



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Flexibility & Effectiveness During A Crisis



OUR VALUES

Legal Aid Chicago was founded on the philosophy that all individuals are entitled to quality civil legal representation, regardless of their income. We work to ensure that poverty is not an impediment to justice by dismantling the legal barriers that perpetuate inequality. Legal Aid Chicago staff live our mission through our core values of equity, excellence, inclusion, kindness, and respect.



EQUITY

- Proactively **removes** barriers to access for clients, considering short-term fixes & sustainable solutions
- **Acknowledges** how different identities influence and inform each person's worldview, expertise, and ability to access to justice
- **Asks** of others, *"What do you believe is best for you? What do you prefer and/or need?"*
- Openly **discusses** how they distribute the opportunities and burdens of the work across the team
- **Acknowledges** racial identities and injustices in pursuit of truth and improvement



EXCELLENCE

- **Listens** carefully to others, **spots** the issue beyond their primary concerns, and **strives** to holistically meet their needs
- **Asks**, *"Are we delivering the best results for our clients?"*
- **Reviews** own work product, and **asks** for, **incorporates**, and **responds** to feedback on work product
- **Admits** mistakes promptly to remedy them
- **Takes** initiative to see and respond to problems



INCLUSION

- **Seeks out** and **considers** alternative points of view from colleagues and clients, regardless of their position or rank
- **Asks** before making an important decision or policy, *"Who else needs to be consulted with on this, internally and externally?"*
- **Welcomes** and **accommodates** everyone, regardless of disability, identity, language, or preference
- **Makes an effort** to understand the work of colleagues, and appreciate the value that they bring
- **Recognizes** the contributions and successes of individuals across the organization



KINDNESS

- **Listens** to others and **acknowledges** their needs
- **Acknowledges** and **apologizes** when they have said or done something hurtful
- **Expresses gratitude** toward others, including when they offer help or support
- **Gives** people the benefit of the doubt
- **Asks**, *"How might these words or actions impact others?"* and considers all stakeholders



RESPECT

- **Acknowledges** the value of others' ideas and experiences, even when disagreeing
- **Demonstrates** an appreciation for others' time through punctuality & preparation
- **Invites** new ideas from all levels, statuses, and perspectives
- **Listens** without interruption to get the full meaning of the person speaking
- **Acknowledges** the decision-making autonomy of others

The staff and team at Legal Aid Chicago are used to challenges and combating the daily inequities that permeate our society. But nothing prepared us for the whirlwind brought by COVID-19. This year’s report will give you an outline of the changes that occurred globally and the way Legal Aid Chicago responded to the issues that arose.

