





# CARE AND EXPERTISE

THAT GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND



## LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

#### An enduring connection to home and community. Cherished moments with family, friends, and neighbors. The ability to live safely and with contentment.

In 2023, the individuals Project Guardianship served—older adults with cognitive impairments and people of varying ages with physical and intellectual disabilities—achieved these wins and more thanks to PG's multidisciplinary teams who routinely went above and beyond to support our clients.

People like Charlie\*, who has dementia and is legally blind. With the dedicated efforts of our case management team, Charlie beat the odds to win a housing lottery and moved into a one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, a vital step toward independence made easier with a home health aide PG secured. And Nadia\*, a retired home attendant and Russian immigrant who was able to return to her Russianspeaking East Village neighborhood following the death of her husband and a nursing home stay. PG enrolled Nadia in Medicaid, deep-cleaned her apartment, and instituted comprehensive care to allow her to thrive again.

With an unwavering commitment to justice that is the hallmark of the Project Guardianship model, our case managers, attorneys, finance associates, and benefits and housing specialists worked tirelessly throughout the year to improve the quality of life for our 200 clients. As we helped the individuals we cared for navigate serious conditions like Alzheimer's disease, traumatic brain injury, mental illness, and other disabilities, they were also emboldened to pursue their passions – playing dominoes, cooking up a storm, enjoying the company of loved ones and caregivers—while living lives of respect, joy, and dignity.

Indeed, dignity is an indisputable core value that informs our essential work and, on a broader level, unites us all in our shared humanity. Last year, PG once again exceeded our mission to protect and restore the dignity of New Yorkers our own clients and those we have never met whose names we will never know.

We succeeded by collaborating as a team to develop and leverage PG's internal expertise in Article 81 guardianship as well as in other areas we are keenly knowledgeable about such as health and human services, financial security, public benefits, education, communications, and coalition-building. With thoughtful planning, we established far-reaching new partnerships and increased our work in the areas of Training & Education and Advocacy, including advancing the goals of Guardianship Access New York (GANY), a statewide alliance of nonprofit guardianship providers and older adult and disability justice advocates.

Through these endeavors, we generated critical resources to benefit countless individuals in guardianship, concerned loved ones considering such arrangements, and a host of nonprofit organizations.

On the following pages, you will learn about a few such resources, including the groundbreaking Guardianship Prevention and Support Helpline, the first of its kind; research to advance alternatives to guardianship; and increased funding for nonprofit guardianship services like PG's for programs across New York State.

Together with our clients, partners, and funders, Project Guardianship will continue to cultivate an equitable society that validates and champions older New Yorkers and people with disabilities. As a proven leader on guardianship issues in New York, PG consistently goes above and beyond for the individuals in our care and the professionals whose expertise enables our clients to live with grace and dignity. We are immensely proud of all we have accomplished in 2023 and look forward to ongoing excellence next year and beyond.

