

ANG AMING MGA TINIG; ANG AMING KOMUNIDAD

SESLEKIMIZ,
TOPLULUGUMUZ

Наші голоси; наша громада

NUESTRAS VOCES;
NUESTRA COMUNIDAD

انٲاٲاوصٲا
انٲعٲاجٲا

我们的声音；我们的社区

Наша
голоса;
наше
сообщество

OUR VOICES;
OUR COMMUNITY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

NASZE GŁOSY;
NASZA SPOŁECZNOŚĆ

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NOSSAS VOZES;
NOSSA
COMUNIDADE

NOS VOIX ; NOTRE
COMMUNAUTÉ

我哋嘅聲音，
我哋嘅社區



LEGAL AID
CHICAGO

ام ٲعٲاج؛ ام ٲااااا



Our clients come to us speaking many different languages, so we offer comprehensive interpretation and translation services. In this way, our clients can feel comfortable talking to us. This annual report highlights many of the languages that our clients speak. The languages below are the top fifteen languages in a twelve-month period that our clients most commonly use:

Spanish	Mandarin
Arabic	Dari
Russian	Pulaar
French	Ukrainian
Polish	Hindi
Portuguese	Tagalog
Urdu	Cantonese
Amharic	Moroccan Arabic

We have used many of these languages on the front cover and throughout this report as a way to illustrate “Our Voices; Our Community,” which is the theme of this year’s annual report.

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Every day, our clients face complicated civil legal issues.

Their housing is jeopardized, their health and well-being are threatened, and the public benefits to which they are entitled are unexpectedly cut off. Unlike in criminal cases, there is no right to a court-appointed attorney in a civil matter. As a result, if people can't afford to hire a private attorney, they must navigate the complex legal system on their own.

At Legal Aid Chicago, we believe every Cook County resident, regardless of their income, should have an equal voice in achieving civil legal justice. We listen to our clients' challenges and work tirelessly to achieve their legal goals that are supported by the law. **Since our founding over 50 years ago, Legal Aid Chicago has taken a multidisciplinary approach to uplift our clients' voices and communities to promote long-term self-sufficiency.**

In 2024, Legal Aid Chicago's team of over 210 staff (including over 110 attorneys) impacted the lives of over 21,000 individuals and their families. Importantly, while our direct services help our individual clients, our impact also extends across all of Chicagoland. For example, our representation of one client in appellate court helped all Cook County residents by simplifying the process for survivors of domestic violence to obtain child support under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act. (You can read more about this case later in this report.)

We maintain a rigorous and comprehensive approach to understanding the ever-changing needs of the communities we serve. In early 2024, we published our first-ever Community Legal Needs Assessment (CLNA). The CLNA is an in-depth research publication that identifies the greatest legal challenges facing low-income Cook County residents and includes the voices of our community. Importantly, the CLNA also validates Legal Aid Chicago's service model and areas of focus, because we already provide legal services in all the most pressing areas of need.

Last year, Legal Aid Chicago continued to expand and deepen our comprehensive services, prioritizing the voice and interests of our clients in every step of their legal challenge. Our client-centered approach is exemplified by our Pro Bono & Community Partnerships Practice Group, which established over 100 partnerships with local community organizations in 2024 alone. These partnerships provide key referrals and allow us to maintain a deep connection to the communities we serve and an understanding of their legal needs.

We are proud to present this year's Annual Report: Our Voices, Our Community.

Legal Aid Chicago is determined to continue our commitment to our mission and communities across Cook County, despite the uncertain environment. We are deeply grateful for your interest in our work and invite you to read and learn about the programs, projects, and staff who make our mission a reality.

If you are already involved with Legal Aid Chicago, welcome back.

If this is your introduction to our organization, please consider this Annual Report an open invitation to join us, as there are plenty of ways to get involved.

With Gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kwshank".

KATHERINE W. SHANK
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virxhini Gjonzenele".

VIRXHINI GJONZENELI
2025 CO-CHAIR



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jm".

JARED T. HECK
2025 CO-CHAIR

2024 ORGANIZATIONAL STATISTICS

OUR IMPACT

14,500+



Individual legal matters handled (includes brief advice as well as extended representation).

\$25,000

Average financial impact per case with successful financial outcomes.



158,100+

Hours of direct case activity logged on individual client cases.

\$34,451,000

Total financial impact in increased assets, increased income, and decreased debt.



20+

Unique languages spoken by our clients

1,300+

Individuals whose health was improved by accessing health and nutrition benefits, including Medicaid, SNAP, etc.



Overall Case Success Rate

95%+



450+ People who avoided homelessness by avoiding eviction/foreclosure or obtaining/retaining subsidized housing.

100+

Orders of Protection obtained or modified for survivors of sexual and domestic violence/abuse.

380

Clients who received additional support services through Legal Aid Chicago's social work team.



9,580

Individuals reached through community engagement efforts, including legal education, clinics, and more.

Who We Serve



100%

In poverty or otherwise at-risk



30%

People living with a disability



12%

Clients who received services in a language other than English

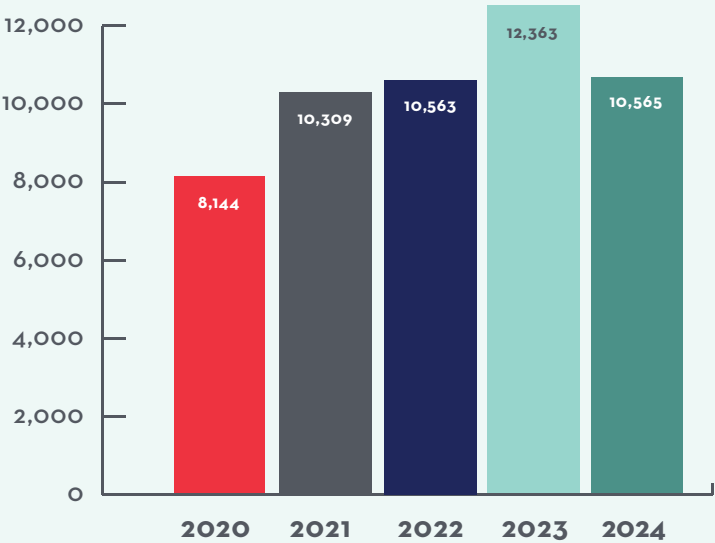


5%

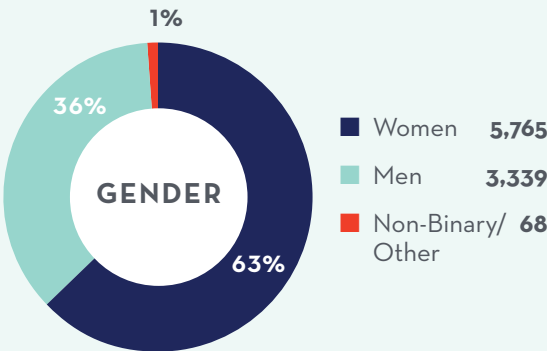
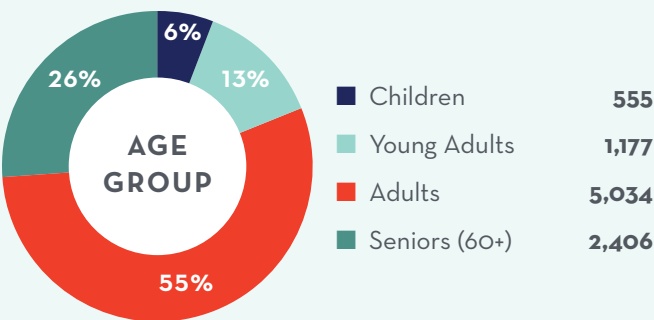
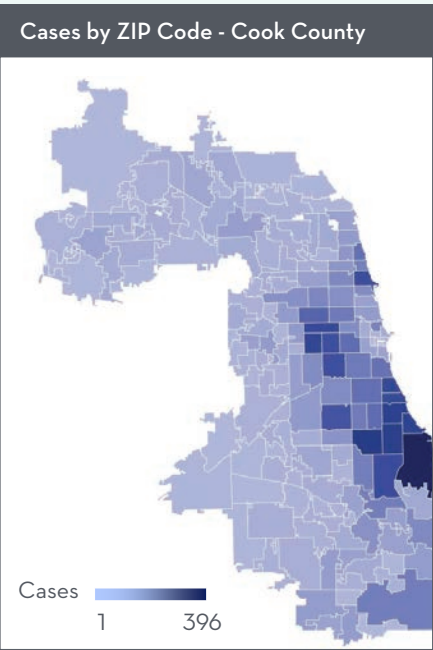
Veterans

