



Equal justice starts here.

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



ABOUT LAF

If someone breaks into a family's home, an attorney is appointed to defend the intruder against jail time, but if a family loses its home because of an illegal eviction, they are on their own unless they can afford legal representation. If a man attempts to murder his wife, he's entitled to a legal defense. But if a woman is being physically and mentally abused by her husband, she is on her own unless she has the means to pay for an attorney.

Unlike in criminal court, Americans contending with civil legal problems have no constitutional right to legal representation, so people living in poverty are often forced to go without it. As a result, they're left susceptible to all manner of injury and exploitation—at the hands of landlords, abusers, scammers, employers, and government agencies, all of whom know how often low-income individuals lack an advocate in their corner. That's where LAF comes in.

For more than 50 years, we've provided free, high-quality civil legal services to the most vulnerable people in Cook County. In doing so, we've resolved critical legal problems and disrupted the cycle of poverty for hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans. Because of LAF, there are fewer trafficking victims trapped in dangerous situations, fewer children without special education services, fewer workers discriminated against for their race or their gender, fewer people denied healthcare, fewer seniors taken advantage of by dishonest contractors, and fewer immigrants excluded from American Dream.

In order to continue fighting for the most vulnerable members of our community, LAF needs your financial support. With your ongoing and increased financial support, LAF will keep providing the best legal help money can't buy.



NAME:

Betsy

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

RN License denied because of juvenile arrest record

WHERE SHE IS NOW:

Juvenile record expunged and working as a nurse



NAME:

Callia, and her kids Kira, Justin, Jaina, and Godwin

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

Evicted from their tiny one-bedroom apartment

WHERE THEY ARE NOW:

Safe in a new apartment big enough for everyone

NAME:

Tomás and Flor

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

Separated 16 years ago because of human trafficking

WHERE THEY ARE NOW:

Reunited on spousal visa



2017 was a year of change at LAF. In June we bade a fond but grateful farewell to Diana White who retired after 10 years as our Executive Director. In October, we enthusiastically welcomed John Gallo as our new CEO and Executive Director. The transition in leadership was seamless and John is bringing exciting new ideas and new energy to LAF. During this time of transition, one thing remained constant – the dedication of the LAF staff who work tirelessly to fight for the rights of people living in poverty. When you read this report, you'll see the impact the extraordinary staff have on their clients, but you also need to know that they could not do it without your financial support. Legal aid can make a huge difference in a family's life. Your contributions make that difference happen. Thank you sincerely.



Maja C. Eaton

Richard F. Klawiter

LAF Governing Board Co-Chairs

NAME:

James

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

Mistake on complicated form
for food stamp benefits

WHERE HE IS NOW:

Food Stamps restored



NAME:

Sarah and Ty

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

unable to get Ty the special
education services he needed

WHERE THEY ARE NOW:

Improving in school with an
Individualized Education Plan

NAME:
Nina

CAME TO LAF BECAUSE:

Fired when her child was sick and she missed an hour of work

WHERE SHE IS NOW:

Unemployment benefits kept her secure until she found a new job



Society, for good reason, recognizes as heroic those who, in service of others, are directly exposed to traumatic events. Any short list of heroic professions includes military veterans, police officers, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and other first responders. We regularly and justifiably honor these heroes for the sacrifices they make every day in order to ensure our safety and stability.

A few months into my tenure at LAF, I have quickly learned about a group of similar but unsung heroes: the LAF staff on the front lines of direct service to the poor and vulnerable. These unsung heroes each chose a career in legal aid instead of more lucrative available options, and have since lived with that economic decision every day. Every week, every month, and every year, they counsel ordinary people trying to escape an abusive spouse, prevent a wrongful eviction, stop an unjust foreclosure, defend against a fraudulent debt collector, obtain needed public benefits, or recover stolen wages. Our staff routinely succeeds, but even in the rare cases where they do not, they provide their clients a measure of dignity and a voice in our legal process. LAF staff do not just serve those living on the margins; they stand with them.

While our staff has not been directly exposed to our clients' trauma, the stories our staff hears from clients are told with such intensity and frequency that our staff cannot help but to assume some of their clients' feelings. They share their clients' fears, and dream their clients' dreams. The stakes in these cases weigh heavily on our staff. Yet every week, every month, and every year, they return to fight for the poor and vulnerable, to inspire hope, and to ensure that their clients' voices are heard in our system of justice.

Join me in telling the citizens of Chicago, Cook County, and Illinois about these heroes, and let's ensure that they are no longer unsung.

