



BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION A IMPACT REPORT

2018

*building communities, ensuring opportunity,
achieving justice, since 1968.*





My first year at Brooklyn A



Last summer



2018 was a big year for Brooklyn A—our 50th Anniversary. Our annual gala event was a historic occasion at which we celebrated everything we have collectively accomplished over a half century—a testament to the resilience of our organization and the communities we serve.

We believe the phrase “*We Represent Resilience*” captures not only the core of our mission over the past 50 years, but also the focus of our current work and the spirit upon which we plan our future. *We Represent Resilience* through our Consumer & Economic Advocacy Program, which represents homeowners facing foreclosure so that they can retain one of their most valuable assets, their home and low-to moderate-income individuals that have tax disputes with the State of New York or the IRS. *We Represent Resilience* through our Preserving Affordable Housing Program, which represents individuals and groups of tenants facing eviction or harassment by a landlord and larger displacement and gentrification pressures. *We Represent Resilience* through our Community & Economic Development Program, which provides legal services to

community-based organizations and community development corporations working toward social and economic justice, as well as to small businesses that are integral to the fabric of their communities and function as important economic engines for immigrants, women, and people of color.

As Brooklyn A’s new Executive Director, it has been especially meaningful to assume this role during our 50th year. The transition from former Co-Executive Directors, Marty Needelman and Paul Acinapura, to me is a historic, generational change in leadership for Brooklyn A. I am also the first woman to serve as the organization’s Executive Director, and I am proud to have a diverse leadership team and staff that embrace and are committed to our mission and the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our greatest assets are our staff and long-term commitment to and relationship with the communities we serve. I have been honored to serve as a staff attorney and as Director of our Community & Economic Development Program for the last 15 years at Brooklyn A, and I look forward to shining a light on the work of our staff and volunteers and to continue to advocate for our clients in this new capacity.

Though the communities we serve are facing the daunting forces of gentrification, displacement, harassment, and lack of services, they, together with our close to 60 staff members, refuse to give in and will continue to fight for their right to survive and thrive.

Brooklyn A has deeply impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals from its founding in 1968 through 2018, and we remain committed to and focused on building upon this legacy and continuing to grow and evolve for the next 50 years ahead of us.

Sincerely,

Jessica A. Rose, Esq.
Executive Director



Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

Brooklyn A's mission is to **advance social and economic justice** and empower communities through innovative, collaborative, neighborhood-based legal representation and advocacy.

2018 BY THE NUMBERS

328,308

 lives impacted by Brooklyn A

55,000

 people reached through trainings and presentations

\$197,337

in federal tax liabilities recovered by the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

97

foreclosures prevented

2,305

evictions prevented

136

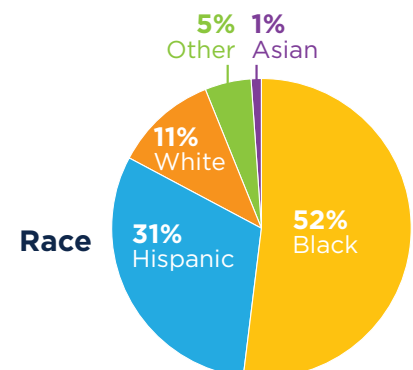
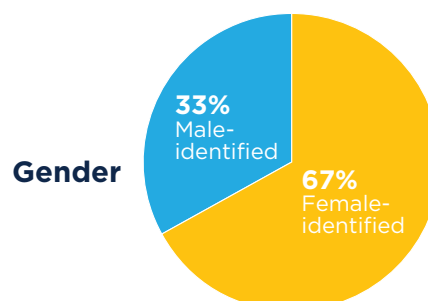
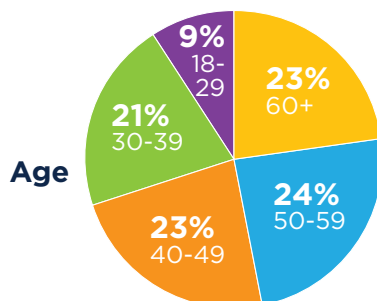
tenant associations organized and supported, involving over 1,900 tenants



375+

non-profit and small business projects supported

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



WHAT WE ARE FACING



HIGH LEVELS OF POVERTY

1.7 million of NYC's 8.5 million residents live below the federal poverty line.*

The 5th largest city in the country has 1.6 million residents.