OUR IMPACT *continued*

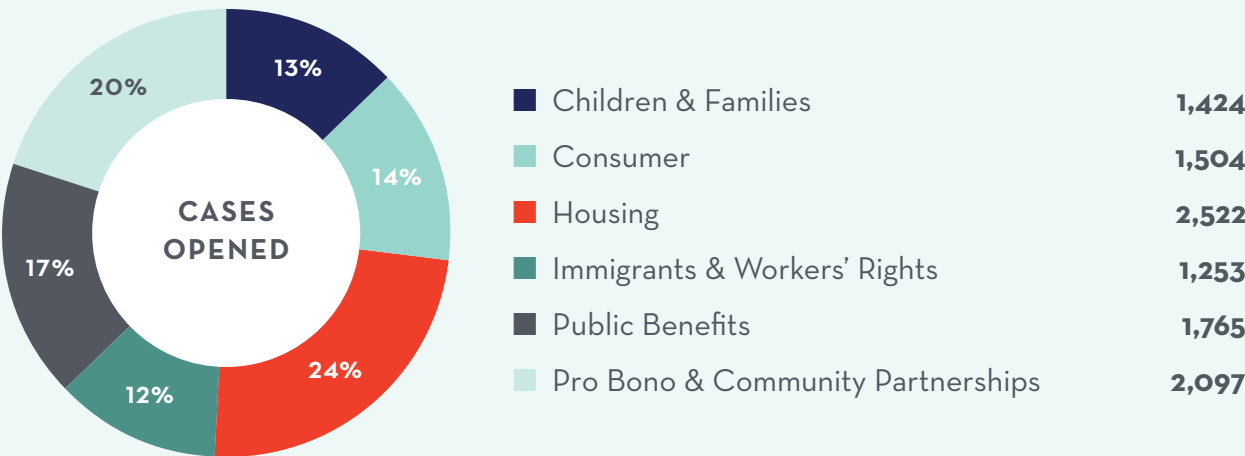
CASES OPENED EACH YEAR



GEOGRAPHIC IMPACT



CASES OPENED BY PRACTICE AREAS IN 2024



HOUSING

LONG-TERM CARE



CHILDREN & FAMILIES



OUR PRACTICE GROUPS

PUBLIC BENEFITS

IMMIGRANTS & WORKERS' RIGHTS



CONSUMER



PRO BONO & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Protecting vulnerable children and families across Cook County is fundamental to Legal Aid Chicago's mission. Our Children & Families Practice Group (CFPG) focuses on cases where the personal safety, family integrity, education access, and financial stability of families are at risk. Our services include:

- Protective orders for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- Complex, contested custody and divorce cases, often involving domestic or sexual violence;
- Child welfare and family defense cases, involving unwarranted Department of Children and Family Services regulation of families;
- Special education, school discipline, and sexual harassment in school cases.



Veronica Gonzalez, a Legal Aid Chicago Board Member and former client, testified in D.C. before the Senate Judiciary Committee to explain the impact of our services on survivors of domestic violence.

"YOU GIVE RESPECT AND DIGNITY TO OLDER PEOPLE!"

—Nancy, Former Senior Client



Client Story

After years of severe verbal, physical, and sexual abuse by her ex-husband, Maria made the courageous decision to flee Mexico with her three children. However, even after her escape, her abuser found ways to keep hurting them by exploiting the Mexican judicial system to maintain control and threaten their future.

In 2024, we represented Maria when her ex-husband petitioned for the return of the children to Mexico in a high-profile federal court case. Since the 1980s, the Hague Abduction Convention has governed international child abduction disputes among its signatories, including the U.S. and Mexico. Petitions brought under this treaty are notoriously complex and difficult to defend.

To make matters even more difficult, the court appointed a large, well-known law firm to represent Maria's ex-husband. Maria was unrepresented until we accepted her case.

With less than three months before trial, a team of Legal Aid Chicago attorneys, paralegals, and social workers accomplished a herculean challenge. To prevail, Legal Aid Chicago had to convince the court by clear and convincing evidence that returning the three children to Mexico would put them at grave risk of harm. We secured a court-appointed Guardian Ad Litem to represent the children's interests, retained expert witnesses, conducted nine depositions, and completed extensive pre-trial and post-trial briefing.

Maria bravely endured 13 hours on the stand, recounting years of brutal abuse as her Legal Aid Chicago attorneys presented a powerful case. The court also heard moving testimony about the children's fear of returning to their father.

After a six-day trial, we won, successfully defeating the father's petition and preventing the forced return of Maria's children to Mexico. Now, Maria and her kids can stay together in the United States. For the first time in years, they are truly safe, and her children can grow up without the constant fear of being sent back to their abuser.

Translated quote >
from previous page
to reflect *Our Voices*;
Our Community theme.

**“¡Brindan respeto y dignidad
a las personas mayores!!”**



CONSUMER

The vast majority of our clients are living in poverty or living paycheck-to-paycheck. Our Consumer Practice Group (CPG) seeks to aid at-risk individuals and families by breaking cycles of debt and protecting our clients' income and assets from unfair collections and fraud. CPG provides services in the following areas:

- Consumer bankruptcy to protect our client's assets;
- Debt collection defense;
- Affirmative litigation to protect consumer rights and prevent fraud and unfair business practices;
- Foreclosure defense and other protections for homeowners;
- Maintaining and restoring essential utility services (gas, electric, water);
- Tangled Title: simple probate to maintain homeownership for heirs;
- Driver's license restoration for debt-related suspension;
- Preventing financial exploitation of older adults;
- Resolving disputes with the IRS at our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, including innocent spouse relief and identity theft.

**"I WAS SO STRESSED, CONFUSED,
AND FRIGHTENED, BUT MY LEGAL
TEAM COULD NOT BE MORE
PATIENT, COMPASSIONATE, AND
PROFESSIONAL."**

—Jose, Former Client



Client Story

Nancy was Bob's only child, and they were very close. Unfortunately, Chuck, a notorious con artist¹, tricked Bob into getting a reverse mortgage on his house and then stole the equity in the home (about \$90,000).

After Bob died, the mortgage company foreclosed on the house. Nancy, our client, was living there with her family. She came to us seeking to save her family's home or at least get the time and money to move.

The case presented several challenges. First, Bob (Nancy's father), the only direct witness to the fraud, was deceased. Second, Chuck kept his name off the paperwork, so it was impossible to prove that the lender had committed any wrongdoing. Nancy sat for a lengthy deposition and did a fantastic job telling the story of the fraud that Chuck had committed against her father. Her deposition was a critical piece in helping us reach a favorable settlement with the lender.