John N. Gallo
LAF CEO and Executive Director



LAF saved the homes
of **1,435 people**

*through preserving housing subsidies, stopping
illegal evictions, and preventing unfair foreclosure.*

45% of them are the homes
of **people with disabilities.**

Because of LAF's intervention
820 people are safer,
and have

workplace protections,
secure and safe housing,
freedom from abusers, and
immigration documentation.

HALF of them were **children,**
and **28%** were **immigration-related.**

LAF helped **3,074 people**
gain access to **work and education**

*by implementing special education plans,
preventing unfair expulsions and suspensions,
securing unemployment benefits and back pay,
documenting work authorization for immigrants,
and fighting workplace discrimination.*

**In 2017, because of LAF,
1,052 juvenile criminal records were expunged.**



LAF
clients
are:



87%
people of
color



59%
women



26%
disabled



24%
seniors



6%
veterans



100%
living in
poverty

In 2017, LAF's services had a
financial impact of
\$24,841,826

for our clients, in
gained assets,
increased income,
and decreased debts.

*In 2017, LAF
made equal justice a reality
for more than 30,000 people
across Cook County.*

KATHY'S STORY

In 2014, Kathy obtained an Emergency Order of Protection against her husband, who had been horrifically abusive to her for years. Though the Order of Protection forced him to move out, a few weeks later, the bank filed a foreclosure against her home. Without his income, she couldn't afford the mortgage on her own and didn't know how to manage refinancing it. When she came to LAF, she was desperate and afraid of becoming homeless, living on the street with her dog Molly.



A team that spanned LAF's practice groups took Kathy's case. Benna Crawford, a supervisory attorney in the Children & Families Practice Group, helped her secure a divorce from her abuser. Benna was able to get his name off of Kathy's home title, and secured additional maintenance income from him to help her make ends meet. Dan Lindsey, the Director of the Consumer Practice Group, got the foreclosure dismissed, and worked with the bank to develop a loan modification so Kathy could afford to stay in her home. LAF's social work team also worked with Kathy to make sure she was safe in her home and comfortable in court, even when her abuser was present. Together, they represented Kathy at a contested hearing for an Order of Protection, and won the house and its equity from her ex-husband. Benna received this note from Kathy, which says it all:

“Not even sure where to begin. I hope you realize LAF and you saved me. I really could not imagine what would have happened if it were not for all your help and everyone else's at LAF. I will always be indebted to all of you.

It has been a long road and I am sorry for that, but this was my future and I felt I had one chance at getting a life back and that is exactly what you did for me. Everyone there gave me a sense of security. I still have a ways to go with my emotions but I do feel I have become a much stronger person and now have self-esteem. All those things I was told about myself all those years from him I know are not true and that I deserve so much better than the treatment he gave me. The best part is being able to walk into MY HOME and not be afraid or nervous. I will never let anyone treat me like that again. I wish there was something I could do or give you to show my appreciation. If I can help one person the way I was helped it would mean a lot to me.

I do have to say one more thing; I will miss you and everyone else that helped at LAF. It has been almost four years and that is a long time to know someone. I respect what you do so much. Molly and I will be OK.”

Francisco and his wife Margareta are in their late 70s and speak very little English. Last winter, they called a company to repair their furnace.

A man named Jake from the company came out and agreed to fix the furnace for a price of \$1,000. He had Francisco, who is nearly blind, sign a document that offered him a discount to the \$1,000 rate. Francisco gave his credit card number, but Jake said that the credit card would not work, so Francisco gave a second credit card number. The next day, Jake and a few workers from his company came back. They brought more documents and, folding the paper over so that only part was visible, insisted that Francisco sign again. This time the amount was blank. Francisco signed, and the workers went downstairs to begin work. A few minutes later, Margareta went downstairs to demand a copy of the document that her husband had signed. She was given a copy which showed a charge of \$13,500. A few minutes later, she looked out the window and saw the workers loading their central AC unit onto their truck. This made no sense since the contract was merely to fix the heater. They also loaded the furnace on their truck. Frantic, Margareta called her daughter, who got on the phone with Jake and demanded that he stop all work. While Jake was on the phone with her, his workers drove off with the AC unit and furnace. They also charged \$6,000.00 onto Francisco's credit cards, and recorded a mechanics lien on the home for \$13,500.

That's when Margareta and Francisco came to LAF, and we helped them settle out of court. LAF got Jake's company to give them new heating and central AC units and repayments of the fraudulent credit card charges. Jake's company was also forced to release the mechanic's lien, so that Francisco and Margareta once again own their home outright.

