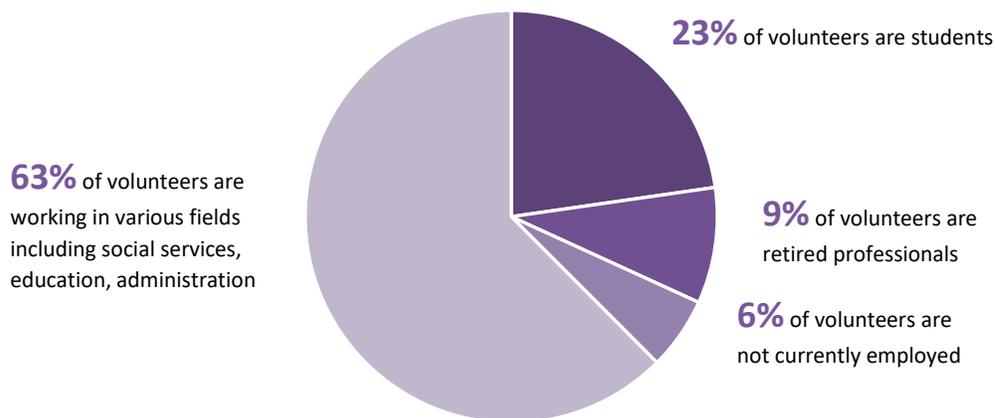
Legal Hand is a local information and resource center supported by a group of dedicated and trained community non-lawyer volunteers. Every six months, in the fall and in the spring, each office conducts a recruitment drive to find individuals interested in volunteering for Legal Hand. New volunteers are trained through a general, all-site orientation, and then through office-specific trainings throughout the

6-month volunteer cycle. Volunteers are trained to spot issues, and connect each individual visitor with the appropriate information to address their specific situation. Office-specific trainings strengthen volunteers' knowledge in specific issue areas such as immigration or public assistance. The Legal Hand staff also work one-on-one with volunteers to ensure that visitors are receiving the best possible information.

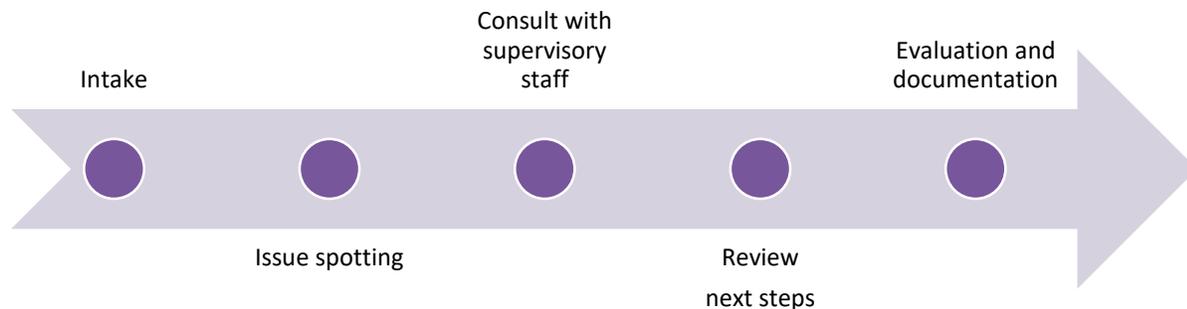


Legal Hand volunteers complete an initial orientation before beginning to volunteer. This initial training covers the basics of housing law, family law, and benefits, introduces volunteers to legal resources available to visitors, and provides training on preliminary interview and issue spotting skills. Here, three new volunteers practice their intake and interviewing in a practice scenario.

Volunteers are asked to sign up for one three-hour shift per week. This guarantees that all three centers are well equipped to assist visitors during all hours of operation. Currently, Legal Hand has 91 dedicated volunteers. Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds— many are community members or retirees looking to give back, but some are graduate or undergraduate students passionate about public service, and others are former Legal Hand visitors who were inspired by Legal Hand's work. Regardless of background, all volunteers have the same motivation to empower and educate themselves, and their communities, through legal knowledge.



The Visitors



Throughout the past year, Legal Hand has continued to hone and develop its intake methods to provide the best possible help to each individual visitor. When visitors come into Legal Hand, they first complete a detailed intake process. A volunteer collects the general demographic information and begins to discuss the issue that brought the visitor to Legal Hand. Volunteers are trained to evaluate holistically visitors' issues and needs so that Legal Hand can effectively help to try to resolve any underlying civil legal issues a visitor may be facing. Often visitors come in facing multiple challenges. By looking for, and addressing underlying issues, Legal Hand is able to help many people avoid court involvement.