JANUARY

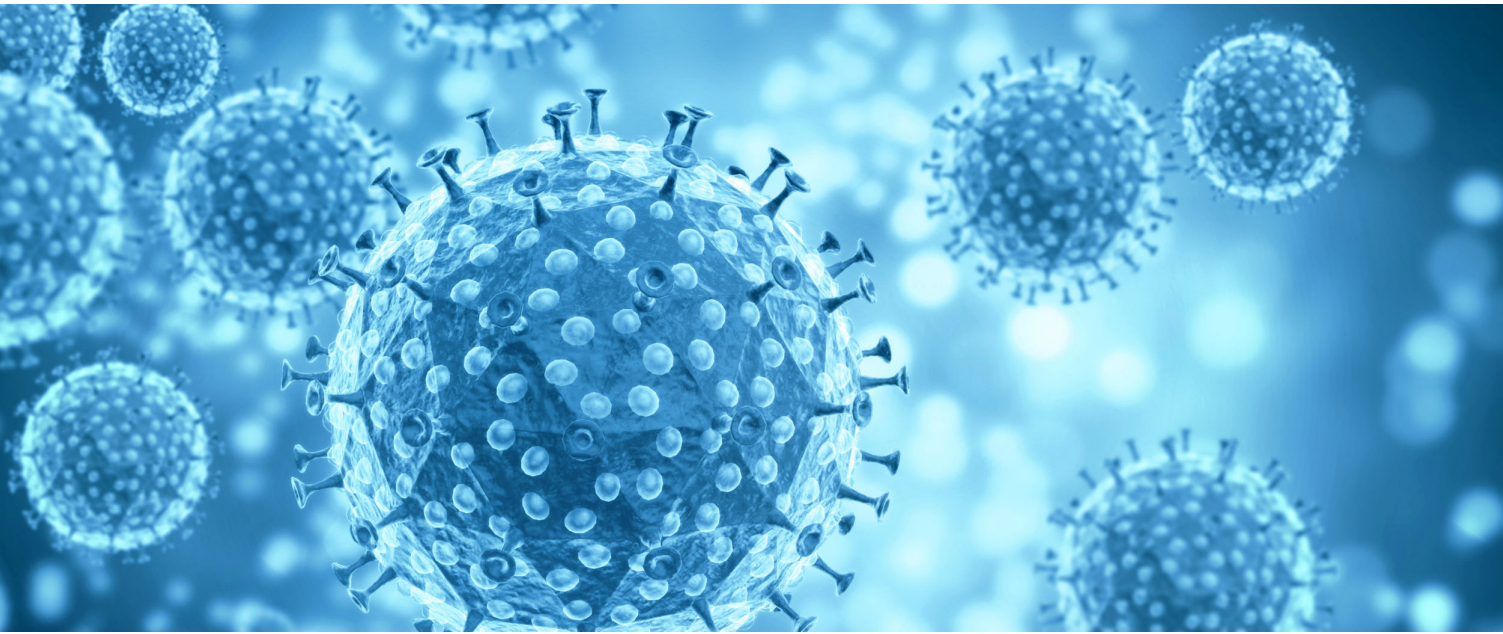


LEGAL AID CHICAGO LAUNCHES EXPUNGEMENT & SEALING PRO BONO CLINICS!

Our Volunteer Services Unit facilitated an adult sealing and expungement clinic on the 17th of January with 24 volunteers and 13 clients. These new “one day clinics” allowed Legal Aid Chicago to connect with law firms and companies in new ways and expanded our pro bono opportunities, while serving clients efficiently.



The World Health Organization (WHO) announced a mysterious coronavirus-Related pneumonia in Wuhan, China. A Washington state resident became the first person in the United States with a confirmed COVID-19 case. Illinois had its first confirmed case of COVID. WHO issued a Global Health Emergency.



FEBRUARY

US declared a public health emergency. CDC said COVID-19 is heading toward pandemic status.

Legal Aid Chicago Executive staff began meeting to discuss a contingency plan for a potential pandemic including an essential operations and IT assessment for working remotely and a COVID-19 Workplace Exposure Protocol was developed.



DANIELLE’S STORY: Danielle came to us after being sexually harassed by her landlord. She was living in her subsidized unit with her minor daughter when her landlord started asking her on dates, and told her to leave the door open for him to come in at night. Danielle declined his advances, and in retaliation he filed an eviction for nonpayment of rent against her, despite the fact that she was current on her rent payments. He said that the eviction case would go away if she agreed to have sex with him. We filed a motion to dismiss the eviction case, and the eviction case was dismissed and sealed. Danielle is excited, happy, and grateful that she can move forward with her life.





LOW INCOME TAX CLINIC

We received funding from the IRS to begin a Low Income Tax Clinic to help with IRS disputes.



M A R C H

WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic; President Trump declared COVID-19 a National Emergency.

VIRTUAL CLINICS

We moved our in-person pro bono clinics to virtual clinics where a client could videoconference with an attorney. If the client did not have the capability to videoconference, we offered telephone assistance.



In Illinois, Governor Pritzker announced statewide school closures and restrictions for public gatherings. The Circuit Court of Cook County announced a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.

Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, providing \$2 trillion in aid.



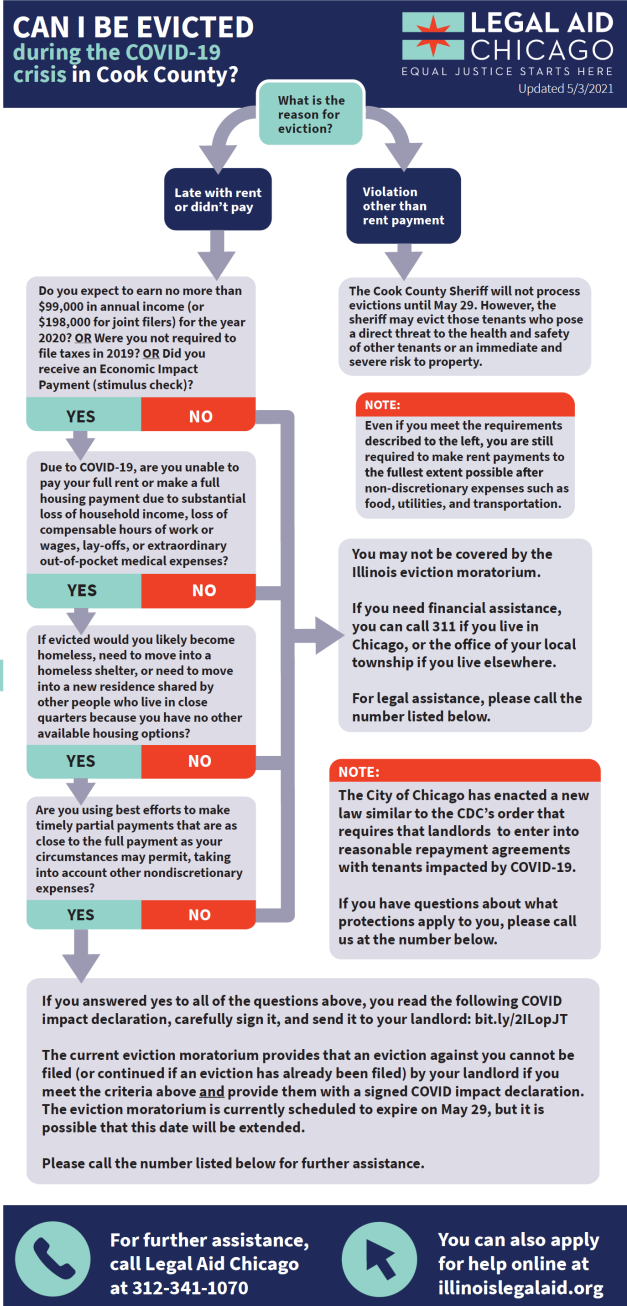
SERENA'S STORY: Serena came to us while living in a domestic violence shelter with her two children. Tony, her husband repeatedly hit Serena and the children, deprived them of food and medical care, and monitored them with cameras while he was at work. At the time, she had an emergency order of protection but Tony had recently filed a parentage case. We were able to limit him to supervised visits at one of our partner agencies while the case went on. During the Domestic Relations case, Tony repeatedly filed baseless motions to transfer custody to him, and made false reports about Serena to the Department of Children & Family Services. Eventually he stopped visiting the children, but he then demanded that the court award him custody of them, allow him to move them out of state, and grant him full decision-making authority over their lives. Tony's antics during the trial included claiming that our office got him fired, but this didn't deter Legal Aid Chicago attorney Myka Held from maintaining the dignity and safety of everyone involved during the trial. In addition to legal advocacy, Alexis Millo, our in-house social worker, got Serena and the children into counseling, helped Serena out with her SNAP benefits, and helped make sure she could keep a roof over their heads. In this case, like so many others, Alexis' ability to help our client meet these needs meant she could then focus on winning her case. Thankfully, the Judge gave Serena sole decision-making authority over the children; limited Tony's parenting time to 12 supervised visits per year, and increased the child support that Serena received.