Sometimes justice isn't a long-fought legal battle. Sometimes it's just holding contractors to the promises they make to their customers. LAF is here to make sure vulnerable seniors are protected and their homes, savings, and health are safe.





When Linda came to the Katten De Diego Legal Clinic, a monthly community-based walk-in legal clinic hosted by LAF and volunteers from Katten Muchin Rosenman, where clients get in-person legal advice and representation, she was seeking assistance with obtaining a divorce from her abusive husband, Carl. Alyse, an attorney at Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP who regularly volunteers at the clinic, took Linda's case pro bono and moved forward with the divorce, hoping to resolve the issue as quickly as possible by obtaining a default judgment. Since Carl was in jail and unlikely to appear in court, this should have been easy.

Before they could obtain that judgment though, Alyse and LAF received a letter from Carl in jail. It was a rambling, 4-page long document that accused Linda of abuse toward him, demanded money before he would agree to a divorce, and ranted about the attorneys representing Linda. Carl also sent correspondence to the presiding judge, which delayed the case further. On top of all that, based upon a technical issue in the criminal case against him for assaulting Linda, Carl successfully appealed his conviction in the criminal case and was granted a new trial.

"Linda desperately wanted to be rid of him," says LAF Staff Attorney Myka Held, who co-counseled with Alyse. "She was worried that he would come after her if he got out of jail." What's more, Carl planned to represent himself in his second criminal trial, which means he would be the one questioning Linda about his own violence toward her. Thanks to Alyse and Myka's hard work, the divorce was finalized at last, five months after the petition for dissolution of marriage was filed. Linda also put the prosecutor assigned to Carl's domestic violence case in contact with LAF so they could share information that will hopefully prevent Linda from being subjected to the trauma of being questioned by her abuser in court.

Linda's story reminds us of the difference legal aid can make in the lives of our clients, and demonstrates how vital our volunteer partners are as we work to increase access to justice. As Alyse puts it, "It is amazing to me the difference between the results for those who have legal representation and those who do not...that is not part of my understanding of how justice ought to work. I am trying, in this tiny way, to fix that for as many individuals as I can." Her help, combined with contributions from LAF staff and her fellow clinic volunteers, enabled Linda to make a break with her abuser and start a new chapter in her life.

Erika is an esthetician, a beauty skincare specialist who cleanses, exfoliates, waxes, lasers, and does make-up. She also is a voucher holder with the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC), under the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Erika uses social media to advertise her services and drum up business for herself and the beauty company for which she worked. When she left that company, she reported her loss of income to HACC, which then reduced her share of the rent. While unemployed, she provided esthetician services to her family free of charge, and also donated her services to low-income high school girls headed to their prom. She continued to post pictures of her work on Facebook, all with the goal of one day opening her own business.

When HACC discovered these posts, it moved to terminate her assistance on the grounds that she was running a business out of her voucher-assisted unit and earning unreported income. Without an attorney, Erika argued at a hearing against HACC's decision. She explained that she did not get paid for the work she was doing, and explained the purpose of the Facebook posts. She also submitted a letter from her landlord stating that he saw no evidence that she was running a business out of his rental unit. Relying on nothing but the screenshots from Facebook, HACC upheld its decision to terminate Erika's voucher. Unable to afford market rent, this devastating error would leave Erika homeless.



That's when she called LAF. Housing Practice Group Supervisory Attorney Michelle Gilbert challenged the decision and the court agreed. HACC restored Erika's rental assistance, and she is now safely housed and able to pursue her dream of owning her own business!

EVENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Each year, LAF sets time aside to honor our volunteers, donors, and staff who support our mission and carry our work. Pictured here, from top to bottom: Members of LAF's staff celebrated with pro bono partners at the Volunteer Appreciation Gelato Social in February; *Justice* (and a slider!) is Served by Governing Board member Doug Sanders in March; LAF Senior Attorney Ainat Margalit was the recipient of the Honorable Abraham Lincoln Marovitz Public Interest Award from Chicago-Kent Law School; LAF and Outreach Coordinator Dolores Cole were recognized as Program Champions for serving older adults at Rush Generations; client Lynkisza Sweezy told her story at LAF's Annual Luncheon in June; LAF won a landmark victory for 51 families who received U-Visas and the right to unionize; 60 major donors and supporters joined LAF for a night at the theatre to see *Hamilton: An American Musical* in October; members of the Young Professionals Board enjoyed a selfie at the YPB's Autumn Affair; and the superheroes of the Equal Justice League celebrated LAF's impact on #GivingTuesday in November.