With gratitude,

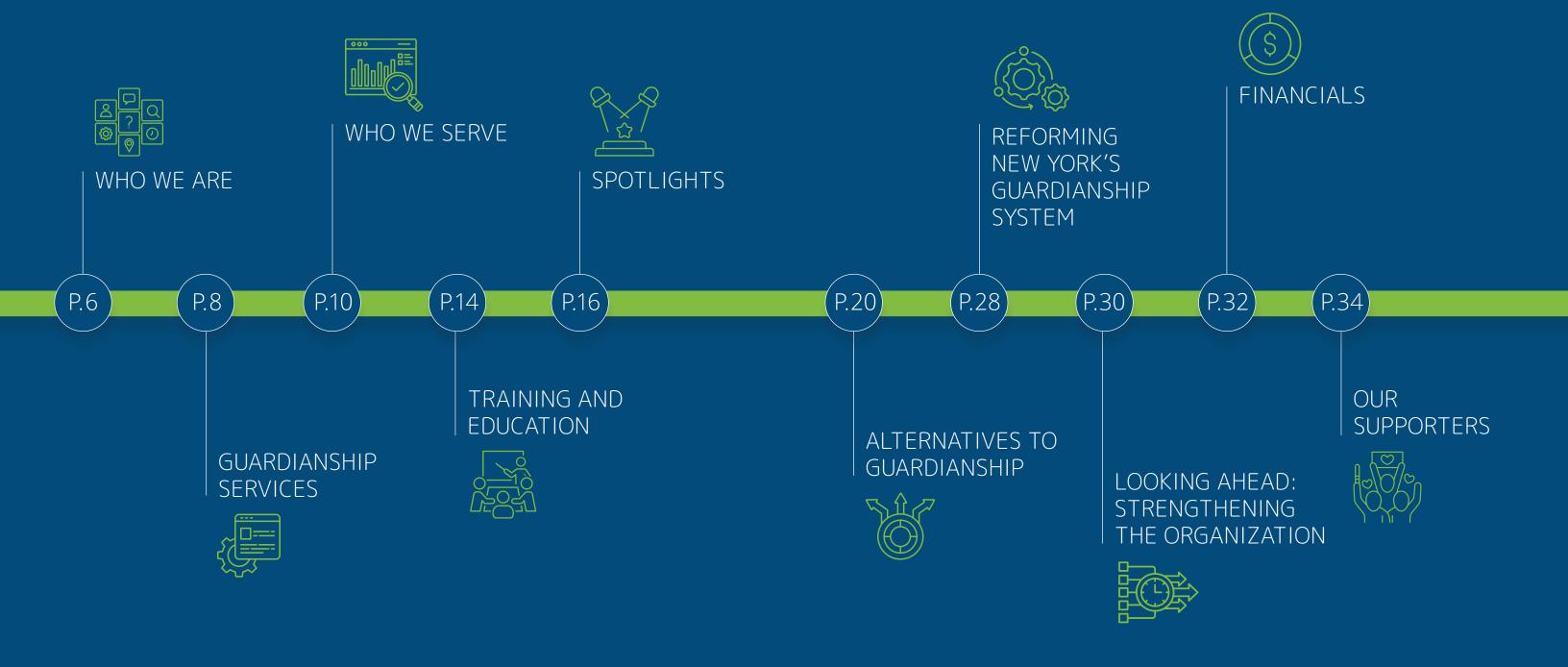
Loan Malin Kimberly Gorge

Joan Malin, Board Chair Kimberly George, President & CEO

<sup>\* &</sup>quot;Charlie" and "Nadia" are pseudonyms for Project Guardianship clients. PG maintains the privacy and protects the identity of, and all information related to, our clients.

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## WHO WE ARE

**Project Guardianship (PG) is dedicated** to delivering holistic, person-centered, court-appointed legal guardianship services, primarily to a low-income population of older adults and individuals living with disabilities.

Our clients often lack family or other forms of support required for them to live as independently as possible and, thus, are especially vulnerable to exploitation. We illuminate the existing gaps within the guardianship and elder services safety net, where financial and physical abuse are prevalent issues. We work on policy reform, prevention and access to alternatives, and advocacy to reduce the overall need for guardianship.





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## GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES



Being a case manager is significant because you are able to encourage, advocate for, and support those whose voices have been ignored or silenced. I take pride in that!

-SUTARSHIA JOHNSON, CASE MANAGER

#### HEALTH

We manage everything from Medicaid enrollment to doctors' appointments to end-of-life care.

#### SAFETY

We take steps to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our clients, wherever they reside.

#### **FINANCIAL SECURITY**

We manage income streams and weekly budgets and grow our clients' savings through investments. We keep our clients safe from financial manipulation and exploitation.

#### **DIGNITY**

We include our clients in decisionmaking to the greatest extent possible and structure our care around their values and wishes.

#### SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

We do everything we can to keep our clients in their homes and communities and out of institutions.













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OF CLIENTS MAINTAINED OR OBTAINED PUBLIC BENEFITS



## WHO WE SERVE

Project Guardianship takes a high-quality, multidisciplinary team approach to helping individuals who need court-appointed legal guardians. We employ lawyers, case managers, a housing specialist, a benefits manager, and finance associates to help clients remain safe, living at home, and as independent as possible.

Drawing on our direct service experience, we advocate for better policies and practices that impact older adults and individuals living with disabilities and mental illness, including Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia and other challenges.

Our programming and initiatives are aimed at providing education, training, and support on guardianship best practices and alternatives to the public, caregivers, families, and professionals. Through research, practice, and policy change, we seek to promote models that address critical needs for individuals, save public dollars, and allow key governmental institutions to operate more effectively. We educate decision-makers at the local, state, and federal levels about the current gaps in care, the growing population in need of services, and practical approaches for addressing that need.

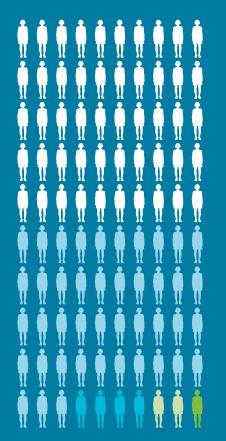
**↓** AVERAGE **→ MEDIAN**  **√** 65+



Gender

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#### Race



50%

43% BLACK

**MULTIRACIAL** 

ALASKA

HISPANIC OR LATINO OR SPANISH ORIGIN

39%



61%

NOT HISPANIC OR LATINO OR SPANISH ORIGIN

Ethnicity

LIVING WITH DIAGNOSED MENTAL ILLNESS OR **COGNITIVE DISORDER** 

LIVING UNDER NYC MEDIAN INCOME

LIVING BELOW FEDERAL POVERTY LINE OF \$14,580



**ENROLLED IN MEDICAID** 

#### Outcomes



(TOTAL 11 CLIENTS)