TRANSITION TO REMOTE WORK

Legal Aid Chicago Staff began working remotely. Our Client Screening Unit was able to transition to remote work immediately. 65% of staff were given laptops with our network loaded on it – within a few weeks 100% of staff had laptops. A phone application was enabled that allowed staff to use Legal Aid Chicago phone numbers on their personal devices. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were established for external and internal meetings loaded on it. A staff rotation schedule allowing a very limited number of staff members to enter the workplace to distribute mail was created.

As soon as we transitioned to remote work, our case handlers communicated with clients regarding the status of our office and of their cases. At the end of the month we launched a COVID-19 Informational Page on our website. Our staff began proactively working with the courts, community partners, and clients to create informational pieces in English and Spanish, detailing changes and ways to access help and services. We prepared and posted information sheets on issues affecting our clients on our website and social media and sent them to community partners.





A WIN!

Thanks to a 3-year grant from HUD, we launched a Fair Housing Investigation and Enforcement Initiative that provides services to anyone facing housing discrimination. The program has a focus on combating sex discrimination in housing in Cook County, a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects women of color.

M A Y



Illinois hit 100,000 total cases.

J U N E



Illinois' coronavirus cases hit a nearly three-month low of 462 new daily cases, though shortly afterwards numbers began to rise again, hitting 143,185 cumulative cases by the end of the month.

J U L Y



Daily cases continued to rise, reaching 150,000 cumulative cases.



ANOTHER WIN!

In the early months of the pandemic, many domestic violence survivors were threatened due to expired Orders of Protection. One example was our client Maria, whose ex-husband began harassing her once her Order of Protection had expired. After she received another

Order of Protection, she appeared in court three times in two months to receive a physical copy of it, which she never received. She called the police to enforce the order, but they were unable to find it in Chicago Law Enforcement's Automated Data System. To get him arrested, she would need a copy of the order.

To remedy this widespread issue, our attorneys filed a complaint against Dorothy Brown, clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County. Two weeks later, the Judge issued an Order in response to the suit stating that Dorothy Brown's Circuit Court was obligated to provide Legal Aid Chicago, the sheriff's office, and any other Cook County petitioner with Protective Orders on the same day that they were issued. This was a tremendous win – now, our clients and other survivors will immediately have copies of their Orders to show to law enforcement to protect themselves from their abusers. They will now be able to rightfully access the potentially life-saving protections these Orders provide.



Melissa Picciola, our Director of Volunteer Services, and John Gallo are quoted in an article in the Chicago Tribune about the increasing need for legal aid as the result of the COVID crisis.

Chicago Tribune

Legal aid organizations strained by increase in pandemic-related cases, including domestic violence, unemployment claims

By ANTONIA AYRES-BROWN
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | MAY 11, 2020



ANTHONY'S STORY: In 2017, a Stroger Hospital Care Coordinator referred Anthony to our medical-legal partnership with Cook County Health. Anthony needed help in applying for Social Security disability benefits. He had been homeless for years, sleeping on the street, suffering from untreated serious mental illness and without a source of income. His initial application was denied so we filed a request for reconsideration, which culminated in a hearing in May 2020. After hearing his case, the Social Security Administration approved him for ongoing SSI benefits as well as \$22,950 in back payments. Thanks to this reliable source of income, James qualified for subsidized housing and was able to move into his new apartment.



LAN'S STORY: Lan was an 83-year-old woman who primarily spoke Cantonese. When her husband died, she moved in with her stepdaughter Dolores who said she would manage Lan's finances. Within three years, Dolores had drained all of Lan's savings—over \$250,000—and kicked Lan out. Virtually none of the money had been used for Lan's benefit. Lan came to us, and we filed an action against Dolores for breach of fiduciary duty, conversion, unjust enrichment, and common law fraud. The three-day bench trial was one of the first via Zoom, and Lan won a summary judgment of \$253,991, on all counts. We're grateful to have assisted Lan, and we remain steadfast in our efforts to help our aging population protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.