* NYC Opportunity <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/poverty-in-nyc/poverty-measure.page>

GROWING INEQUALITY

Brooklyn's median income increased 14% from 2008-2017, but the poverty rate decreased only 0.5% in that time. The median income for white residents was \$66.4k in 2018, but only \$43.9k for residents of color.*

This indicates an infusion of people with wealth in the borough but no meaningful effect on eliminating poverty or racial inequality.

* <https://statisticalatlas.com/county/New-York/Kings-County/Household-Income>



EXTREME LACK OF TRULY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

44% of all New York households are rent-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of income toward rent. 91% of severely rent-burdened households (those paying over 50% of their income on rent) are low-income.*

These numbers mean that not only are people barely able to meet basic needs after paying housing costs, but that they also face challenges building savings and can face homelessness very quickly in the event of a sudden shift in income or expenses.

* Citizens Budget Commission; <https://ny.curbed.com/2018/10/12/17965416/nyc-rent-burdened-households-affordable-housing>

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Low-to-moderate income communities of color in NYC continue to face structural barriers when seeking financing from traditional banks — with many experiencing discrimination when applying for homeownership loans and small business development loans.*

The foreclosure crisis of 2008 and its causes have not dissipated and we are still seeing an alarming number of homeowners of color facing foreclosure.

* <https://anhd.org/report/black-and-latino-borrowers-locked-out-homeownership-new-york-city-new-data-and-analysis-shows>



THIS MEANS THAT LOW-TO-MODERATE INCOME RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR FACE INCREASING DISPLACEMENT DUE TO GENTRIFICATION AND OTHER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PRESSURES.

Our **Consumer & Economic Advocacy Program** provides vulnerable homeowners and taxpayers with legal services to protect economic equity and create stability.

WE PREVENT FORECLOSURES AND DEFEND AGAINST PREDATORY LENDING.

Our foreclosure prevention and bankruptcy work provides vulnerable homeowners throughout NYC, often seniors, with high-quality legal services to preserve and protect home equity. We defend individuals and families from discriminatory practices by predatory lenders, financial institutions, and home rescue scam artists.

“They helped me file for bankruptcy, which completely stopped the sale with hours to spare. Brooklyn A made it possible for me to keep my home.”

– Renee, foreclosure prevention client, Washington Heights

In 2018 we represented **266 homeowners** facing foreclosure and prevented a total of **97 homes** from being foreclosed. **One third** were homes owned by seniors.

We had a **100% success rate** in 2018, obtaining **positive resolutions** including loan modifications and using affirmative litigation in bankruptcies.



In Brooklyn, foreclosures doubled in 2017 with 827 homes scheduled for auction. In 2018, Queens had the highest foreclosure rate in NYC with 1,214 first-time foreclosures.

We have become the leading nonprofit in utilizing bankruptcy as a viable alternative to alleviate the foreclosure issues dominating the five boroughs. We are the only legal services organization in NYC whose foreclosure prevention practice includes complex bankruptcy cases as a means to resolve foreclosure matters.

WE RESOLVE TAX ISSUES WITH THE IRS FOR LOW-INCOME TAXPAYERS.

Our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic advocates on behalf of low-income and ESL taxpayers, providing individual representation and advice on an array of issues. For many working families, help from Brooklyn A often produces lifesaving cash infusions that can be used to pay for shelter, food, clothes, and education expenses.

In 2018, we helped **180 New York City residents** resolve their tax issues.

A woman's ex-husband controlled her money. After their divorce, she learned that the IRS was claiming she owed \$150,000 in liabilities through their jointly filed taxes. We helped her have the debt entirely removed as well as claim refunds that her ex-husband had hidden from her.