During visits, volunteers check in with Legal Hand supervisory staff. Not only does this ensure that visitors are getting the best possible information, but it also allows volunteers to continue broadening their legal knowledge. After volunteers have provided all the help they can on-site, they review the next steps for the visitor to take. Sometimes this is as simple as waiting to hear about a pending benefits application, or calling referral numbers. Other times this includes paying arrears on a specific schedule, or drafting a letter to their landlord regarding rent grievances.

At the end of their visit, visitors are asked to fill out an evaluation while volunteers document the information they provided during the visit. Legal Hand uses a case management system software which helps volunteers record visitors' issues.

Legal Hand Brownsville

The Issue A visitor came into Legal Hand Brownsville to get help paying her electric bill, because she was facing over \$1,200 in arrears and was about to lose her power.

The Action A volunteer at Legal Hand called Con Ed to discuss the visitor's options. Specifically, the volunteer got information about Con Ed's payment agreement program and the enrollment process. Then, the volunteer helped the visitor enroll in the program.

The Impact The visitor's power stayed on with minimal financial consequences- she only had to pay \$10, and keep up with all future payments with no down payments on the arrears.

Legal Hand Jamaica

The Issue A mother of a man with traumatic brain injury (TBI) came to inquire about her rights to make medical decisions for her son. He had entered the TBI treatment center over a year ago, finished his therapy period, and is now being monitored around the clock for seizures. At the time of the injury, he was in the process of getting a divorce. His wife rather than his mother, was his designated medical decision maker. The visitor lives in Peru and comes every 6 months to care for her son. She was frustrated because she was not her son's medical decision maker and, in her opinion, the hospital was not providing necessary treatments because the wife refused to respond to any inquiries regarding treatment. When she inquired about becoming the designated medical decision maker, the hospital told her that she would need an order from court.

The Action A volunteer at Legal Hand contacted the hospital to find out how and why the wife was designated as the decision maker. The volunteer discovered that the decision was not court ordered and was not through the patient executed healthcare proxy. Instead it was the hospital's internal decision because no one else was available. The volunteer then asked for internal reassessment due to a change in circumstances and the availability of another family member.

The Impact Instead of going to court to become her son's medical decision maker, the hospital agreed to set up a reassessment meeting to discuss changing the medical decision maker.

Visitor Stories

Legal Hand Crown Heights

The Issue A disabled senior citizen came into Legal Hand initially because he had lost a money order. The volunteers were able to help him find and fill out the forms required to request a refund. It wasn't until a subsequent visit that the visitor revealed that he was having problems with his senior citizen rent increase exemption (SCRIE) benefits. He had consulted an attorney, who was not able to help him with the SCRIE issue, but told him what he needed to submit to SCRIE to have the issue resolved.

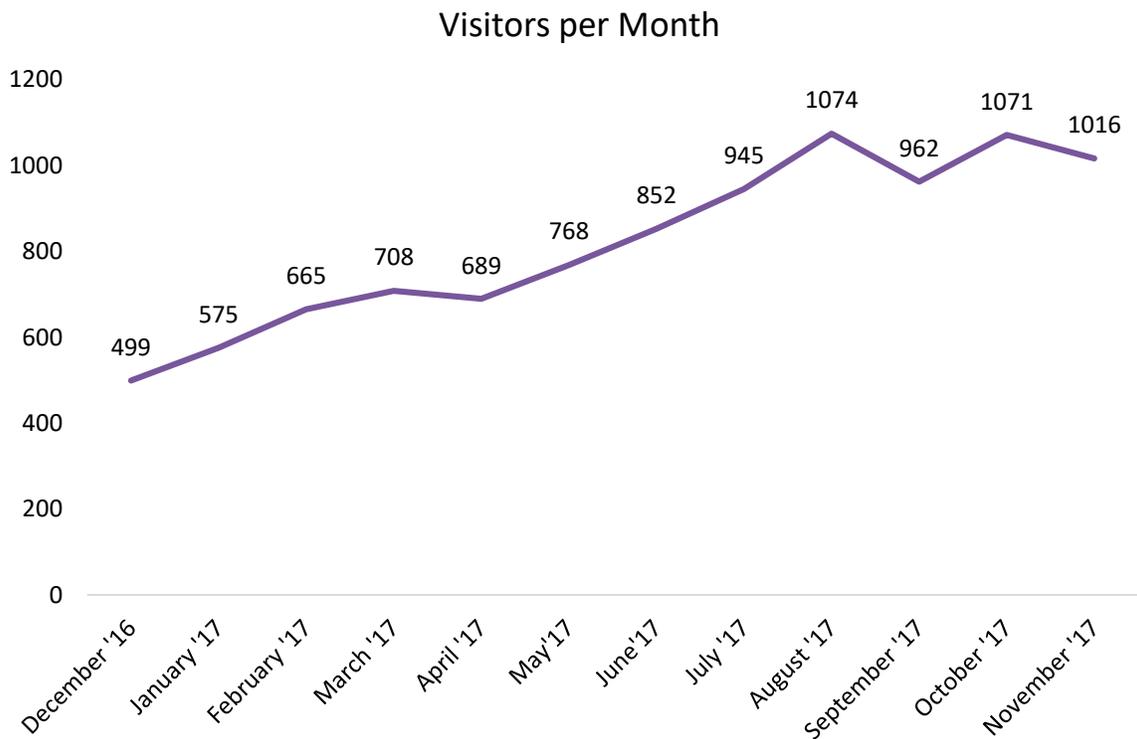
The Action A Legal Hand volunteer helped him gather and submit the necessary documents to SCRIE to resolve the issue. Soon after his visit, the visitor returned to Legal Hand to let Legal Hand know that he had received his SCRIE approval and was actually owed a credit from his landlord of almost \$9,000. A volunteer then helped him draft a letter requesting the money owed.

