Emily Chang
Summer Service Project Two-Pager

HER ◇ JUSTICE
Shift the Power

Her Justice is a nonprofit organization established in 1993 that works with the low income women of New York City. Their pro-bono legal model trains partner attorneys to assist women with immigration, family, and matrimonial law. 90% of the women that they have served are women of color, and 80% are survivors of intimate partner violence.

3%
Native American/Other

9%
White

9%
Asian or Pacific Islander

23%
Black

56%
Hispanic
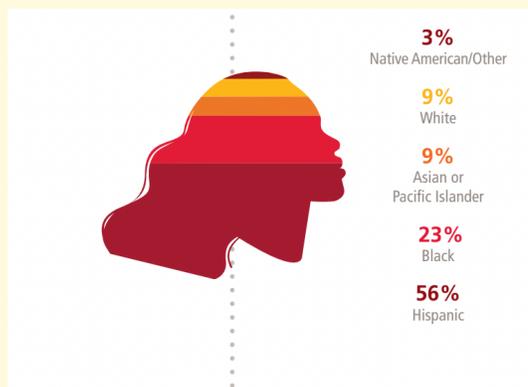
Figure 1. A breakdown of clients served in FY 2021

100%
OF OUR CLIENTS ARE WOMEN LIVING IN POVERTY

80%
are survivors of intimate partner violence

70%
are born outside of the U.S.

69%
are mothers
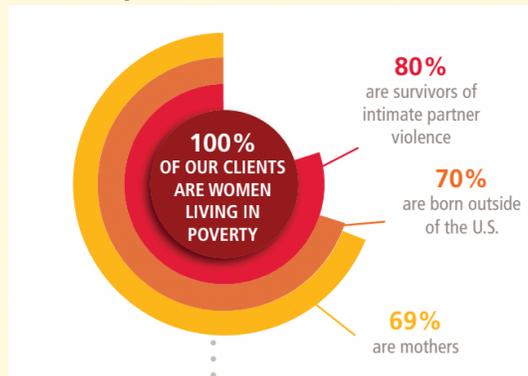
Figure 2. Further client demographics from FY 2021

The Her Justice Pro Bono Model trains New York City attorneys to specifically handle civil court cases for low-income women. This mentorship and training pushes their effectiveness beyond just a pro-bono quota.

> **In FY 2021, Her Justice Mentored 2,013 Volunteer Attorneys, representing over $40 million in value.**

Poverty, Race, Gender and the US Legal System

The United States legal system is not conducive to equitable or accessible legal care. The dimensions of gender, race, and income all intersect to make this especially true for low-income women of color.

- The Legal Services Corporation cites that 93% of Americans living below the Federal Poverty Line did not receive any or enough legal help in the past year in their civil court proceedings. With women comprising 56% of the low-income population, they are disproportionately affected in case proceedings.
- A Hague Institute for Innovation of Law conducted a 2021 study on over 10,000 adults, finding that men resolve legal problems completely at a rate slightly higher than women. The study also found that the most vulnerable communities at a disadvantage for their access to legal justice include lower-income, women, multiracial and Black Americans.
- The US Department of Justice identified task forces that concluded "pervasive gender bias exists against women litigants" in cases dealing with divorce, child support, and domestic violence.
- Legal aid services for survivors of intimate partner violence leads to 141% social return on investment. The overall income for women increases by $2.41 for every $1 spent on legal aid services.
- Both divorce and immigration law also rely on representation for improved success rates:
  - Only 5% of unrepresented deportation cases are successful
  - 86% of divorce cases with both parents represented lead to more ideal outcomes for families

Technology in Legal Services

A study by the University of California, Irvine has studied challenges within the legal services industry to support better technological integration. Some key suggestions include:

- Shifting away from a "one-size-fits-all" model towards more dynamic, customizable models
- A "bottom-up" approach to improve access to justice for the clients directly

The Center of Law and Social Policy similarly identifies three key ways for technology to serve the goal of equal justice:

- Program and Office Management
- Access to Information for Advocates
- Client Education

All graphs and images provided by Her Justice

Why Her Justice?