MOVED TO LESS RESTRICTIVE SETTING (INCLUDES MOVES HOME)

#### MAINTAINED IN COMMUNITY HOME



LIVING IN COMMUNITY



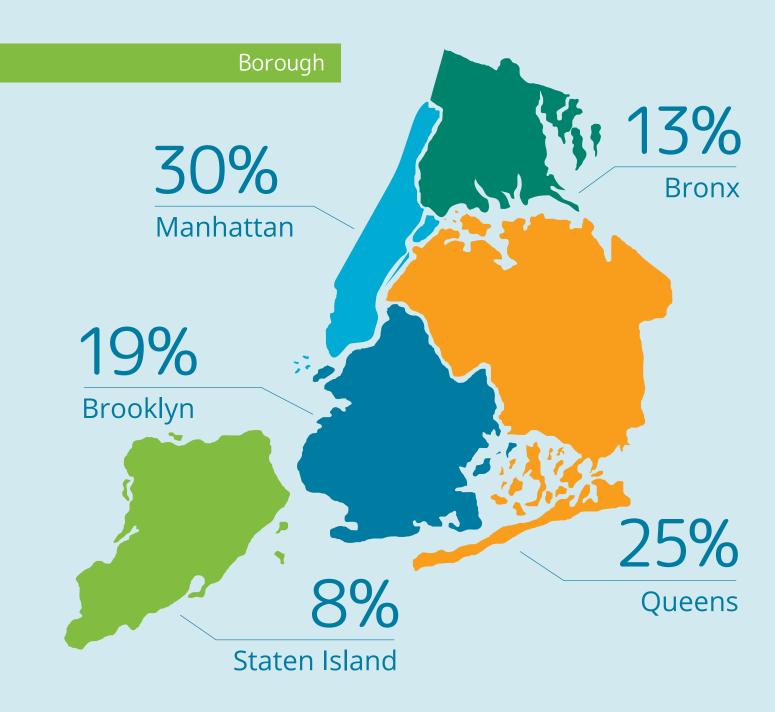
LIVING IN **FACILITY** 



REMAINED IN 48% COMMUNITY **FROM** LAST YEAR



**REMAINED IN FACILITIES FROM** LAST YEAR



3% Non-NYC

2% Unknown

### TRAINING & EDUCATION

In 2023, we expanded our training program and hosted other practitioners and leaders in the field.

### Training at a Glance



We conducted an interactive panel on topics such as advance care planning tools and their practical applications, end-of-life decisions and palliative care, and health care decisions from an elder abuse perspective.

**HEALTH CARE DECISION-MAKING** AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

We hosted a talk to help plan for crises and share specialized information on mental illness in older adults. The tools can help individuals engage in conversations before a crisis occurs, including identifying early warning signs and helpful coping strategies.

PREPARING FOR MENTAL **HEALTH CRISES** 

PG provided a Helpline presentation for leadership of JASA, a key agency serving older adults in New York City.

**JASA LEARNS ABOUT THE HELPLINE** 

This event was hosted by NYC Department for the Aging and PSS, a nonprofit serving older New Yorkers. In this session, PG covered Article 81 guardianship, who it's for, and the process for getting a guardian appointed by the court.

**ADULT GUARDIANSHIP** (ARTICLE 81)

### FEB

APR

JUL

AUG

NOV

#### **BRONX ENHANCED MULTIDISCIPLINARY** TEAM (EMDT)

We provided a guardianship refresher and information about new, relevant projects, specifically PG's Helpline pilot and the Office of Court Administration (OCA) guardianship webpage.

#### NYC CITY COUNCIL **BRIEFING ON GUARDIANSHIP**

PG leadership presented on guardianship basics, alternatives, and the need for funding.

#### NAPSA CONFERENCE (NATIONAL ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES ASSOCIATION)

PG led a workshop with Maryland State Court and National Center for State Courts (NCSC) on the guardianship process, alternatives and prevention, and the role of Adult Protective Services.

#### **UNDERSTANDING GUARDIANSHIP:** LIMITATIONS AND **ALTERNATIVES**

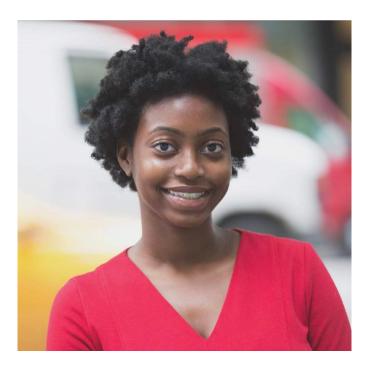
This event was hosted by NYC Aging and PSS, a nonprofit serving older New Yorkers. In this session, PG explored the complexities of guardianship, its alternatives, and tools for prevention.