Although the house was being foreclosed, the settlement agreement allowed Nancy and her family to remain in the home for a few more years. In addition, the lender paid her \$20,000 to help with moving costs, a security deposit, rent, and other expenses.

Had we not intervened, Nancy would have lost the home immediately. Instead, she and her family were given plenty of time and money to find a new apartment and have now settled in a home and neighborhood that they love. In fact, Nancy and her family have told us they now prefer their new home and neighborhood.

¹ Chuck was recently sentenced to 17 years in federal prison.

“J’étais tellement stressé, confus et effrayé, mais mon équipe juridique n’aurait pas pu être plus patiente, compatissante et professionnelle.”

HOUSING

Each year, thousands of Cook County families experience eviction, housing discrimination, housing insecurity, and a host of other challenges related to housing. Our Housing Practice Group (HPG) seeks to foster a universal right to decent, safe and affordable housing. HPG services include:

- Preventing evictions;
- Preventing unwarranted terminations from subsidized housing and voucher programs;
- Opposing housing discrimination and enforcing tenants' rights under local, state, and federal housing laws;
- Challenging gender-based housing discrimination;
- Protecting residents from unlawful lockouts and unsafe living conditions;
- Advocating for reasonable accommodations for clients with disabilities and protecting the rights of tenants with special legal needs, including survivors of domestic violence;
- Advocating for and enforcing tenants' rights through affirmative litigation.



**"YOU HELPED ME KEEP A ROOF
OVER MY HEAD."**

—Estella, Former Client



Client Story

Harper is a full-time college student, one semester away from graduating. She recently obtained a housing choice voucher and moved into her current apartment. Her landlord tried to evict her after a conversation about the apartment's conditions, alleging that she was verbally abusive toward him and that this constituted a lease violation. While Harper admitted she was frustrated during the discussion with the landlord, she was never threatening or harmful.

Although Harper's case started in the summer, she did not find a way to Legal Aid Chicago until the fall. Legal Aid Chicago accepted Harper's case on short notice to ensure that she had the opportunity to be heard. This was critical because an eviction would lead to the loss of Harper's Section 8 voucher and would prohibit her from returning to the program.

Although the landlord offered to settle, Harper knew that she had not done anything wrong and that she had a right to express her opinion without being evicted. After less than a week of preparation, our attorneys represented Harper at trial.

The judge found that Harper's language was not a material lease violation and ruled in her favor. After the ruling, Harper cried in relief and said she felt like she could finally get back to her studies, graduate, and begin her career.

“आपने मेरे सिर पर छत रखने में मेरी मदद की।”

IMMIGRANTS & WORKERS' RIGHTS

The Immigrants & Workers' Rights Practice Group (IWR) is committed to serving vulnerable workers, immigrants, and agricultural workers across Cook County and beyond. IWR staff work to protect workers' rights and benefits, obtain protected status for victims of crime, including survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence, and ensure farmworker health, safety, and living conditions. Services include:

- Securing unemployment benefits and resolving wage claims;
- Challenging all forms of employment discrimination and enforcing employee protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, and other statutes;
- Representing immigrant victims of serious crimes, domestic abuse, sexual assault, and persecution;
- Providing comprehensive services for victims of human trafficking throughout Illinois, including victim advocacy before law enforcement agencies and courts;
- Providing outreach and meeting the legal needs of agricultural workers throughout Illinois.



Lisa Palumbo (pictured center front, in black), Director of the Immigrants and Workers' Rights (IWR) Practice Group was honored by the Chicago Bar Foundation with the Thomas H. Morsch Award. This award recognizes Lisa as an exemplary lawyer who has dedicated her entire 35-year career to public service work. Many of Lisa's IWR and Legal Aid colleagues came to support her and are pictured here.

“THINGS COULD BE VERY
DIFFERENT FOR OUR FAMILY
IF YOU HADN'T STOOD UP AND
FOUGHT FOR US.”

—Gabrielle, Former Client



Client Story

Today Zoe lives happily with her daughter and husband in Chicago and loves her job in youth services. However, just a few years ago, she endured a living nightmare when a relationship with a colleague became abusive. Zoe reported the harassment to her employer, but they refused to protect her.

When Zoe obtained an Order of Protection (OP) against her abuser, her employer demanded that she withdraw the OP. Eventually, the abuse and lack of support forced Zoe to resign from her job.

When Zoe found Legal Aid Chicago and shared her story with Supervisory Attorney Dolores Ayala, she felt an enormous sense of relief and validation. For the first time, someone truly listened. Dolores filed a charge of discrimination with the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) and supported Zoe throughout the lengthy legal process. “The way she stood firm and bravely told her story was one of the most remarkable things I’ve ever seen,” Dolores recalls.

Eventually, the IDHR found substantial evidence of sexual harassment, which paved the way to litigate the issue before the Illinois Human Rights Commission. Ultimately, Zoe’s former employer agreed to mediation. The case was resolved, and Zoe received a substantial settlement.

Zoe credits Dolores and Legal Aid Chicago with helping her reclaim her life. With support from her legal team, she was able to obtain a meaningful settlement and found the validation she sought. Now Zoe is determined to share her voice and tell her story so others know they do not have to stay in unsafe workplaces and that justice is possible.

“Life is only hard when you tackle it alone. I am a woman of my own destiny now. I feel unstoppable. I know my Legal Aid Chicago team always has my back, and I am forever grateful.”

“У нашей семьи всё могло бы сложиться совсем иначе, если бы ты не встал и не начал бороться за нас”

LONG-TERM CARE

Older adults and individuals with disabilities and special medical needs often require the kind of compassionate living environments offered by long-term care facilities. These residents are often at risk of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Legal Aid Chicago's Long-Term Care Practice Group (LTC) supports residents of long-term care facilities and seeks to improve their quality of life through the following services:

- Redressing deficiencies in residents' quality of care;
- Preventing involuntary discharge;
- Resolving disputes with Medicaid;
- Protecting residents from financial exploitation and elder abuse;
- Promoting the dignity and personal autonomy of every resident, regardless of age or ability.



"AT MY AGE I COULD NEVER AFFORD A LAWYER, BUT THANKS TO LEGAL AID CHICAGO, I WAS SO BLESSED."

—Ruth, Former Client

AgeOptions honored Legal Aid Chicago with the 50 Years of Partnership Award. AgeOptions is a nonprofit that connects older adults with resources and service options to live their lives to the fullest. Through this partnership, Legal Aid Chicago provides legal services to older adults in Cook County, including residents of long-term care facilities, to help with housing, debt, health care, financial exploitation, and other legal problems.

Colleen Connolly (pictured back row, second from right) received the award on Legal Aid Chicago's behalf and is pictured with other AgeOptions representatives.



Client Story

Geraldine is an active community member who retired after a career in finance. When she was persuaded to leave her home for a routine COVID vaccine appointment, Geraldine had no idea where it would lead her.

Tricked by her brother, who held her Power of Attorney and title to her trust, Geraldine was forced into an assisted living facility and placed in a dementia unit. After this horrifying turn of events, all Geraldine wanted was to return to her independent life and community.

Geraldine's friend and neighbor, Jack, first contacted Legal Aid Chicago's Ombudsman Program in our Long-Term Care Practice Group on her behalf. The Ombudsman Program, which advocates for residents of long-term facilities and seeks to improve their quality of life, was able to revoke her brother's Power of Attorney and secure proper legal representation for Geraldine. But before Geraldine could even meet with her attorney, her brother put her house up for sale.