The Emerging Legal Crisis Facing Chicago's Black and Brown Communities
AN 8 PART WEBINAR SERIES



AUGUST

COVID-19 became the third-leading cause of death in the US.



WEBINAR SERIES

We launched an 8-Part webinar series on the persistent and new legal crises facing Cook County's Black and Brown communities. Over 1000 unique individuals attended these sessions – over 600 of them attending more than one session.



ABDU'S STORY: In 2018, Abdu arrived in the United States from Myanmar as a Rohingya refugee. He immediately began learning English and started working as a janitor in an airline club at O'Hare. Abdu was laid off due to COVID-19 and, with the assistance of a refugee agency, filed for unemployment. However, when the agency filed his application, they accidentally reversed Abdu's first and last name. As a result, his name did not match the name on his social security and identity documentation so the claim was denied. This simple clerical error created severe financial stress for Abdu, who was forced to borrow money to pay his rent. He was desperate when he came to us for help. Although we corrected his name, he was still denied his unemployment insurance. After three months of bureaucratic mayhem, Legal Aid Chicago attorneys worked alongside Immigrant & Workers' Rights Director Lisa Palumbo to represent Abdu at his hearing. In a matter of minutes, the administrative law judge addressed the error and apologized to Abdu for the delays in receiving the benefits in which he was entitled. He received his back benefits soon after!



RELAY FOR JUSTICE

Relay for Justice was launched. For two weeks hundreds of people walked, ran or biked and then tracked their activity in a Relay web portal. They virtually "stopped" in various cities that marked vital moments of justice and advocacy in civil law. Together we exercised, learned about those who fought for justice and raised money to support Legal Aid Chicago.



SEPTEMBER

A plan devised by HHS and the DOD aimed to make a COVID-19 vaccine free for all Americans, with the vaccine being rolled out in January 2021.



NICHOLAS' STORY: There is a law that states that those who apply for public assistance qualify for "all such benefits to which any person may be entitled except to the extent that the applicant expressly declines in writing to apply for particular benefits." In other words, if John applies for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, then John is also entitled to any other state-funded benefits, unless he declines those benefits.

In reality, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) requires people to specifically articulate the benefit they are seeking when they apply. If you don't name a specific benefit, IDHS will not evaluate your eligibility for it. This flips the law on its head, shifting the burden away from IDHS to the applicant. The result is that many low-income Illinoisans do not get the benefits to which they are entitled.

Nicholas did not specifically request a benefit called Aid for the Aged, Blind or Disabled Cash assistance so IDHS did not evaluate his eligibility for it. They argued that Nicholas' failure to check a box for this benefit was evidence of him declining the benefit. Our attorneys represented Nicholas, and the court rejected IDHS's argument, placing the obligation to inform applicants back onto IDHS, where it rightfully belongs. This ruling resulted in Nicholas receiving close to \$6,000 in additional benefits. Although the court's decision only applied to this case, Legal Aid Chicago attorneys are working to leverage the Court's decision and ensure that IDHS changes its practices so that they are in compliance with law.



OCTOBER

Global cases topped 40 million. Illinois reported 6,943 new confirmed cases on October 30, the highest mark since the pandemic began, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 402,401. The record was broken on the following day, October 31, with 7,899 cases.



NOVEMBER

Illinois passed 11,000 deaths and 600,000 cases.