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# SPOTI IGHTS

### PG's Internship Program



"The work at Project Guardianship intersects with areas I want to focus on in terms of advocating for people," exclaimed Flavian Philip, who gained vital experience this summer as one of PG's legal interns.

Flavian relished the opportunity to be part of a selective program that welcomes students from law schools throughout the New York area, including Brooklyn Law School, Cardozo School of Law, Seton Hall Law School, Fordham Law School, and New York Law School, where she is a "2L" (second year) student studying public interest law. Along with Flavian, three additional interns, Isabel Anthony (Cardozo School of Law), Lina Greenspon (Brooklyn Law School), and Anthony Schlass (Seton Hall Law School), spent their summers at PG.

At the suggestion of one of her deans, Flavian attended a public interest event at her school. It was there that Flavian was first introduced to Dre Cetra, one of PG's Deputy Directors of Legal Services, who oversees the internship program.

"I had never heard of guardianship before," Flavian recalled. "I found it so interesting!"

At the Public Interest Law Center (PILC) fair, hosted by NYU Law School, Flavian reconnected with Dre, who interviewed her and offered her the role. She came on board in June and spent her weeks handling any number of important tasks from conducting legal research for current client cases to drafting legal memos to attending court appearances with the legal team.

"The internship program provides law students with real-world exposure to the important work of guardianship and the role of advocates in ensuring that individuals under guardianship are receiving high-quality services," explained Dre.

Students receive academic credit for their internships, and PG works proactively to ensure the opportunity is accessible to all.

With her ultimate goal of becoming a civil rights attorney, Flavian felt drawn to the "intersectionality" of the work at PG, particularly its commitment to advocating for people who are marginalized by

At CUNY's City College, Flavian majored in philosophy with a minor in legal studies. A law professor, perhaps recognizing her potential to make a difference, urged her to consider law school. But her passion for doing good was ignited much earlier.

Beginning at just seven, she remembers spending Sundays working alongside her mother at local community service events in Brooklyn, helping distribute clothing, canned goods, and toiletries to adults and children in need. This experience undoubtedly shaped what will likely deepen into lifelong advocacy work.

Her valuable contributions to Project Guardianship have also made a meaningful impact, not only for PG but as a catalyst for Flavian's future career, which, by any measure, is full of promise.



The work at Project Guardianship intersects with areas I want to focus on in terms of advocating for people.



### A Fresh Start for Our Client



For decades, Dolores\*, a retired attorney and administrative judge, made her home in a gracious brownstone she owned in Brooklyn Heights, renting out several apartments for additional income. But her struggles with untreated mental illnesses, including a hoarding disorder, resulted in erratic behavior so severe her tenants eventually moved out, leaving Dolores alone in the cavernous building.

Because she had no family or friends to care for her and help maintain her brownstone, Dolores was in danger of falling through the cracks of society when Project Guardianship was appointed to be her guardian. Our expert team of case managers, finance associates, lawyers, and benefits specialists moved quickly to stabilize Dolores and her home.

Her problems were manifold. First, the brownstone had become a serious safety hazard because, over time, Dolores had filled nearly every inch of the space with her innumerable possessions. The property was also in foreclosure through no fault of Dolores. The victim of cruel exploitation, she had been duped into approving fraudulent contracts of sale for units in

the building. Thus, unpaid taxes had accrued, and the brownstone, neglected for many years, needed significant repairs.

Project Guardianship's legal team obtained pro-bono counsel for Dolores and worked with these attorneys to bring litigation against the individuals who had stolen from her. (Although a million-dollar judgment was won against the perpetrators, it is unlikely to be collected as one of the defendants disappeared.)

Next, PG worked to avert the bank foreclosure by nullifying the prior contracts of sale and restoring the property title to Dolores' name. Without renters or savings, Dolores would not have the funds to maintain the large brownstone, so the decision was made to sell the property.

To restore the building to marketable condition, we hired professionals to deep clean and declutter; resolve mold and water damage; and repair the boiler and roof. When the property was sold at auction, the proceeds of approximately \$1 million paid off the outstanding bills, utilities, and taxes that were in arrears.

Following the successful sale, the next priority was to find Dolores a suitable home. She wanted to remain in the same Brooklyn Heights neighborhood where she felt comfortable. We were delighted to identify a rent-stabilized apartment just one block from Dolores' former address. It took a full day and six staff members to carefully sort through her voluminous possessions.

Thanks to the mental health therapists Project Guardianship helped to put in place as part of Dolores' treatment plan, the impact of the massive clean-out was minimized, and the items important to her were safeguarded.

Although the move was challenging for Dolores, relocating so close to her previous address was vital to her adjustment and ongoing recovery. Her cozy new apartment is truly home sweet home. And with the ongoing support of her compassionate and knowledgeable PG care team, Dolores is indeed making the most of her new lease on life.