Keeping her home was important to Geraldine. However, nothing could convince her brother to take the house off the market. As a last resort, Legal Aid Chicago helped Geraldine revoke the trust that held the house and recorded the revocation. This was enough to cancel the listing.

Once her brother's plan was thwarted, Legal Aid Chicago attorneys, with outside counsel, helped Geraldine choose guardianship companies that would respect her wishes.

Assessing her finances, Geraldine decided to sell her home and moved into a beautiful apartment close by, remaining in her community. Today, Geraldine and Jack meet daily and enjoy walks in the neighborhood she loves.

عيطتسأ نكأ مل، اذه ينس يف
نكلو، امحم فيلاكت لمحت أدبأ
نم ةينوناقلا ةدعاسملا لصف
”أدج ةكرابم تنك، وعاكيش



MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

Legal Aid Chicago's three Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) work to interrupt cycles of inequality and address the intersecting legal and medical challenges clients face in health care settings. In our MLPs, one with the Cook County Health and Hospitals System and two with UChicago-Medicine, doctors and legal aid staff work together. Health care providers screen patients for legal problems, and Legal Aid Chicago helps solve them, while educating medical partners on health-harming legal needs.



+



=

Success!



Client Story

Jeremy was referred to Legal Aid Chicago by his care coordinator, Tricia, at Cook County Health. As an older man facing multiple serious health conditions, Jeremy was unable to work or afford stable housing. He was forced to move between his siblings' homes and, at times, sleep on the train or in the park.

Despite his documented disabilities, the Social Security Administration (SSA) denied his application for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits, claiming he was still capable of working.

We accepted Jeremy's case, submitted an appeal of his SSDI denial, and represented him in a request for reconsideration of benefits. Throughout a lengthy two-year appeal process, Tricia and Jeremy were extraordinarily helpful in assisting his Legal Aid team. Specifically, Tricia helped Jeremy stay connected to us as he moved around, and she helped him track down records and fill in gaps in his medical history. In the end, we proved to the SSA that Jeremy's medical conditions were so severe that he was not capable of working.

Jeremy now receives \$2,260 a month and over \$46,000 in back pay, allowing him to afford a place of his own. His faith in Legal Aid Chicago never wavered, and he is thrilled to have stable housing moving forward.

“Through our early intervention on a case and confirmation that we can accept it through our MLP, we can start working for a client without any time lost when their medical providers identify a health-harming legal need.”

Mona Elgindy

Associate Director,
Medical-Legal Partnerships

PRO BONO & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Legal Aid Chicago's Pro Bono & Community Partnerships Practice Group (PCG) facilitates collaborations with dedicated volunteers and organizational partners. These connections help expand our reach and amplify our impact across Cook County. PCG manages our various volunteer-based projects, including:

- Adult and juvenile criminal records relief (expungements, sealing, and related relief);
- Free, walk-in legal clinics in neighborhoods across Cook County (and a monthly virtual clinic);
- Preparing advance directive documents for clients so that they can prepare for the future and have peace of mind.

PCG also oversees Legal Aid Chicago's community engagement work through building and maintaining relationships with a broad spectrum of community partners to benefit our clients and the community at large.



Katherine Shank (Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director) (left) with Barbara Bertini (Director of Pro Bono & Community Partnerships Practice Group) and Cynthia Sadkin (Chief Strategy Officer) at the opening of the Aspire Center, one of Legal Aid Chicago's off-site locations in partnership with the Westside Justice Center and Austin Coming Together.

"I AM SO HAPPY THESE SERVICES WERE HERE WHEN I NEEDED THEM. YOU FOUND A SOLUTION FOR ME WHEN I DIDN'T SEE HOW IT COULD BE DONE."

—Joe, Former Client



Client Story

We collaborate with numerous community-based organizations to help Cook County residents obtain the legal relief they need. One such partner referred Gerald to our Pro Bono and Community Partnerships Practice Group (PCG) for assistance with criminal records relief. Gerald was a committed and involved dad who coached a youth sports team and volunteered in a homeless shelter.

He also dreamed of working in the health care field. Although he took every opportunity to obtain certifications through workforce development programs and improve his professional prospects, his past criminal record remained a barrier to employment.

We reviewed Gerald's record and determined that he was legally eligible to seal it. Legal Aid Chicago's PCG staff filed the appropriate petitions and appeared in court on Gerald's behalf. Gerald's Legal Aid Chicago attorney demonstrated to the court that he had worked hard to change his life since his conviction. The judge ruled in Gerald's favor thanks to our advocacy and ordered that the cases on Gerald's record be sealed.

Legal Aid Chicago then helped Gerald obtain a Health Care Worker Waiver, which allows people with a conviction to be hired in a health care setting. Gerald's attorney held extensive meetings with the Illinois State Police and the Department of Public Health to get Gerald's sealing orders logged in the health care worker registry. Thanks to Legal Aid Chicago's assistance, Gerald can now work in the health care industry and no longer has to explain his convictions to potential employers.

"Sobrang saya ko na narito ang mga serbisyonang ito noong kailangan ko sila. Nahanap mo ang solusyon para sa akin noong hindi ko nakikita kung paano ito magagawa."



PUBLIC BENEFITS

Legal Aid Chicago is proud to provide comprehensive civil legal assistance across a vast array of legal issues. One of our most complex and multi-faceted categories of legal assistance involves public benefits. Legal Aid Chicago's Public Benefits Practice Group helps families across Cook County meet their basic human needs through the following programs and services:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Medical Assistance (Medicaid, Medicare, Medicare Savings Programs);
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security;
- Veterans Benefits;
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);
- AABD Cash (Aid for the Aged, Blind, Disabled);
- Cash, Medical, and Food Assistance for Non-Citizen Victims of Trafficking, Torture, and Other Serious Crimes (VTTC).



Client Story

Our client, Susan, is a young woman living with profound disabilities. Susan is cared for by her devoted mother, Lisa. For over a decade, Susan has received disability benefits, \$967 per month. This is enough to cover some essential needs, but not sufficient to meet the full cost of her care and daily living.

Previously, the Social Security Administration (SSA) abruptly terminated Susan's benefits and ordered her to repay \$18,000. Susan holds money for Lisa in a special needs trust. However, these trust funds should not have been included in determining Lisa's SSA eligibility. By mistakenly counting them, the SSA found Susan ineligible.

Lisa contacted several legal aid organizations, but none would take the case, until she reached us. An accountant, Lisa kept meticulous records of Susan's benefits. Lisa and Susan's Legal Aid Chicago attorney reviewed the SSA's records and saw its error in including the trust. Once we pointed out the error, the SSA reinstated Susan's benefits and cancelled its request for repayment.

Recently, Public Benefits Practice Group (PBPG) Director Trey Daly worked with Lisa on a different issue: IDHS's failure to review Susan's eligibility for all medical benefits. In Illinois, when a person applies for public assistance, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is required to evaluate their eligibility for all available benefits (unless the applicant declines in writing). In Susan's case, IDHS failed to conduct that review, and never assessed her eligibility for Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled benefits.

Trey requested IDHS to retroactively evaluate Susan's eligibility dating back to 2013, as the law requires. (IDHS often delays compliance even when obligated). With persistent monitoring, Trey achieved a life-changing result.

Susan's monthly benefits have now increased by \$331, and she received more than \$41,000 in retroactive payments. One notable change: Lisa could purchase a specialized bike trailer so Susan can accompany her on bike rides, which is a small but mighty step toward a greater quality of life.