Community Commitment
Her Justice is highly intentional about the communities that they serve. They are transparent about the demographics of their clients, mostly serving women of color and survivors of domestic violence. 100% of their clients are low income.

Push for both institutional change and immediate relief
Her Justice goes beyond pro-bono services to also execute their policy agenda to advocate for changes within immigration, family, divorce, and intimate partner violence policy.

27% Outreach
48% Full Representation
24% Advice and Counsel or Brief Services
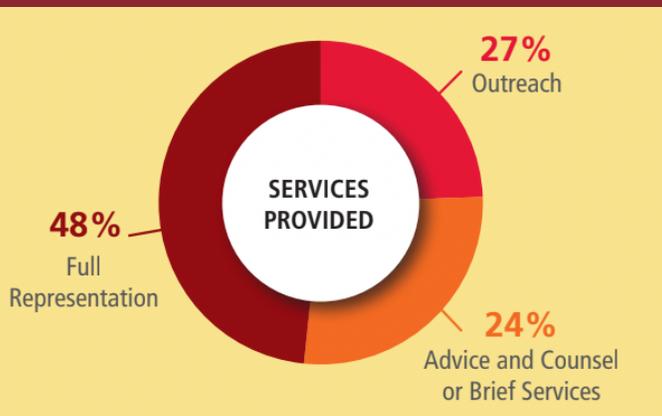
SERVICES PROVIDED

Figure 3. A breakdown of services provided by Her Justice in FY 2021

Project Breakdown

Research and Community Context Building
The beginning of this project was spent undergoing training and meetings with attorneys to understand the community this tool would be serving in addition to best practices for trauma-informed services. I also went through hundreds of pages of legal manuals to begin devising the content needed for the Client Case Navigator Tool. This was the step that was the trickiest and required the most willingness to learn and be corrected.

Interviews, Coding, Usability Tests
Then, I went through weeks of client and attorney interviews, usability tests, designs, content review, coding, and debugging to get the tool functional and intuitive for this community to use. I made sure to work with both clients and attorneys to ensure that the community this tool was meant for remained the priority.

Handoff and Sustainability
I finished the project by writing robust documentation, filming handoff tutorial videos, and conducting meetings with various legal teams to ensure a seamless handoff.

Project Description

Deliverable 1: Client Case Navigator Tool
The first deliverable I created was the Client Case Navigator Tool, an online web application for clients to understand more about how their case is being processed in the New York courts system. The tool I made consists of both a static timeline in addition to a dynamic quiz. With this quiz, clients can input information they have on their case to see potential reasons for delay as well as where their case might be in the timeline. This tool is meant to combat the knowledge gap and power dynamic between attorneys and clients to offer clients more agency.

(Mini) Deliverable 2: Accessibility Website Redesign
Through findings from usability tests, I also proposed a new set of best practices for the redesign of the Her Justice website to make it more navigable, intuitive, and accessible for Her Justice clients. The Her Justice website is rich with empowering resources, but it is hard to find them, thereby rendering them obsolete.

Scholar Impact
Her Justice currently struggles with attorneys not being as responsive to their pro-bono clients. This can be trauma and stress-inducing to these women during such tumultuous times. Through these deliverables, clients will have more agency over their cases. The attorney-client power dynamic will be lessened as knowledge becomes more accessible.

1. Berberich, Karen, and Nina Siulc. Why Does Representation Matter? - Vera Institute of Justice. www.vera.org/downloads/publications/why-does-representation-matter.pdf.
2. "Statistics: Hire a Divorce Attorney for the Best Custody Outcome." Statistics: Hire a Divorce Attorney for the Best Custody, www.custodyxchange.com/topics/research/divorce-custody-statistics-2021.php.
3. Teufel, James. Income and Poverty Status among Women Experiencing Intimate Partner ... onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lasr.12572.
4. UC Irvine Law Review - University of California, Irvine. scholarship.law.uci.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1489&context=ucilr.
5. Using Technology to Meet the Legal Needs of Low-Income People - Srln.org. www.srln.org/system/files/attachments/digital_divide.pdf.

All graphs and images provided by Her Justice