The Impact Not only did the visitor receive his money order refund and resolve his issue with SCRIE, but he also will have much more financial security now that he has \$9,000 in credit for rent.

Legal Hand visitors find out about Legal Hand in a variety of ways. According to a recent follow-up-survey, 35% of visitors surveyed indicated that they had found out about Legal Hand by walking into a Legal Hand office or receiving a Legal Hand flyer. Throughout 2017, Legal Hand staffed various community events, such as street fairs, where they distribute information about Legal Hand. Additionally, all Legal Hand offices are in busy areas that are close to subway stations and therefore see quite a lot of foot traffic. The next most popular way that visitors found out about Legal Hand was through other organizations, whether a community organization or a legal service organization (30%). For example, Legal Hand’s three partner organizations, the Legal Aid Society, NYLAG, and Legal Services NYC, refer their clients to Legal Hand if they have issues that don’t require a lawyer, or if they need additional support for upcoming court cases. The third most common way visitors discover Legal Hand is through friends or family members who have previously visited Legal Hand (18%). Other ways people are referred to Legal Hand’s services are through the courts and through the offices of local elected government officials.

Legal Hand Issues and Information

Throughout its second year of operation, Legal Hand assisted 9,824 New Yorkers, and received approximately 800 visits per month. This is a 75% increase from Legal Hand’s first year of operation in which Legal Hand had 5,615 visits. Since opening in 2015, Legal Hand has had over 16,000 visits.



Legal Hand visitors come in looking for help with a plethora of issues. Below is a breakdown of the most common issues over the past year at Legal Hand.

	Total	Brownsville	Crown Heights	Jamaica
Total Visits	9,824	2,090	4,760	2,974
Legal Issues				
Housing	29.19%	36.01%	21.71%	37.51%
Benefits	7.71%	4.84%	8.94%	7.38%
Family Law	9.74%	14.57%	4.19%	16.06%
Employment	8.05%	3.13%	11.53%	5.22%
Immigration	4.62%	4.45%	2.91%	7.55%
Consumer Debt	5.04%	4.40%	6.09%	3.69%
Elder Law	2.25%	2.36%	2.51%	2.36%
Administrative	13.49%	2.38%	22.01%	2.83%
Other ²	19.92%	23.64%	20.10%	17.39%

Over the past year, all three neighborhood storefronts have worked to provide housing services due to the prevalence of this issue among visitors. Most commonly, visitors come to Legal Hand searching for housing or facing housing instability. Visitors also come in because they are having issues with their landlord, are looking to apply for housing subsidies, or are having trouble with a housing benefit. All three Legal Hand storefronts have developed a vast collection of resources and referrals related to specific housing issues, established relationships with local tenant associations, and held workshops on a variety of housing topics such as community organizing, tenant rights, and Housing Court basics.

Because each storefront center operates in a different community, other issues vary by locations. For example, at Legal Hand Crown Heights, visitors are more likely to come in for issues relating to employment, benefits, and consumer debt than at the other two centers. At Legal Hand Jamaica, visitors come in seeking help with family law issues or immigration issues more often than at the other offices. Legal Hand storefronts are able to target their volunteer training, resources, and community workshops to the issues pertinent to each community and also develop collections of resources that cater to their specific community’s needs.