OUR VOICES: *In Our Own Words*

We invited a group of our remarkable staff to share why they choose to be part of Legal Aid Chicago and how their work connects them to our mission and our community. These are their voices.



JENELLE PEDROZA
Director, Client Support Services

I am driven to provide responsive support to people caught up in difficult and traumatic systems, helping them regain their voice.



JUSTINE J. RODRIGUEZ
Senior Paralegal, Pro Bono & Community Partnerships

I am proud to help our clients every day. Being someone they can trust and depend on is extremely rewarding and inspires my work.



CINDY VILLAGRAN
Senior Paralegal, Immigrants & Workers' Rights

The power of our work is enabling our clients to know their legal options. My work is deeply rooted in providing humane and holistic legal assistance to our clients, ensuring long-term safety and stability.



MIRNA VILLASEÑOR
Senior IT Service Desk Analyst

Helping people is my biggest accomplishment. I feel great when I am able to troubleshoot and come back with results. No matter how tough it is, I am going to find a solution.



LAWRENCE WAGNER
Supervisory Attorney, Long-Term Care

When I come home at night and lay my head down, I know my efforts help improve someone's life. To me, you can't put a price on that.

“ماک رپ سیکی یریم نے آپ آہک ہی رکش اک آپ
روا ےھجم نے آپ آہک فرص ھمل رہ یریم نے
لبق تسمن نشور روا نوکس ینہذ وک یٹی بی یریم
نے اچ چہ ہدنز کی ا وک یناہک یریم ۔ ید دیما کی
یریم یریم نے لدب یریم ناسنا بایماک کی ا سے یلاو
اک یگدنز ینپا مہ ۔ ہی رکش ےل ےک نے رک ددم
۔ ھی شوچرپ تہب ےل ےک نے رک عورش باب این
۔ ےل یقاب ان آ ھیبا یرتہب

“Дякую за кожна годину, яку ви витратили
на роботу над моєю справою. Ви дали мені
та моїй доньці душевний спокій
і надію на світле майбутнє.
Дякую, що допомогли
мені перетворити
мою історію з
історії виживання
на історію
процвітання.
Ми так раді
розпочати новий
розділ у нашому
житті. Найкраще
ще попереду!”

“Merci pour chaque
heure passée à travailler
sur mon dossier. Vous nous
avez apporté, à ma fille et moi,
la tranquillité d'esprit et l'espoir
d'un avenir meilleur. Merci de m'avoir aidée
à passer du statut de survivante à celui de
personne épanouie. Nous sommes ravies de
commencer un nouveau chapitre de nos vies.
Le meilleur reste à venir !”

“Gracias por cada hora que dedicaste a trabajar
en mi caso. Nos diste a mí y a mi hija tranquilidad
y esperanza de un futuro mejor. Gracias por
ayudarme a pasar de ser una sobreviviente a una
persona próspera. Estamos muy emocionadas de
comenzar un nuevo capítulo en nuestras vidas.
¡Lo mejor está por venir!”

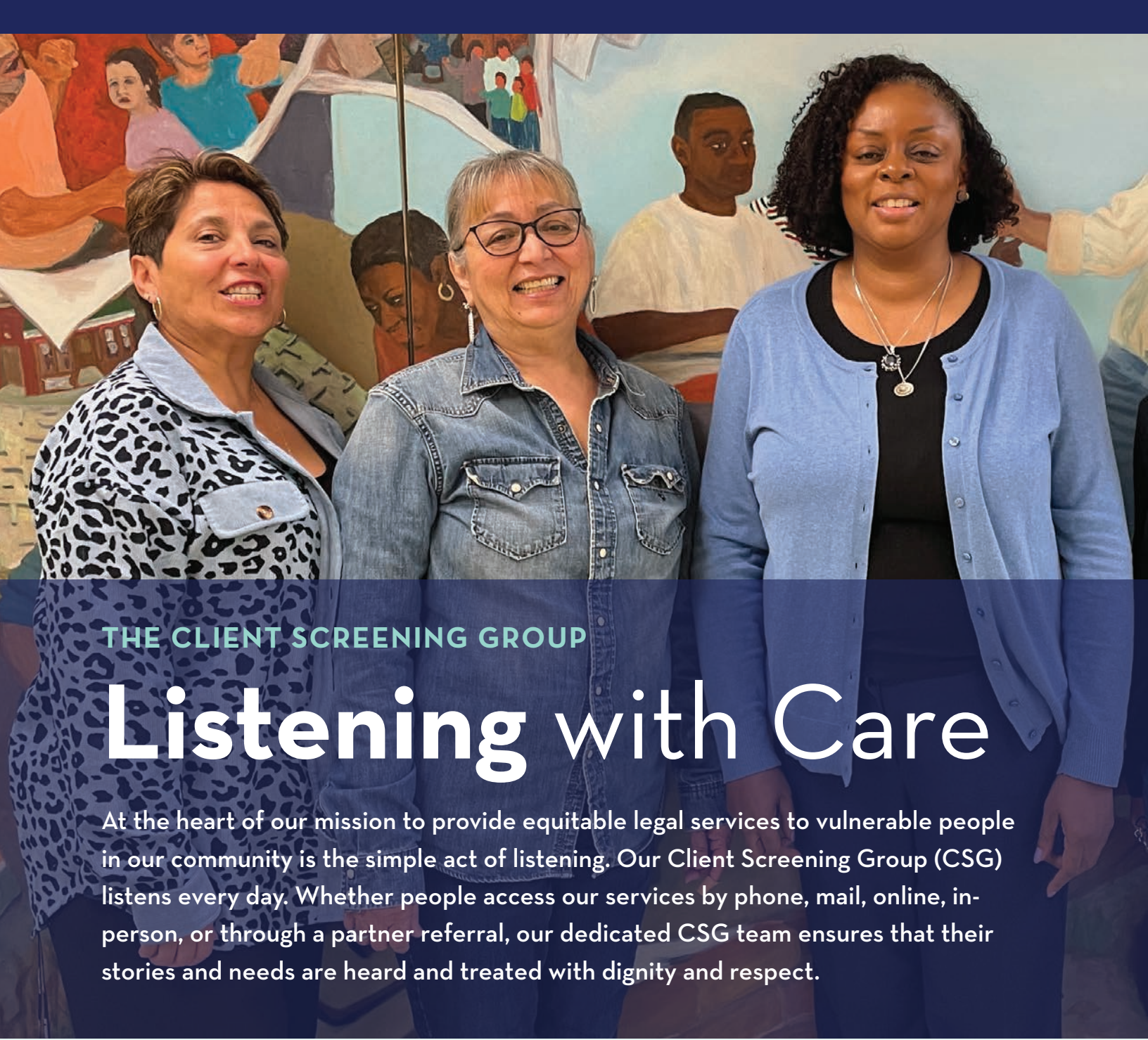
“Obrigada por cada hora que dedicaram
ao meu caso. Vocês deram-me, a mim e à
minha filha, paz de espírito e esperança num
futuro melhor. Obrigada por me ajudarem a
transformar a minha história de sobrevivente
em próspera. Estamos muito entusiasmados
por começar um novo capítulo nas nossas
vidas. O melhor ainda está para vir!”

“多謝 用 每一個鐘 處理我個案。 令我同
我個女安心， 希望未來更加光明。
多謝 幫我將我 故事由一個幸
存者變成一個蓬勃發展 人。
我 好興奮可以開始我 人生 新篇章。
最好 仲未到！”

“Thank you for every
single hour that you spent
working on my case. You gave me
and my daughter peace of mind and
hope for a brighter future. Thank
you for helping me turn my story
from a survivor to a thriver. We
are so excited to start a new
chapter in our lives. The
best is yet to come!”