Knowing I can make a positive difference is the most beautiful thing that I take away from my job every day. I love knowing that step by step, I can help give people a better life.



<sup>\* &</sup>quot;Dolores" is a pseudonym for a Project Guardianship client and the photo attached is a stock photo (and not an actual photo of "Dolores"). Project Guardianship maintains the privacy and protects the identity of, and all information related to, its clients.

## ALTERNATIVES TO GUARDIANSHIP

### The Guardianship Prevention and Support Helpline

In June, we launched the Guardianship Prevention and Support (GPS) Helpline to provide free information and referrals to anyone with questions about Article 81 Guardianship and its alternatives. Our team of experienced attorneys takes calls from the public and professionals, offering resources and clarity on all stages of the guardianship process.

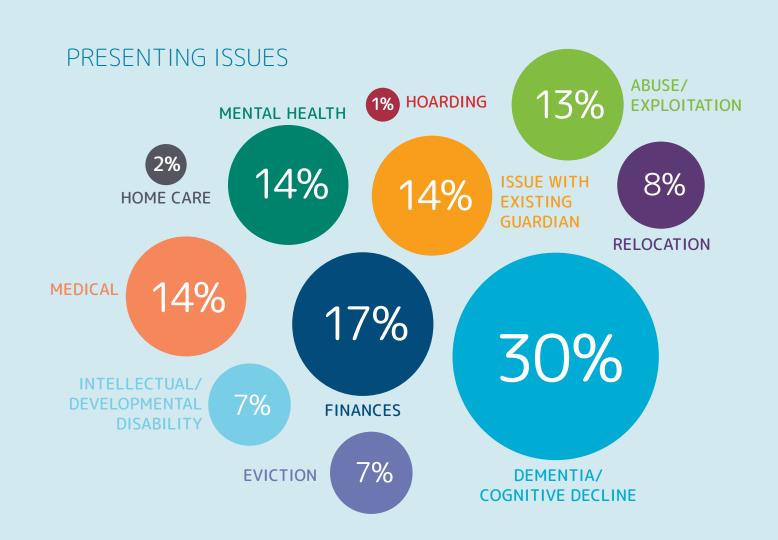
Since guardianship can interfere with a person's independence, we are committed to supporting individuals and families in treating guardianship as the last option. Over the course of six months, the Helpline was established as the only one-stop resource for comprehensive guardianship information in all of New York!

During calls, we assist the public with everything from general information about guardianship to navigating the court process. We also brainstorm ideas with loved ones and offer referrals to other organizations.