After 20 years of dedicated service at LAF, Executive Director Diana White began her retirement in June with enthusiasm, and welcomed incoming CEO and Executive Director John Gallo.

After ten years as Deputy Director at LAF, Diana began her decade-long tenure as LAF's Executive Director in 2007. "There were so many things I wanted to do — not glamorous, but practical things. And this was my chance to do them," she explains. One of her first acts in her new role was to enlist a consultant to develop LAF's first strategic plan. She helped spearhead the centralization process from LAF's neighborhood office to one downtown hub, and restructured the organization into the five practice groups we have today. "Once people got down here, they enjoyed the chance to brainstorm and collaborate. The quality of the practice improved a lot." Another challenge Diana faced head on was the changing nature of legal aid funding. Thanks to Diana's leadership, LAF has built a strong donor base beyond government funding, particularly in the Chicago legal community. "Chicago has this amazing civic pride," she says. "I've lived in a lot of cities, but it's really something here."

John Gallo, Diana's successor, had been a partner at Sidley Austin LLP for 21 years. During his tenure with the firm, he served as head of the litigation group in the firm's Chicago office and as global co-leader of Sidley's white collar practice group. Before that, he served as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Northern District of Illinois. Throughout his illustrious career, John demonstrated a deep commitment to providing pro bono counsel to indigent criminal defendants and others in need. "When the opportunity to join LAF presented itself, I recognized immediately that it would allow me to follow my passion to provide a voice for those in need while helping an incredibly deserving organization continue to grow," John says. "I've always felt that, as a lawyer, I have a responsibility to use my skills to provide services to individuals that otherwise could not afford legal representation. It is an honor to be selected to lead the city's preeminent provider of legal services to people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups."

We are deeply grateful for Diana's leadership and wish her a stress-free, well-deserved retirement, and are looking to the future under John's leadership.



LAF STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended December 31, 2017

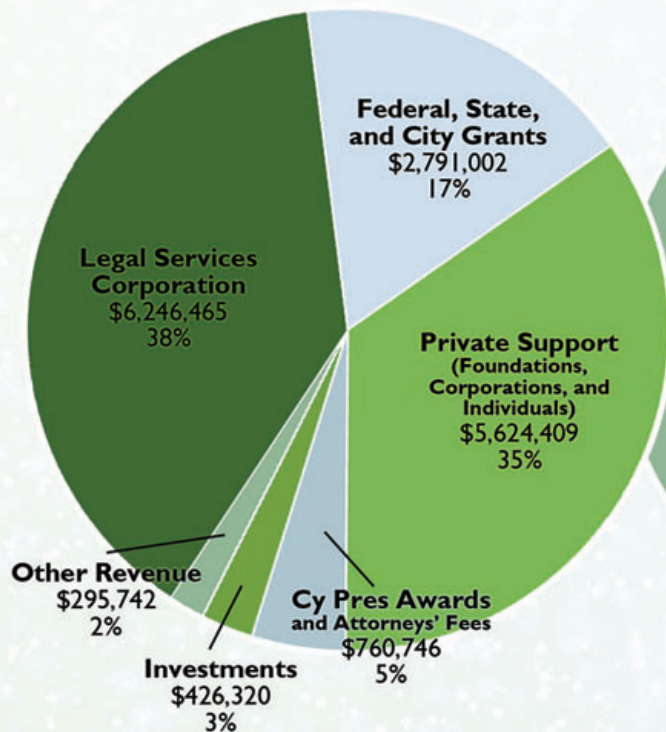
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total
REVENUE				
Grants and Contracts - LSC	\$ -	\$ 6,246,465	\$ -	\$ 6,246,465
Grants and Contracts - Other Government Foundations, United Way, and others	2,791,002	-	-	2,791,002
Contributions	1,248,230	2,976,708	-	4,224,938
Special Events	809,199	1,000	-	810,199
Cy Pres Awards	589,272	-	-	589,272
Attorneys' Fees	424,160	-	-	424,160
Interest and dividend income	-	336,586	-	336,586
Realized and unrealized gain on investments	143,608	6,658	-	150,266
Miscellaneous	276,054	-	-	276,054
Services, in-kind	136,811	17,914	-	154,725
Net Assets released from restrictions:				
Satisfaction of program restrictions	141,017	-	-	141,017
Total Revenue	9,208,713	(9,208,713)	-	-
	15,768,066	376,618	-	16,144,684
EXPENSES				
Program Services	12,682,420		-	12,682,420
General and administration	551,544	-	-	551,544
Fundraising	684,174	-	-	684,174
Total Expenses	13,918,138	-	-	13,918,138
		-		
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	1,849,928	376,618	-	2,226,546
NET ASSETS				
Beginning of Year	4,275,388	1,261,370	100,000	5,636,758
End of Year	\$ 6,125,316	\$ 1,637,988	\$ 100,000	\$ 7,863,304