“Dziękuję za każdą
godzinę, którą
poświęciłeś mojej
sprawie. Dałeś mi i
mojej córce spokój
ducha i nadzieję na
lepszą przyszłość.
Dziękuję, że pomogłeś
mi zmienić moją historię
z osoby, która przeżyła,
w osobę, która odniosła
sukces. Jesteśmy podekscytowani,
że rozpoczynamy nowy rozdział w naszym
życiu. Najlepsze jeszcze przed nami!”

“मेरे केस पर काम करने में बतिए हर एक घंटे
के लिए शुक्रिया। आपने मुझे और मेरी बेटी को
मन की शांति और एक उज्ज्वल भविष्य की
आशा दी। मेरी कहानी को एक सर्वाइवर से एक
सफल व्यक्ति में बदलने में मेरी मदद करने
के लिए धन्यवाद। हम अपने जीवन में एक नया
अध्याय शुरू करने के लिए बहुत उत्साहित हैं।
सबसे अच्छा अभी बाकी है।”

A photograph of three women standing in front of a large, colorful mural. The woman on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a leopard print jacket. The woman in the middle has short grey hair, wears glasses, and a denim jacket. The woman on the right has dark curly hair and is wearing a blue cardigan. They are all smiling. The mural behind them depicts various people in a community setting.

THE CLIENT SCREENING GROUP

Listening with Care

At the heart of our mission to provide equitable legal services to vulnerable people in our community is the simple act of listening. Our Client Screening Group (CSG) listens every day. Whether people access our services by phone, mail, online, in-person, or through a partner referral, our dedicated CSG team ensures that their stories and needs are heard and treated with dignity and respect.

CSG is the main intake point for people who seek legal assistance.

Comprised of Intake Specialists and Intake Attorneys, CSG manages large volumes of requests for legal assistance each day. Intake staff assess applicants' eligibility for our free services, ensuring that their income and legal issues fall within the scope of our services. They gather essential information from clients to guide them to the most appropriate legal resource and evaluate how we can best help. CSG also connects clients who speak languages other than English to interpretation services to ensure that language is never a barrier to obtaining legal assistance. Whether fielding questions, coordinating with attorneys, or triaging urgent issues, CSG creates a space where clients feel safe and heard.



Some of our incredible CSG staff members, including: Sylvia Lozano-Haas, Amanda Palacios, Piper Taggart, and Flora Fell.

People who seek our services often find themselves in extremely difficult situations, and asking complete strangers for help can be challenging. CSG staff, who are trained in all areas of civil law, know how to build a client's trust and handle cases in which a client may have experienced trauma. They provide a calm voice on the line when clients don't know where to turn with their problem and are the first to say, "We're here for you."

In 2024, CSG screened more than 7,000 applicants. Some were referred internally to one of Legal Aid Chicago's Practice Groups for potential legal representation; some received information and legal advice directly from intake staff, empowering them to handle their situation on their own; others were referred to trusted partner organizations for further assistance. Everyone we speak with receives some sort of resource to help them address their legal problem, which, in itself, can be a relief. As our Chief Strategy Officer, Cynthia Sadkin, who oversees CSG explains, "We do everything we can to serve as many people as possible: that includes listening to them and guiding them to the right resource. This is an essential component of justice."

With the large demand for our services, the work that CSG does is fast-paced, complex, and often emotionally demanding. CSG approaches their work with heart and dedication. Mona Green, Senior Intake Specialist, reflects on her work by noting, "Many of our clients face systemic barriers that limit access to essential resources and support. Being able to help bridge those gaps—whether through education, access to health care, housing, or simply listening with compassion—reminds me every day that small acts can lead to big changes. It is very fulfilling to be a part of something that empowers people and helps to strengthen communities." By providing compassionate support and offering clarity in often complicated legal situations, CSG uplifts the voices of clients who often feel unheard or overlooked. As Piper Taggart, CSG Director, says, "We have great intake staff who are doing their best to serve the thousands of people who need help. People just want to be listened to, and we're there."

Every person who reaches out to us has a story to tell, and each story matters. CSG listens to each story to guide people toward the most appropriate legal resource. Honoring the voice of those who seek our help, they strengthen the foundation of our community. We are proud of our CSG for the dignity and respect they bring to each interaction, as well as the excellent legal service they provide. They remind us that justice begins in the moment that someone decides to seek help and feels truly heard.

If you're in need of services, please call 312.341.1070 or apply online at www.legalaidchicago.org/get-help.

Snapshot of How We Help our Clients

THE MARTINEZ APPEAL

Last year, our Order of Protection

Appeals Project, a partnership with Dentons, won a significant appeal that will ensure financial stability and long-term safety for survivors of domestic violence and their children. This Project, established in 2013, files appeals to protect the rights of survivors when judges refuse or fail to give them protective orders they deserve and need to keep themselves safe. We have won over 90% of those appeals.

Dentons' partnership is critical to the OP Appeals Project's success. The firm provides generous financial support, paying for costs such as expensive court transcripts. It also staffs each appeal with a team of lawyers who collaborate with Legal Aid Chicago's attorneys to craft powerful and successful appeals.

So much of Legal Aid Chicago's work is about creating stability and enhancing safety for individuals and their families. The OP Appeals

Project goes beyond that individual impact and has a systemic impact; when we win appeals, every survivor gets the benefit of that win. Judges know that we will hold them accountable for giving survivors everything they deserve under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act.

In this most recent win, we secured the right for survivors to seek child support from their abusers. For at least a decade, judges have routinely refused to consider child support in Order of Protection cases. As a result, our clients and other litigants have needed to file separate child support cases outside of the Domestic Violence Division, a process that can take months and leave survivors vulnerable to further abuse.

This is exactly what happened to our client, Claudia, who obtained a plenary Order of Protection against her partner. However, the trial court refused to consider temporary child support for Claudia. We appealed.



“THIS DECISION IS A GIANT STEP TOWARDS ENSURING SURVIVORS GET THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE THEY NEED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN.”

—Jordan Crider, Legal Aid Chicago Staff Attorney who helps staff the Project

Legal Aid Chicago attorneys worked closely with Dentons to write a powerful appellate brief. A nationwide domestic violence appeals project, DV LEAP, also partnered with Katten Muchin Rosenman to prepare and file a moving amicus brief on behalf of Claudia.

We won. In its decision in that case, *Martinez v. Leon*, 2024 IL App (1st) 231058, the court emphasized that one of the goals of the Illinois Domestic Violence Act is to ensure survivors are not forced to stay in abusive situations due to financial dependence. The court found that the decision to deny the opportunity to apply

for temporary child support was incorrect and recognized that financial support is critical to survivors who are seeking to escape abusive environments.

“Financial security is a safety issue for domestic violence survivors, but for over a decade the majority of courts have refused to grant child support in Order of Protection cases,” says Legal Aid Chicago Staff Attorney Jordan Crider. “This decision is a giant step towards ensuring survivors get the financial assistance they need to protect themselves and their children.”

OUR 2024 DONORS

We regret we cannot list every donor, but we extend our sincere thanks to each and every one! (This list reflects cumulative gifts of \$1,000 and more received between January 1, 2024 and December 30, 2024.)

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The legendary blues musician Buddy Guy (left) signed and donated a guitar for Justice is Served, which is one of Legal Aid Chicago's signature events. Pictured with Marc Maddox (President/CEO, Marmax Entertainment). This guitar prompted a bidding war at the event and raised four figures for us!