² On occasion, Legal Hand helps visitors facing issues related to topics such as healthcare, criminal issues, disability rights, and youth services. These services all make up less than 2% of the total services completed by Legal Hand.

Legal Hand Impact

In September 2017, Legal Hand's impact on access to justice was shared with Chief Judge Janet DiFiore at a hearing in the New York Court of Appeals in remarks made by Sirrah Harris, the staff attorney at Legal Hand Crown Heights.

“The impact to our communities lies in our ability to do proactive and preventative work rather than the reactive work that is usually required of legal services attorneys. Legal Hand offices are able to focus on empowering and educating community members... As an attorney who has practiced in areas of housing, workers' rights, and consumer debt, I am well aware of the need for services that can help people find solutions to their problems before they end up in the court system... Legal Hand is an essential resource that helps keep people out of the court system through education and early intervention. Legal Hand has the unique ability to work with community members repeatedly and on an as-needed basis, to immediately address issues that come up and provide a range of resources to help people resolve the interrelated various issues that are often the compounding forces that lead to legal situations.”

Legal Hand further documented its impact in two surveys to measure visitors' experiences at Legal Hand. When visitors were asked to reflect on the impact of Legal Hand on the resolution of their issue:

71% of visitors reported that their issue had been resolved or was in the process of being resolved following their visit to Legal Hand.

85% of visitors agreed that Legal Hand aided the resolution of their issue.

93% of visitors agreed that Legal Hand gave them the information they needed.

In short, when visiting Legal Hand, a vast majority of visitors received assistance that either helped them solve their issue, or put them on the path towards resolution. In many cases, this meant helping to solve issues before they required court involvement. However not all cases can avoid court involvement, and in these instances Legal Hand provided information on court processes, helped visitors gather documents, and provided referrals for appropriate services.

Visitors also responded to questions about Legal Hand's influence in specific areas of their life.

58% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their housing situation.

56% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their family's well-being.

32% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their employment or income stability. 58% indicated that Legal Hand had no impact on this.

73% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their feelings of control over the important things in their life.

79% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their feeling that they can deal with a similar issue in the future.

67% of visitors reported that Legal Hand had a positive impact on their feelings of nervousness and stress.

These results indicate that Legal Hand is successfully empowering visitors to cope with issues in their lives. Results also show that for over 90% of visitors surveyed, Legal Hand had a positive impact on their housing situation, family's well-being, and employment or income stability, or that the visitor had not yet seen any change in this aspect of their life.

Finally, visitors answered questions regarding the quality of service at Legal Hand.

98% of visitors agreed that Legal hand was a valued community resource.

98% of visitors indicated that they would return to Legal Hand for future advice.

95% of visitors said that they felt respected and welcomed during their visit.

93% of visitors felt that the information they received was clearly explained.

Legal Hand is creating an environment where visitors can come to receive quality information in a welcoming and accessible space. Over the past year, Legal Hand has expanded its ability to serve a high volume of visitors while continuing to provide high quality services. Legal Hand offices seek to make the visitors feel as comfortable as possible, and even provide refreshments and a public computer to visitors waiting to speak with a volunteer. Similarly, Legal Hand volunteers spend time getting to know visitors, and listening to their issues so that they can provide the best help possible. On average, volunteers spend 30 minutes with each visitor, but sometimes visits can go longer depending on the visitor's needs.

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

In its second year of operation, Legal Hand has continued working to help low-income New Yorkers with civil legal issues. Legal Hand has expanded its capacity to serve visitors one-on-one, and continued to form relationships with the communities in which they operate. Throughout the past year of operation, Legal Hand offices have seen over 9,000 visitors and hosted over 80 workshops. The increase in visits has accompanied a growing ability to provide consistent and high quality legal information and empowerment. By training community volunteers, educating community members on pertinent legal issues, and providing legal information on a walk-in basis, Legal Hand can try to resolve legal issues before they require court involvement. This is true not only because of the one-on-one help to address a specific issue, but also because Legal Hand gives community members, volunteers and visitors alike, the tools with which to cope with legal issues in the future.

During the coming year, Legal Hand plans to expand its reach by opening new storefront centers in the Bronx and Harlem. In addition, the current Legal Hand storefronts seek to continue the important work they are doing while developing and strengthening additional partnerships. Finally, Legal Hand is seeking to develop a new technology platform to better support volunteers in providing information to visitors, and expand their legal knowledge.