Source: Certified Financial Statements

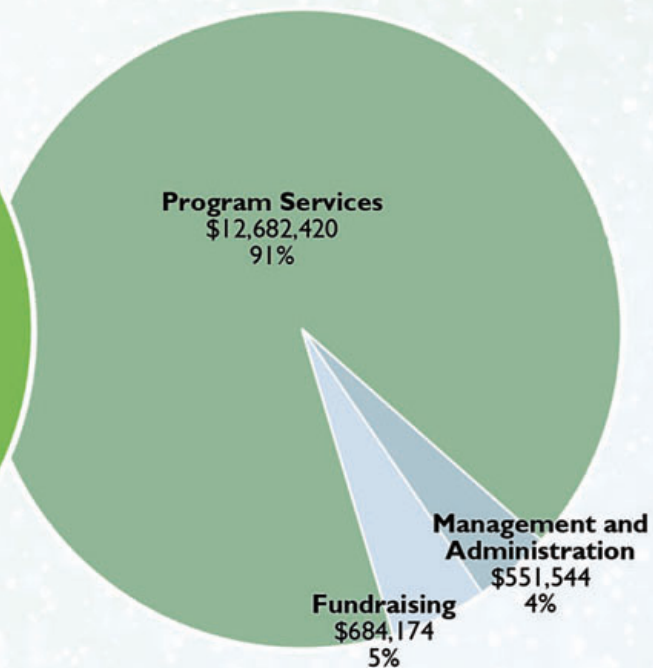
	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
Total Assets	\$ 13,052,703	\$ 11,231,450
Total Liabilities	5,189,399	5,594,692
Net Assets		
Unrestricted		
Undesignated	3,805,412	2,200,597
Board-Designated Endowment	2,319,904	2,074,791
Total Unrestricted	6,125,316	4,275,388
Temporarily Restricted	1,637,988	1,261,370
Permanently Restricted	100,000	100,000
Total Net Assets	7,863,304	5,636,758
Total Liabilities and Assets	\$ 13,052,703	\$ 11,231,450

Source: Certified Financial Statements

2017 Total Revenue



2017 Total Expenses



\$200,000+

AgeOptions
 Alphawood Foundation
 Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
 Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois

\$100,000+

The Chicago Bar Foundation
 Erie Family Health Center
 Kirkland & Ellis LLP Foundation
 Sidley Austin LLP
 United Way of Metropolitan
 Chicago

\$50,000+

Equal Justice Works
 Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP
 Polk Bros Foundation

\$25,000+

Baker McKenzie LLP
 Chicago Community Trust
 DLA Piper LLP (US)
 Equal Justice America
 Jenner & Block LLP
 Mayer Brown LLP
 Public Interest Law Initiative
 Robert E. Gallagher Charitable
 Trust
 Charles & M.R. Shapiro
 Foundation, Inc.
 The Retirement Research
 Foundation
 Winston & Strawn LLP

\$10,000+

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“I am proud to support LAF because it gives a voice to people in need, on fundamental issues like home, health, education, work, safety, opportunity. This is transformative work — truly changing peoples’ lives — and LAF does it exceptionally well. I give LAF my time and financial support, and invite you to join me.”

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“Kirkland & Ellis is proud to support LAF and the important work that they do. LAF's attorneys and staff work tirelessly to ensure that the most vulnerable residents of Cook County have equal access to justice and have their voices heard.”



BRIAN HAUSSMANN

LAF YOUNG
PROFESSIONALS BOARD
CO-CHAIR, AND
FOUNDING EQUAL JUSTICE
LEAGUE MEMBER

“Without LAF, thousands of our community’s most vulnerable members and their families would be denied meaningful access to our courts and would lose legal rights that are critical to their very survival. I am proud to support LAF’s essential mission of providing equal access to justice.”

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“I am extremely proud to support LAF and its tireless pursuit of equal justice. I had the privilege of volunteering at LAF and working side-by-side with its dedicated attorneys and staff. I saw first hand how LAF changed peoples' lives. It is critical that our most vulnerable neighbors continue to have free access to high quality legal services to break the chains of instability and have a voice in the legal system.”

We thank all of our generous supporters who help made equal justice a reality for more than 30,000 people in Cook County. However, due to space limitations we are unable to print the names of donors who contributed less than \$500.

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