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A Calling, A Career, and A Community— *All in One Place*

ALAN STARTED as a Legal Aid Chicago attorney almost 55 years ago. Since then, he has been a dedicated donor and supporter.

Alan grew up not far from Chicago. Even when he was young, he knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

After graduating law school, he joined the Peace Corps. He spent over two years working in a small town in Brazil, where he immersed himself in the culture.

When Alan returned to the US, he set his sights on Chicago. He had always wanted to be in a big city, especially after living for years in a town of 3,000 people in Brazil. His Peace Corps friend, Wally Winter, who worked at Legal Aid

Chicago, connected him with the organization.

Alan joined as a staff attorney at the Englewood neighborhood office on Chicago's South Side. His early cases included juvenile law, welfare claims, utility shut-offs, divorces, and small claims disputes.

After three years, Alan transferred to the newly opened office on 18th Street in Pilsen, a vibrant, predominantly Mexican neighborhood. His Spanish language abilities and experience working at the Englewood office made him a great fit for the Pilsen office, and soon he was directing it. "It was an exciting time and place to practice law because

there were so many legal issues impacting the Pilsen community," Alan shares.

The work was fast-paced and deeply rewarding. His cases ranged from repossession defenses to welfare advocacy to landmark immigration litigation. One of his favorite victories was a federal case in which he, alongside Legal Aid's first Executive Director Sheldon Roodman, successfully challenged a citizenship requirement that barred Mexican green card holders from working at the U.S. Postal Service. "We filed in federal court and won," says Alan proudly.

Alan's team in Pilsen grew to include six attorneys, paralegals,

and a steady stream of law students. They often collaborated with Legal Aid's Northwest office, which served Chicago's Puerto Rican community. The team once made the front page of the local Pilsen newspaper when they sued a lawyer who was defrauding homebuyers of their earnest money. Beyond courtroom victories, Alan also testified before the U.S. Judiciary Committee and the Illinois Assembly on the need for bilingual court translators and contract rights for non-English speakers.

After seven years with Legal Aid Chicago, Alan married and moved to Arlington, Virginia. Many of his former Legal Aid colleagues had also migrated to the D.C. area. They all remained close, attending each other's children's weddings, as he fondly recalls. He next worked in an assistant general counsel role and later in private practice.

Alan says that he never had a job as meaningful or enjoyable as the one at Legal Aid Chicago. The camaraderie and sense of purpose he found there were impossible to match later on in his career. He also appreciated the close friendships he made there, which continue to this day. **"I knew even back then that**

Migrants Sue Del Monte

action suit was filed Friday against the Corp. here in Rochelle charging migrant employees were forced into a peonage.

It also names the Illinois Department of Labor and United States Department of Justice as defendants in a suit filed in behalf of six Mexican blacks.

—te Corp. with the labor and

and travel regardless of hours worked.

Officials at Del Monte were contacted for comments concerning the suit. A spokesman said they had not yet been served with the details of the suit and would have no comment until they had had time to study the charges.

It was about one year ago a similar suit was filed against Stokely-Carr, Camp and the Rochelle Community Hospital by legal assistance attorneys for the Illinois Migrant Council.

—al women earned by Council.

solitary Teaching the poor about do-it-yourself divorces

By Laura Green

"Hi everybody," Beverly Cooper sang out. She couldn't breathe through the door because the little room was too crowded for a free-swinging gesture, but she did the best she could.

Waiting for her in the back room of the storefront law office were her students, 13 women and one man. Some joked, some were nonchalant. A few said nothing and hunched over their papers. Some had their lives ahead of them, some were used up. Some were worn down, others will get a second wind. Each was poor, black and wanted a divorce.

"There are three ways for a person to get a divorce," she explained. "Pay a lawyer, and that costs at least \$500. If you are poor, you come here and you have a choice. See our lawyer downtown who takes the divorce cases. That takes about 15 months. Or there's pro se."

Ms. Cooper, a lawyers' assistant with the Grand Boulevard Neighborhood Legal Services office of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, was there to teach them to do the job themselves.

Pro se means a person acts on his own behalf in court without a lawyer speaking for him. Though the option of representing yourself in court has always been available, it has become popular in recent years as a fast way to settle uncomplicated and sometimes undisputed matters. The process, appropriately used, saves legal fees, spares lawyers' routine and

Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago

Rights vs. rules of thumb

ACTING with remarkable speed, the Illinois Supreme Court last week ordered a hearing to determine whether Daniel Collins, defendant in a rape case, is entitled to free counsel. The order is more important than it looks; its effect is to warn judges that they are not free to make up their own rules regarding defendants' rights.

Collins had asked the court to appoint counsel for him, saying he was broke and couldn't afford a lawyer. Since Collins at the time was free on \$250 bond (he said he'd borrowed the money from friends), Circuit Judge Wayne W. Olson refused. This was in line with a policy laid down by Presiding Judge Joseph A. Power of Criminal Court: "If a defendant can find money for a lawyer, it's free counsel."

65,000 "very small" us

Read told to limit restraints

John Shultenberger, chief of the juvenile division of the Legal Aid Society, had sought an injunction barring the use of any restraints on patients.

Alan Griseck, attorney for Chicago-Read, said: "We deny all the charges made in the suit. We're still trying to find out what happened, and we're not saying anything until we do."

At an emergency hearing requested by Legal Aid Society attorneys, Judge Joseph A. Power issued a temporary restraining order against the staff and supervisors of the children and adolescent units of the state hospital, 6500 W. Irving Park Rd.

However, he said, of the estimated one million persons receiving welfare payments in Illinois, about 250,000 are women and many of them

Family of 11 sues Indian cuts red tape and gets food stamps

Gran Triunfo Latino en la Demanda Contra Departamento de Bomberos

Una gran victoria se acre-
dio la oficina de Asistencia
Legal para la comunidad en
la Calle 18, al obtener por la
vía de la demanda al
Departamento de Bomberos
y empleos Civiles de la Cu-
dad. la orden del juzgado que

Jaime Alatorre, quien a
través de la asistencia Legal
de la Oficina de la Calle 18,
había presentado una
demanda al
Acto seguido el Lic. Dock-
erstein y Vergara se la otorga-
ron de Asistencia legal, presen-
tando. El motivo por el

Collection of newspaper stories about cases that Alan worked on while at Legal Aid Chicago. Alan had carefully saved these clippings for years!

working at [Legal Aid Chicago] would be the most important and rewarding legal experience I would ever have."

Alan has continued to feel a strong obligation to give back. He has been a donor to Legal Aid Chicago for decades and has proudly included the organization in his will. Legal Aid Chicago gave Alan the opportunity to practice law in a

way that mattered to him, his clients, and his community. **"Even now, I stay connected. Those friendships from the 18th Street [Pilsen] office are still some of the strongest in my life."**

"LEGAL AID DIDN'T JUST GIVE ME A CAREER. IT GAVE ME A COMMUNITY,"

Alan says with a big smile.