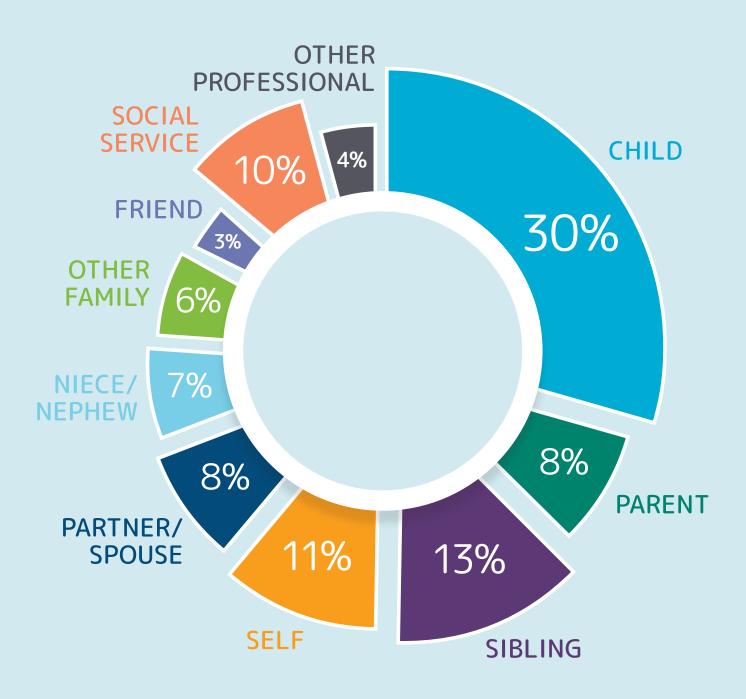


#### Here are a few Helpline highlights:





### RELATIONSHIP OF CALLER TO PERSON IN NEED



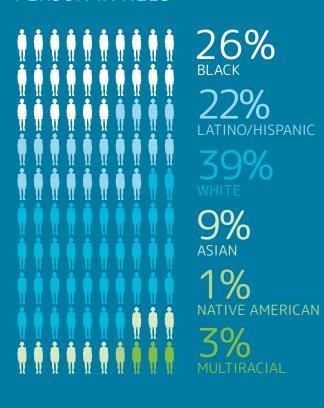




#### **GENDER OF PERSON IN NEED**

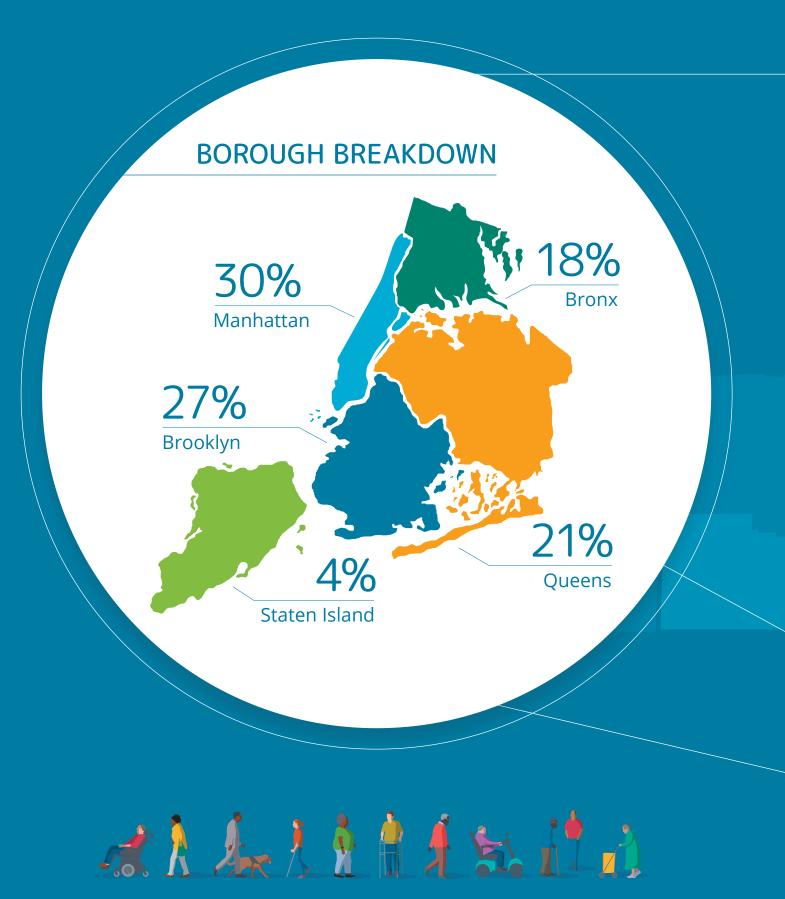


#### RACE/ETHNICITY OF PERSON IN NEED

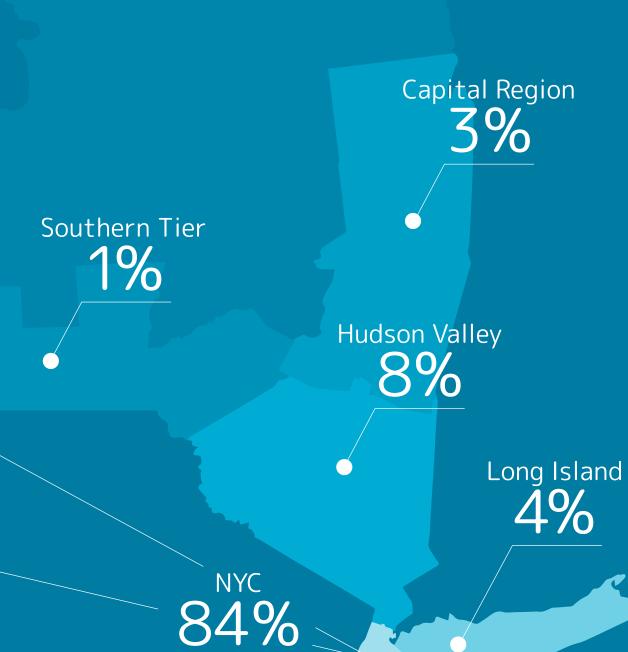


AVERAGE AGE OF PERSON IN NEED





### NYS REGION OF PERSON IN NEED



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## Decision-Making Supports for Older Adults

With the agin to experience that between

With the aging of the population, more individuals are expected to experience cognitive impairments. Studies have shown that between 17 and 22 percent of people 65 or older have mild cognitive impairments with rates increasing with age. It

is estimated that about half of those people will develop dementia due to Alzheimer's disease. As the older adult population in New York increases, so does the likelihood of cognitive impairments. While cognitive impairment doesn't always result in guardianship, the absence of other care plans and supports increases the possibility of such an arrangement.

