

Lawyers Alliance Supports Nonprofits Serving Survivors of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

Our Equal Justice Works Fellow, sponsored by DLA Piper and Verizon, will prioritize expanding our services to organizations serving domestic violence survivors over the next two years.

In New York State, more than one in three individuals will experience abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime. In New York City, police file one domestic violence incident report every two minutes, and many additional incidents go unreported. Ninety-nine percent of survivors also experience economic abuse, which makes access to free resources from nonprofits and government agencies essential for their survival.

New York City nonprofits operate safe shelters and community centers focused on healing, empowering survivors to build safety plans, access counseling, and develop financial planning skills. Organizations working with survivors of domestic and gender-based violence are often overwhelmed by the demand for services, which means there are fewer resources and less time to devote to organizational and governance matters. Lawyers Alliance and our volunteer attorneys provide much-needed legal services to these organizations as they balance the needs of communities and simultaneous funding constraints.

Aligning purposes with funding goals to maintain transitional living programs

Nonprofits working with survivors are expanding their purposes in order to better serve clients through a variety of activities. Amending a nonprofit's certificate of incorporation can allow it to provide needed services and secure necessary funding from public sources.

Case Example: Diaspora Community Services

needed to amend its certificate of incorporation to facilitate the renewal of a government grant to operate a transitional living program called Mothers Gaining Hope. The program provides apartments to mothers in Brooklyn, serving as maternal group homes for pregnant or parenting runaway or homeless youth ages 16-21 from across the City. Residents receive case management services and counseling to assist with education and career goals, financial literacy, health education, healthy relationship development, and healthy parenting skills. These services enable residents to live independently by providing them with resources and skills to participate in the community as self-sufficient

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Photo: Diaspora Community Services

Diaspora Community Services provides a range of services at maternal group homes.

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adults. Diaspora Community Services received assistance from attorneys at **Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP** to facilitate the amendment process as required by its state funder, and it ultimately secured renewal of the grant to support this vital program for young mothers. “We are always grateful for the support of Lawyers Alliance who has worked with Diaspora for over 10 years in various important legal aspects. For this particular engagement, it allows us to further our mission in the community of empowering young people using a comprehensive youth development approach,” says Carine Jocelyn, CEO of Diaspora Community Services.

Creative strategies for generating revenue and securing services for clients

Nonprofits with excess or underutilized office space might consider subleasing or licensing an office or conference room to a third party for business purposes, so long as their leases permit it. An arrangement like this can be particularly beneficial when there is a synergistic relationship between the parties. If contemplating a sublease, Lawyers Alliance and our volunteer attorneys can provide legal assistance.

Case Example: The **Crime Victims Treatment Center** (CVTC) offers crisis intervention, individual and group trauma-focused therapy, legal advocacy, psychiatric consultation, prevention training, and community education. Volunteers from **Dechert LLP** finalized an agreement to sublease space within the organization’s office to a licensed

psychiatrist to provide on-site services for clients. The arrangement proved to be beneficial for both parties: CVTC’s clients obtained convenient access to a psychiatrist’s services and the psychiatrist gained space for their private practice. Amie Karp, CVTC’s Clinical Director, reports, “Our attorneys were responsive and helpful. And patient along the way when we hit hurdles. They got the job totally done for us. We’re very grateful.” Notably, the volunteers from Dechert helped make the agreement adaptable as a template for future subleases.

Protecting survivors’ privacy

It is important for nonprofits in New York to ensure that their website terms of use and privacy policy are regularly updated and compliant with relevant consumer protection laws. Statements explaining when and how an organization tracks visits to its website must be accurate, and privacy controls should work as described online.

Case Example: Founded in 1994, **New Destiny Housing** is the only organization in New York solely dedicated to the solution of permanent housing for survivors of domestic violence, the leading cause of family homelessness. After connecting through Lawyers Alliance’s Best Practices for Website Use Clinic, lawyers from **Covington & Burling LLP** volunteered to work with New Destiny Housing to revise its terms of use to appropriately disclose the organization’s current data collection practices and dispute resolution. This is particularly essential for nonprofits serving survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, especially as tech-facilitated and image-based abuse has risen. It is also important to update terms of use and privacy policies if an organization processes donations or registrations through its website. After updating the policies with help from Covington, Nicholas Lundgren, New Destiny’s General Counsel, says, “Privacy and data collection is a complicated and constantly evolving area, so we really appreciated their expertise and the expertise among their colleagues in their practice group at the firm.”

If your nonprofit supports survivors or advocates against domestic violence and is in need of pro bono business and transactional legal services, please contact Equal Justice Works Fellow Frances Tyler at ftyler@lawyersalliance.org.

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Photo: Crime Victims Treatment Center

CVTC staff members in the psychiatrist’s space.