Our **Community & Economic Development Program** provides transactional legal counsel to non-profits and small businesses that sustain and empower low-income communities.

WE REPRESENT NON-PROFITS THAT SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS.

We provide transactional legal counsel to community based organizations (CBOs) and community development corporations (CDCs) in all 5 boroughs. This enables us to help our community partners create community-based health care clinics, schools, affordable housing and other critical services to our shared communities.

In 2018, we represented **64 non-profits** on **78 development and operation projects**, which impacted the lives of **267,986 individuals and families**.

At the end of 2018, we closed on a \$30 million construction financing for Make the Road New York (MRNY) for the construction of a new community center in the heart of Corona, Queens. The center will enable MRNY to serve thousands more immigrant New Yorkers each year and be a tool for the amplification of their extraordinary advocacy and organizing efforts. We represented MRNY on the land acquisition of the vacant lot 3 years ago and have been working hard with a large project team ever since on assembling a very complicated financing involving various governmental funding sources, private loans, new market tax credits, and private equity.



Legal support like negotiating leases, architect and construction agreements and representing clients in financial closings for expanded service spaces gives CBOs and small businesses a greater chance to survive on very tight budgets.

48% of New York City small businesses are **immigrant-owned**, and in some neighborhoods, small businesses employ up to **42% of the neighborhood population**.

Each month, **1,200 small businesses** close in NYC.

WE LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD FOR SMALL BUSINESSES.

Our Small Business Support Project, launched in 2017, provides small businesses throughout New York City with high-quality legal representation in all non-litigation matters pertaining to commercial leases. Through this program, we strengthen local communities by ensuring that small businesses have the support and guidance necessary to negotiate a fair commercial lease.

“Had we not had an attorney helping us in this way, we probably would have signed something very close to what was originally sent, which we now know would have been a huge mistake. In the end, we were able to negotiate significantly better terms and clarify many items that were unclear. We entered this new lease with confidence and the security that comes with knowing we had an attorney in our corner. We look forward to opening our new location this summer. Overall, a truly wonderful experience.”

– Amy, small business owner, My Little Village preschool, in the Lower East Side.

Last year, we helped small business owners with **over 300** commercial lease matters.

Our **Preserving Affordable Housing Program** uses litigation and advocacy strategies to preserve and protect affordable housing, prevent evictions, combat tenant harassment and discrimination, and ensure that tenants enjoy the right to safe and sanitary housing.

WE USE STRENGTH IN NUMBERS TO FIGHT FOR TENANTS' RIGHTS.

Our Group Representation Unit uses a unique blend of litigation and community organizing to partner with community based organizations deeply rooted in the neighborhoods we serve, assist tenants and community organizers in forming and representing tenant and shareholder associations, provide support to low-income housing cooperatives, and participate in community coalitions engaged with the struggle for fair and equitable housing and community development.

In 2018, the Group Representation Unit worked with **1,906 Brooklyn residents** to fight for their rights.

"We just want to live safe and be able to come home and enjoy our day with heat and hot water."

- Ermelinda, Group Representation Unit client, Bushwick

Ermelinda is a member of the tenant association member of the tenant association of 431 Bleecker Street who has lived in her building for nearly 40 years and is the sole remaining long-term tenant, as others have been forcibly pushed out. In recent years, as gentrification in Bushwick has risen and a notorious owner bought the building, Ermelinda and other tenants have been fighting harassment, discrimination based on race and disability, unsafe living conditions and unlawful eviction through organizing and litigation with representation from Brooklyn A attorneys and organizers.



The number of people experiencing homelessness in NYC has grown to over 76,000, a crisis fueled in part by lack of affordable housing—only 1.15% of units with rents below \$800 are vacant.

Housing code violations in New York City were up for the fourth year in a row in 2017. Landlords often withhold repairs or even create hazardous conditions to force low-income tenants from apartments so that they can raise rents to market rate or higher.

WE HELP PREVENT HOMELESSNESS AND IMPROVE PEOPLE'S HOMES.