In New York, guardianship has become a default solution for older adults who need help making decisions, including in cases where less-restrictive alternatives may suffice. Unfortunately, this ready application of guardianship—a legal tool that removes a person's ability to make some or all decisions for themselves and assigns this role to another person or entity—may have significant repercussions, including the accelerated decline of an older person's health and wellbeing. In 2022, a partnership was formed to understand, develop, and ultimately formalize decision-making supports for older adults as an

alternative to guardianship.



### PHASE I: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

With support from The New York Community Trust and The Borchard Foundation Center on Law and Aging, Cardozo Clinical Law Professor Rebekah Diller conducted a global environmental scan—including a literature review and interviews with selected academics, practitioners, and others in the aging services fields—to understand the prevalence of decision-making supports for older adults and the extent to which those supports have been formalized.

#### Several findings were noteworthy:



Even with significant cognitive decline, persons with dementia retain their values and construct meaning in their lives by reference to those values.



Due to the progressive nature of cognitive decline, persons with dementia require supports that move along a continuum—from independent decision-making to supported decision-making to, in some cases, substitute decision-making based on previously expressed wishes.



No supported decision-making (SDM) model for older adults has been operationalized.

By developing and testing an instrument and process that embed support principles throughout a continuum and document a person's values and priorities, we can move the work of developing a supported decision-making model for older people a big step forward.

#### **NEXT UP**

## PHASE II: TOOL DEVELOPMENT WITH OLDER ADULTS

Project Guardianship, together with special advisor Kristin Booth Glen and researchers from the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging at CUNY-Hunter College, is working with older adults to develop questionnaires that will help them consider the decisions they may need to make as they age and the support, and supporters, they may want to engage. With input from over 100 older adults, these questionnaires and accompanying recommendations will be made available for use by individuals, aging services practitioners, family members, and others.

## REFORMING NEW YORK'S GUARDIANSHIP SYSTEM

### Guardianship Access New York



In 2022, PG founded Guardianship Access New York (GANY), a statewide coalition of nonprofit guardianship providers and elder and disability justice leaders advocating for adequate state funds for personcentered guardianship, known as "good guardianship." In our first year, GANY pursued a \$15M appropriation to ensure access to information about Article 81 guardianship and its alternatives, as well as access to good guardianship services for any New Yorker who needs it, regardless of their ability to pay.

We partnered with state legislators to successfully secure a \$1M appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. This funding allowed us to expand our

Guardianship Prevention and Support Helpline and for local providers to increase nonprofit guardianship services in Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Wyoming, Monroe, Nassau, Suffolk, Bronx, New York, Kings, Queens, and Richmond counties. Importantly, the appropriation marked the very first acknowledgement of the state's mandate to provide a guardian to any person who needs one while simultaneously endorsing nonprofit providers.

We participated in various efforts to make our state a better place to age and live with disabilities. We sought out and actively participated in New York's Master Plan for Aging (MPA) process, serving on the Safety and Security Subcommittee and leading the Guardianship and Alternatives Working Group. We also joined U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's Working Group on Aging and were quoted in her Multi-Sector Plan on Aging.

### **Elder Justice Innovation**

In 2022, PG partnered with the NYS Unified Court System's OCA to improve our state guardianship system. Our goals included increasing access to court services for low-income individuals, those living with disabilities, and/or those who have limited English proficiency, and modernizing guardianship case

This work was part of a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living (ACL) to modernize and reimagine guardianship proceedings in New York State. The grant also included the development of an OCA guardianship webpage, which PG led. The website, which includes informational videos in a variety of languages, a glossary of guardianship terms, and a comprehensive resource guide for caregivers and guardians, will launch in 2024.







## LOOKING AHEAD: STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION

#### PG made incredible strides in 2023.

By emphasizing person-centered care and guardianship as a last resort, we continued to foster a culture that values the autonomy and selfdetermination of older adults.

We demonstrated that an age-friendly society works first to prevent guardianship, second to delay it, and third to guarantee qualified, person-centered services when all else fails. This approach is applicable to many areas of aging. From coalition-building and legislative advocacy to new programs and resource development, our strategy reflects the confluence of many broken systems that people experience simultaneously and acutely when they age and/or care for older adults.