SARAH’S STORY: Sarah was sleeping when her downstairs neighbor broke into her apartment. She woke up to him strangling her and attempting to sexually assault her. Sarah received treatment from Northwestern and obtained an emergency civil no-contact order. The attacker didn’t deny that the assault occurred and claimed that he was “blackout drunk.” Sarah did not want to move, but she also needed to feel safe. She came to us for help. The law provides that, under the Safe Homes Act, survivors of sexual assault can terminate their lease, but it does not provide mechanisms to ensure safety for someone who wants to stay. We worked with Sarah to craft a resolution that established that her attacker stay at least one mile away from her and that he receive mandatory therapy. Sarah also asked for and received a conversation with the attacker and his mother to address the sexual assault and how it has affected Sarah. If her attacker violates the settlement or is charged with sexual assault by another woman, the settlement is void and Sarah can pursue criminal charges. After entering the settlement, Sarah said that “a wave of peace” washed over her, and she felt that she’d received justice.



DECEMBER

FDA Advisory Panel granted emergency authorization of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine.



HOLIDAY VIRTUAL EVENT

Legal Aid Chicago hosted a virtual event honoring Lisa Madigan, former Illinois Attorney General, with the Champion of Justice Award and Legal Aid Chicago’s Senior Attorney Kulsum Ameji with the Jerold S. Solovy Award Winner. Governor Pritzker, Mayor Lightfoot, Senators Durban and Duckworth, David Axelrod, and Tina Tchen were among those who participated in the virtual event. During the event we also paid tribute to the late Tom Johnson and Leslie Jones, former Legal Aid Chicago attorneys who were tragically murdered in April.



HARRIET’S STORY: Shortly before Thanksgiving Housing Law Attorney, Kate Pannella, received an emergency case. Harriet had been forcibly evicted the day before and had spent the night in her car with her six children. Harriet’s landlord had succeeded in obtaining an eviction order despite the moratorium because they alleged she had caused plumbing issues that had caused severe property damage. However, Harriet had repeatedly reported the faulty plumbing to maintenance. Kate and attorney MacKenzie Speer got right to work and drafted a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and motion to vacate the eviction order and reinstate Harriet and her children in their home. The judge refused to recognize the situation and instead entered a briefing schedule which would keep Harriet homeless. However, Kate continued to negotiate, and the landlord agreed to reinstate Harriet’s tenancy and enable her and her children to return home – just in time to celebrate Thanksgiving.





MIGRANT FARMWORKERS CASE

During the afternoon of July 23, 2019, a helicopter sprayed toxic pesticides on migrant farmworkers working in Central Illinois cornfields, clearly visible in neon orange hats and backpacks. Two weeks later, many of those same farmworkers were again sprayed with pesticides, this time twice within a half-hour. The farmworkers, employed by Iowa-based Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc., included numerous teenagers, workers in their 60s, and a pregnant woman.



On Dec. 2nd, Legal Aid Chicago, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, and the Environmental Law & Policy Center filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Illinois on behalf of 27 migrant farmworkers. According to the suit, the farmworkers suffered acute poisoning after both events, including shortness of breath, blurred vision, painful eye and skin irritation, vomiting, headaches, excessive fatigue, and dizziness. Symptoms persisted for months, and some continue to this day. Five children were also exposed to the pesticides by coming in close contact with the farmworkers. The farmworkers sought damages for the harm they suffered and continue to suffer, and for harm to their children.

“No farmworker should be exposed to poisonous chemicals when doing their job, let alone multiple times in two weeks,” said Lisa Palumbo, Director of Legal Aid Chicago’s Immigrants and Workers’ Rights project. “Migrant farmworkers are some of our most vulnerable workers, who grow and harvest the food we eat. Their employer is obligated to ensure they are safe from pesticide exposure, and that they are properly cared for and provided truthful information if exposure occurs. This did not happen here.”

THE NEW NORMAL



Overall, in the last 12 months, Legal Aid Chicago closed 10,188 cases. These cases impacted over 18,000 people with a financial impact of over \$27,000,000.

Despite the challenge of operating in a COVID-19 world, Legal Aid Chicago adapted to our increased load of cases, disseminated critical information to our clients, and swiftly reconstructed our fundraising strategy. This reflects the tenacity and dedication that Legal Aid Chicago Staff continue to exhibit from year to year.