The Individual Representation Unit preserves affordable housing for residents in public and subsidized housing, protects against illegal evictions, advocates for tenants with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence, and restores or obtains government benefits to ensure the ability of low-income community members to stay in their apartments.

Last year, we prevented **903 evictions**, which enabled **2,305 people** to remain in their homes in Brooklyn.

Ms. C is an 88-year-old disabled woman who is in a wheelchair and has dementia. She receives a Section 8 voucher and regularly pays \$188 a month in rent. Her landlord claimed she was late on her payments when she was briefly in a nursing home and began charging her the market rate (seven times the subsidized portion) and sued her. Brooklyn A attorneys helped her file a petition based on disability discrimination with the NYC Human Rights Commission, and after many months of complex litigation, the case ended with the landlord agreeing to waive all market-rate arrears and reinstate her subsidized portion, allowing Ms. C to keep her apartment.

WE CELEBRATED OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY ON NOVEMBER 1, 2018 AT THE MARRIOTT AT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE.

Over 400 elected officials, community members, Board, staff, alumni and supporters gathered to celebrate 50 years of advancing social and economic justice.

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

advancing social
& economic
justice since



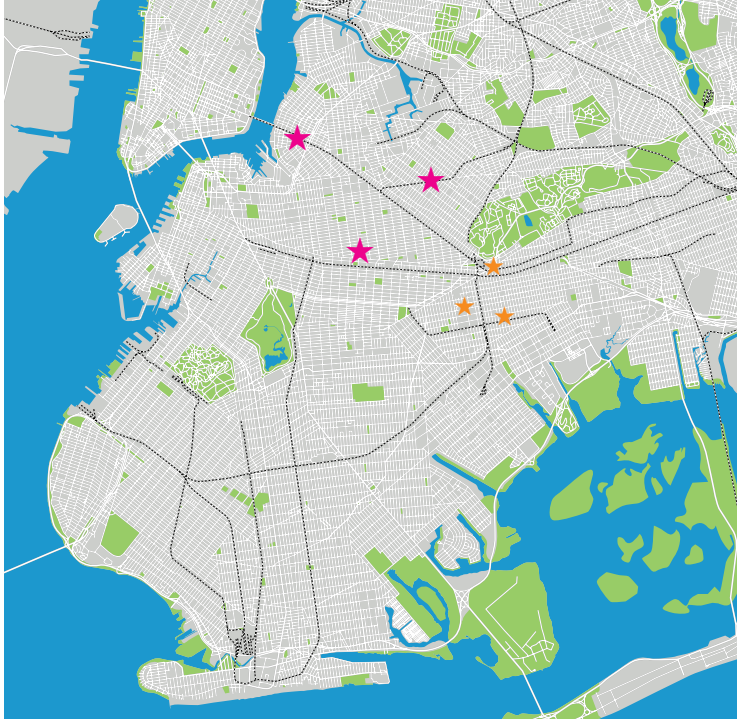
WE HAVE REPRESENTED RESILIENCY FOR 50 YEARS.

Paul Acinapura and **Marty Needelman**, two of our longest-serving advocates and former Co-Executive Directors, were honored.

Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP received the Pro Bono Appreciation Award for its contributions through the Externship Program.



50 YEARS OF RESILIENCE



OFFICE LOCATIONS

★current offices

260 Broadway
619 Throop Avenue
1455 Myrtle Avenue

★past offices

424 Stone Avenue
503 Pennsylvania Avenue
80 Jamaica Avenue

1968 Brooklyn A opens its doors during the War on Poverty. Then known as Williamsburg Legal Services, East New York Legal Services and Brownsville Legal Services.

1971 Marty Needelman joins the Williamsburg office as a Reginald Heber Smith Fellow after two years as a VISTA lawyer at Southside Mission. The director of the office is Cesar Perales, who will go on to found LatinoJustice PRLDEF and serve as the Secretary of State for New York.

1973 Brooklyn A attorneys Larry McGaughey and David Glasel represent tenant advocates in creating Southside United Housing Development Fund Corporation (Los Sures) and begin collaboration representing tenant associations in fighting slumlords and creating affordable tenant owned co-ops.