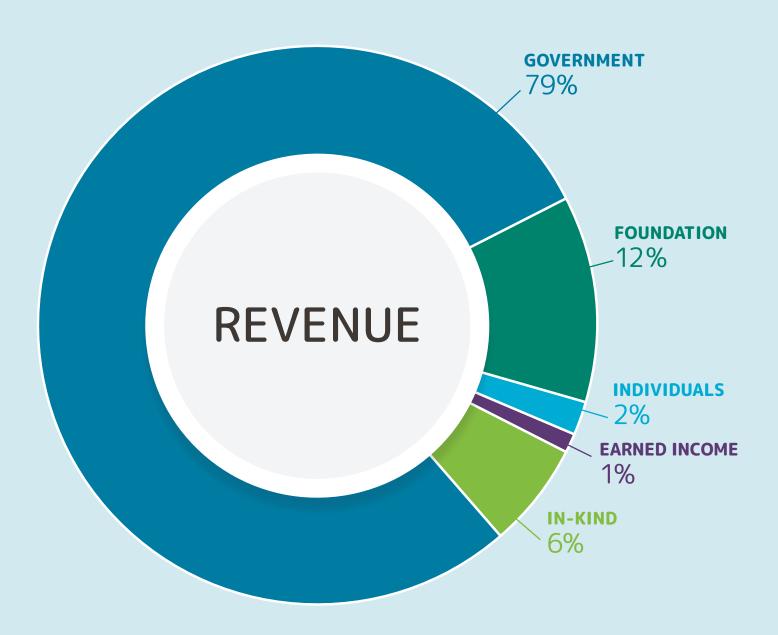
PG continues to successfully partner with fellow providers to achieve advocacy goals, build local capacity to serve people in their own communities, involve stakeholders in reform efforts, and create awareness to educate the public, policymakers, and professionals.

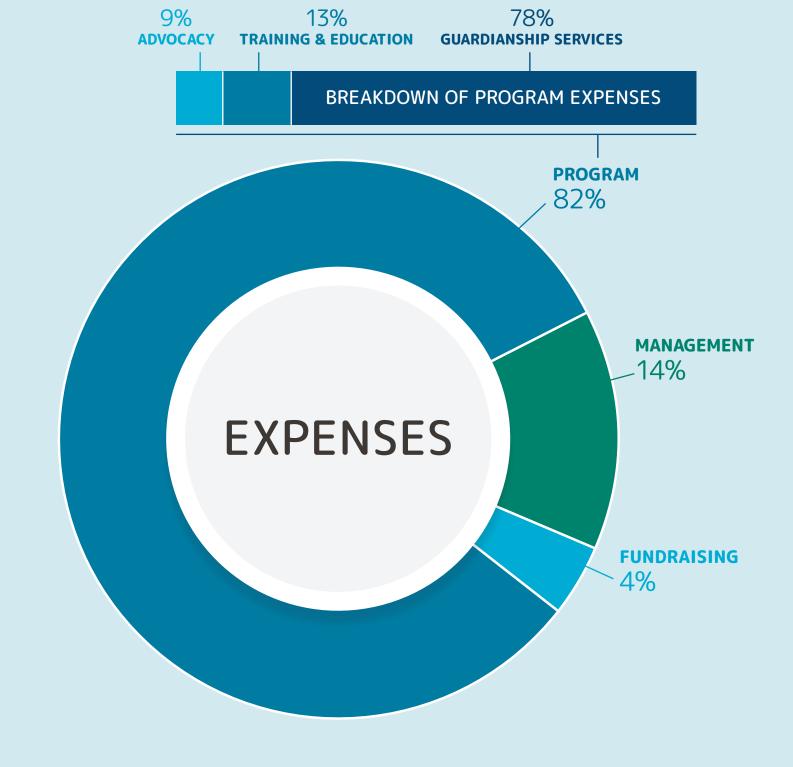
We move forward with the energy and commitment to improve the experience of those aging in New York.



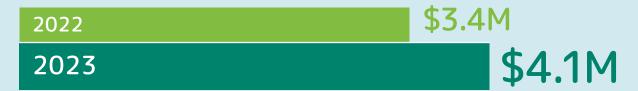
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## 2023 FINANCIALS





### ANNUAL REVENUE GROWTH





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## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

### Grants and Donations received in 2023

#### \$2,000,000+

New York State Unified Court System

#### \$1,000,000-\$1,999,999

New York State Office for the Aging

#### \$100.000-\$250.000

Anonymous

Fan Fox and Leslie R Samuels Foundation, Inc.

New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living

#### \$10.000-\$99.999

Anonymous Elizabeth B. Gilmore **New York Community Trust** NYC Council District 40 NYC Council Speaker New York Foundation for Eldercare

Tuttle Fund

#### \$1,000-\$9,999

Meredith Family Foundation

New York Bar Foundation

BankUnited

Janel Callon

**Gregory Klemm** 

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Franziska Laskaris

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Wendy Mackenzie

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Beth Schneider

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Lloyd Stanford

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#### \$500-\$999

Paul Casowitz

Blake Foote

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Jane Levine

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Kenneth Majerus

Shallini Mehra

Charlene Ray

Shaheen Rushd

Frank Schneiger

Jonathan Segal

#### Up to \$499

Jillian Allison

Anita Altman

Marisol Bakker Padilla

Ida Barak

Rebecca Barnett

Meg Barnette

Adrienne Bass

Abdias Berroa

Rich & Marian Boehm

Christel Brellochs

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Richard Koplin

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Robin Willig

Mike Zisser

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