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CHICAGO

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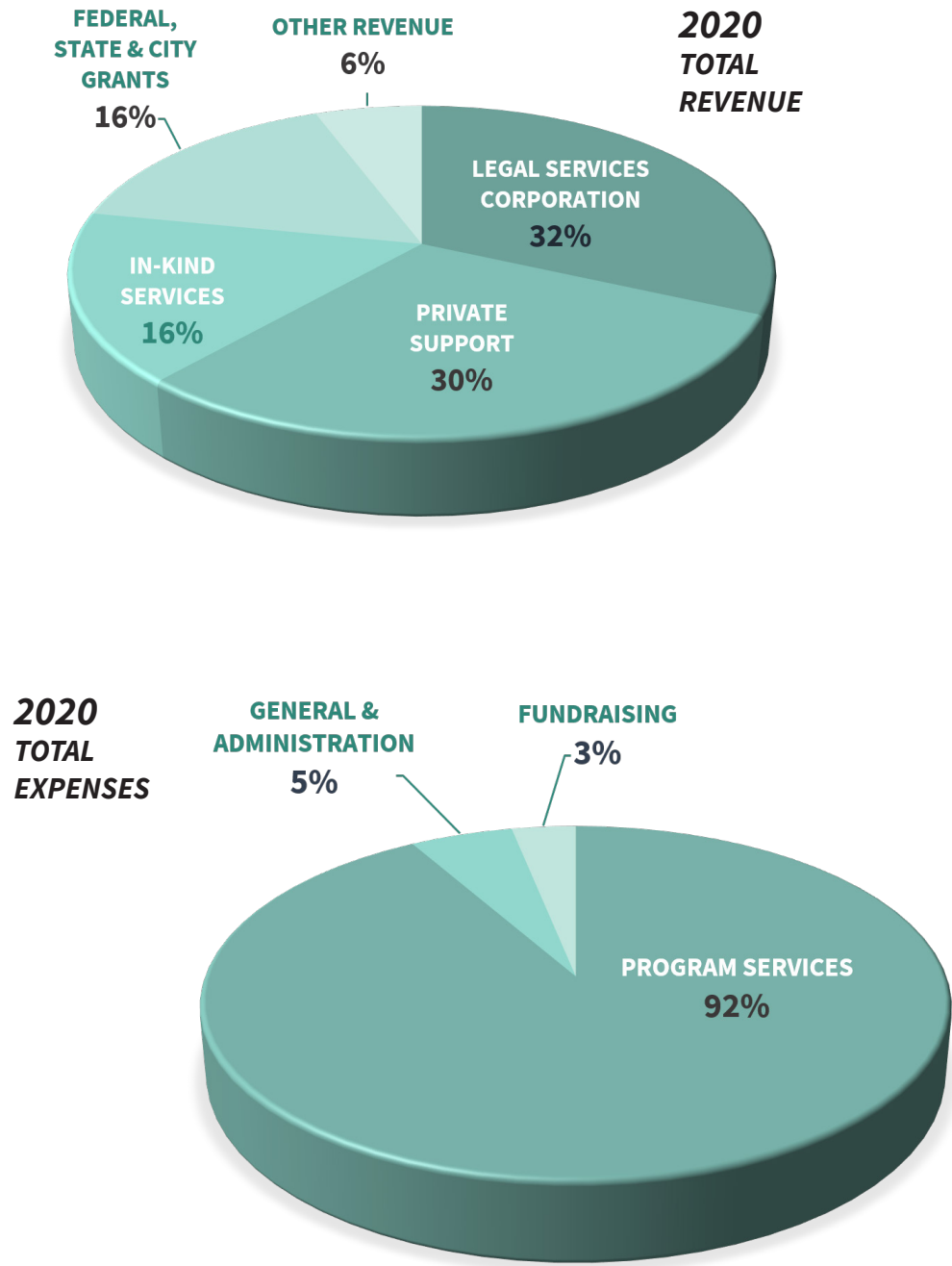
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FINANCIALS