1974 Paul Acinapura joins the Brownsville office and begins representing community and parent leaders in the fight for the community's control of the Oceanhill-Brownsville schools and the establishment of one of the nation's first Head Start programs.

1978 *Williamsburg Fair Housing Committee v. NYC Housing Authority* is a landmark case

which successfully challenged the existing racial quotas of 75% white residents at the expense of non-whites, who made up over 90% of Housing Authority waiting lists in over 1,000 South Williamsburg public housing apartments.

1981 Paul Acinapura and Brownsville Multi-Service Family Health Center (BMS) convince the State—for the first time—to utilize tax-exempt bond financing thought to be reserved for hospitals only, in building a new, dramatically expanded, modern community health center for BMS, which would be capable of handling 50,000 patient visits per year.

1982 Brooklyn A assists in the creation of a private school in East New York, Bethlehem Baptist Academy, serving grades K-8 which we would eventually help convert into the Trey Whitfield School. Today, the school educates more than 500 young people each year.

1986 Rick Wagner, in conjunction with LatinoJustice PRLDEF, represents the Parents Association of PS 16 in the "Wall Case" against the Board of Education's attempt to create a segregated wing of a public school for the exclusive use of Hasidic Jewish girls from local Williamsburg private religious schools, ultimately leading to a unanimous US 2nd Circuit Court

of Appeals decision holding the approach to violate federal civil rights laws barring racial, religious and gender-based discrimination in the use of public funds and institutions.

1987 Brooklyn A attorney Lee McRae participated in the first pilot program of a homelessness prevention project through the HRA - EAF. The success of the program demonstrated that eviction prevention is a better solution to preventing homelessness than placing people in shelters. Brooklyn A was instrumental in the implementation and growth of the program which laid the foundations of Universal Access to Counsel.

1997 Hillary Exter works with Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) and community-activist parents in forming the Cypress Hills Community School (CHCS), a unique, parent involvement-based, dual-language K-8 school. Over the next almost 20 years, CHCS, CHLDC and Brooklyn A advocates for and negotiates its acquisition of a private parcel as the permanent site of the school and then for the construction and operation of the school by the School Construction Authority and Department of Education.

1999 Brooklyn A welcomes new community collaborators: the Brooklyn AIDS Network, the Community Health Care Network, an AIDS/HIV case management and support program, and the North Brooklyn Coalition Against Family Violence and has a robust comprehensive rights unit and domestic violence/family law practice.

2001 Rick Wagner launches Brooklyn A's first anti-predatory lending litigation, including complex litigation against the institutional causes of actors in such practices, that continues to the present day in the face of an ever-escalating number of foreclosures against economically marginalized homeowners.

2006 With Brooklyn A as counsel, Mobilization Against Displacement, a coalition of all major housing groups in Williamsburg-Greenpoint, forces the City to incorporate "inclusionary zoning" with a minimum of 30% affordable in relation to the rezoning of the waterfront, which results in the construction of over 10,000 new apartments, with market-rate units going for about \$1 million each.

2008 In response to the subprime mortgage crisis, Brooklyn A attorneys David Bryan and Ndukwe Agwu expand our foreclosure prevention services.

2015 Tamara del Carmen launches Brooklyn A's first Low-Income Tax Clinic to assist income-eligible taxpayers with Internal Revenue Service issues.

2017 Brooklyn A attorneys, representing the Broadway Triangle Community Coalition, win a landmark settlement which ensures housing developed around the site would be permanently affordable.

2017 Brooklyn A launches the Commercial Lease Assistance Program as part of its Small Business Support Project.

2018 Brooklyn A attorneys successfully represent a long-time neighborhood auto repair shop, putting an end to a landlord's threats and allowing the business to continue operating.

2018 The Group Representation Unit has established over 120 Housing Development Fund Corporation (HDFC) cooperatives in Williamsburg over its 50 years and continues to represent many of these HDFCs to this day. These co-ops provide affordable homeownership opportunities for low-income families.



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