LEGAL AID CHICAGO
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
REVENUE			
Grants and contributions - LSC	\$ -	\$ 5,725,523	\$ 5,725,523
Grants and contributions - other government	-	3,982,792	3,982,792
Foundations, United Way, others	831,643	2,693,218	3,524,861
Contributions	1,793,525	-	1,793,525
Special events	58,325	-	58,325
Less cost of direct benefit to donors	(9,717)	-	(9,717)
Cy Pres awards	84,562	-	84,562
Attorneys' fees	5,500	317,069	322,569
Investment return - net	433,629	14,184	447,813
Miscellaneous	160,792	20,347	181,139
Services, in-kind	2,828,757	160,768	2,989,525
Net assets released from restrictions			
Satisfaction of program restrictions	13,221,240	(13,221,240)	-
Total revenue	19,408,256	(307,339)	19,100,917
EXPENSES			
Program services	19,037,236	-	19,037,236
General and administration	1,065,505	-	1,065,505
Fundraising	661,910	-	661,910
Total expenses	20,764,651	-	20,764,651
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(1,356,395)	(307,339)	(1,663,734)
NET ASSETS			
Beginning of year - as restated	8,582,749	1,093,082	9,675,831
End of year	\$ 7,226,354	\$ 785,743	\$ 8,012,097

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

DECEMBER 31, 2020 AND 2019

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
CASH		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,941,474	\$ 3,832,194
Restricted cash - client deposits	152,355	324,352
Restricted cash - letter of credit deposit	750,000	750,000
Total cash	<u>6,843,829</u>	<u>4,906,546</u>
RECEIVABLES		
Grants and contributions receivable	1,884,092	2,210,321
Miscellaneous	333,389	194,403
Total receivables	<u>2,217,481</u>	<u>2,404,724</u>
PREPAID EXPENSES	<u>287,370</u>	<u>126,089</u>
INVESTMENTS	<u>2,747,874</u>	<u>2,579,739</u>
Total current assets	<u>12,096,554</u>	<u>10,017,098</u>
Noncurrent assets		
INVESTMENTS	<u>2,892,140</u>	<u>2,641,253</u>
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT		
Computer equipment and software	287,954	287,954
Furniture and equipment	1,024,329	1,024,329
Leasehold improvements	3,269,328	3,222,355
	4,581,611	4,534,638
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>(3,148,971)</u>	<u>(2,889,455)</u>
Net property and equipment	<u>1,432,640</u>	<u>1,645,183</u>
Total noncurrent assets	<u>4,324,780</u>	<u>4,286,436</u>
Total assets	<u>\$ 16,421,334</u>	<u>\$ 14,303,534</u>

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

DECEMBER 31, 2020 AND 2019

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Fringe benefits and payroll withholdings	\$ 56,112	\$ 49,465
Accounts payable	71,363	85,298
Grants payable	142,092	32,786
Deferred revenue	1,884,670	26,100
Deferred rent	459,848	431,970
Accrued vacation expense	684,356	450,343
Client deposits	152,355	324,352
Total current liabilities	<u>3,450,796</u>	<u>1,400,314</u>
NONCURRENT LIABILITIES		
Loans payable	2,190,900	-
Deferred rent	2,767,541	3,227,389
Total liabilities	<u>8,409,237</u>	<u>4,627,703</u>
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restrictions		
Undesignated	4,434,214	6,041,496
Board designated endowment	2,792,140	2,541,253
Total without donor restrictions	<u>7,226,354</u>	<u>8,582,749</u>
With donor restrictions	785,743	1,093,082
Total net assets	<u>8,012,097</u>	<u>9,675,831</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 16,421,334</u>	<u>\$ 14,303,534</u>