FINANCIALS

Statement of Activities

Year Ended December 31, 2024

REVENUE

Grants and Contributions - LSC	\$	8,410,643
Grants and Contributions - Other Government		12,501,346
Foundations, Fellowships, and Other		2,427,331
Contributions		6,246,385
Special Events		109,518
Less: Cost of Direct Benefit to Donors		(110,473)
Special Events, Net		(955)
Cy Pres Awards		47,706
Attorney's Fees		209,310
Investment Return (Loss), Net		787,714
Miscellaneous		188,102
Services, In-Kind		2,912,968

Total Revenue	\$	33,730,550
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EXPENSES

Program Services	\$	23,729,882
General and Administration		3,831,109
Fundraising		1,067,343

Total Expenses	\$	28,628,334
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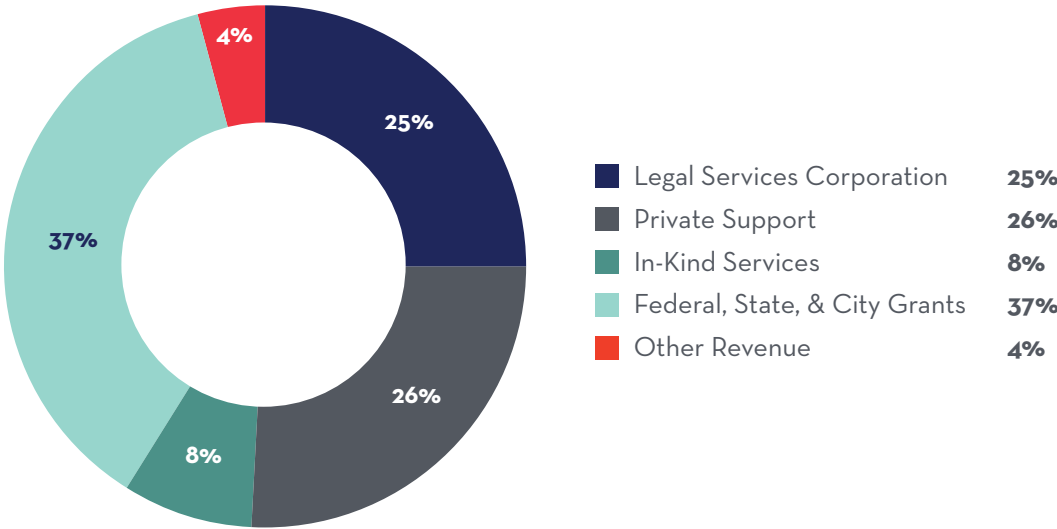
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$	5,102,216
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Net Assets - Beginning of Year		9,894,461
Net Assets - End of Year		14,996,677

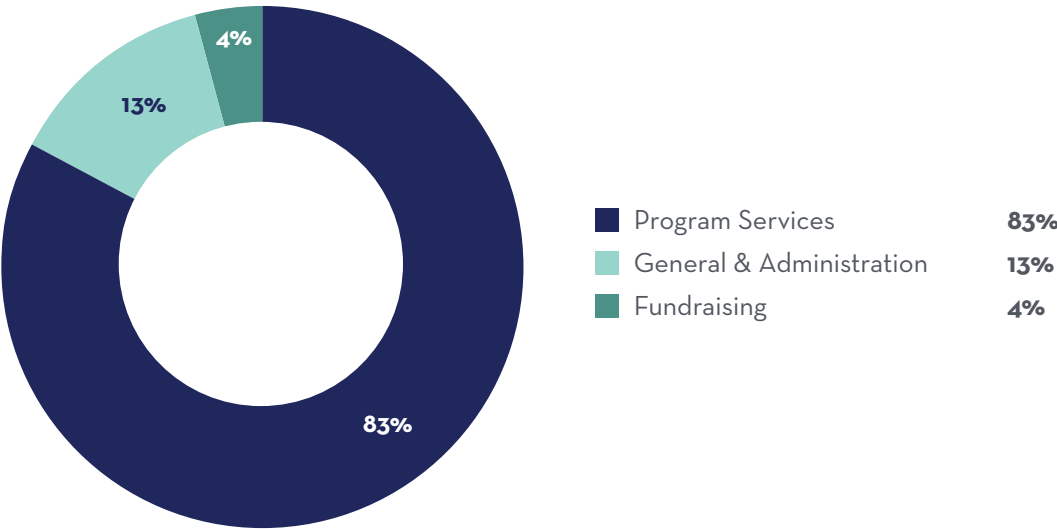
**“LEGAL AID CHICAGO HAS GIVEN US
OUR LIFE AND FREEDOM BACK! WE’RE
BEYOND THANKFUL.”**

—Andrea and Phillip, Former Clients

2024 TOTAL REVENUE



2024 TOTAL EXPENSES



“Le service d'aide juridique de Chicago nous a redonné vie et liberté ! Nous sommes extrêmement reconnaissants.”

FINANCIALS

Statement of Financial Position

as of December 31, 2023 and December 31, 2024

ASSETS	2024	2023
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 5,302,073	\$ 1,726,198
Restricted Cash	618,334	1,570,210
Grants and Contributions Receivable	3,457,542	3,342,011
Miscellaneous Assets	868,424	905,547
Investments	3,115,009	2,857,913
Total Current Assets	\$ 13,361,382	\$ 10,401,879
NONCURRENT ASSETS		
Investments	\$ 4,040,126	\$ 2,976,895
Property and Equipment	4,224,382	4,345,194
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	(3,665,236)	(3,659,107)
Property and Equipment, Net	559,146	686,087
Total Noncurrent Assets	4,599,272	3,662,982
Operating Right-of-Use Asset	2,433,056	3,601,717
Total Assets	\$ 20,393,710	\$ 17,666,578

“IT HAS BEEN A LONG ROAD, AND I AM GRATEFUL FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE FOR MY CASE. IT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING TIME OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL NEVER FORGET THE REPRESENTATION YOU PROVIDED.”

—Sofia, Former Client

Statement of Financial Position

as of December 31, 2022 and December 31, 2023

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	2024	2023
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Fringe Benefits and Payroll Withholdings	\$ 221,920	\$ 145,920
Accounts Payable	77,062	108,825
Grants Payable	86,267	49,937
Deferred Revenue	70,221	135,993
Current Lease Liability - Operating	1,736,402	1,712,142
Accrued Vacation Expense	919,445	895,307
Client Deposits	368,334	1,070,210
Total Current Liabilities	\$ 3,479,651	\$ 4,118,334
NONCURRENT LIABILITIES		
Long-Term Lease Liability - Operating	1,917,382	3,653,783
Total Liabilities	\$ 5,397,033	\$ 7,772,117
NET ASSETS		
Without Donor Restrictions:		
Undesignated	\$ 10,650,381	\$ 6,526,750
Board-Designated Endowment	3,940,126	2,876,895
Total Without Donor Restrictions	14,590,507	9,403,645
With Donor Restrictions	406,170	490,816
Total Net Assets	14,996,677	9,894,461
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 20,393,710	\$ 17,666,578

“यह एक लंबा सफ़र रहा है, और मेरे मामले में आपने जो कुछ भी किया है, उसके लिए मैं आपका आभारी हूँ। यह मेरे जीवन का सबसे चुनौतीपूर्ण समय था, और आपने जो प्रतिनिधित्व किया, उसे मैं कभी नहीं भूलूँगा।”

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Cynthia Sadkin, Chief Strategy Officer, proudly holding the signed Buddy Guy guitar she won at Justice Is Served!

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**"I TALKED, YOU LISTENED. YOU
HELPED RESOLVE MY LEGAL
PROBLEM. THANK YOU!"**

—Jenny, Former Client

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Some of our staff pose to celebrate International Women's Day.

“Rozmawiałem, słuchałeś. Pomogłeś
mi rozwiązać mój problem prawny.
Dziękuję!”

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Our Community

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OUR MISSION

At Legal Aid Chicago, we work together to provide high quality civil legal aid to people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups. Through advocacy, education, collaboration, and litigation we empower individuals, protect fundamental rights, strengthen communities, create opportunities, and achieve justice. In carrying out our mission, we treat everyone with compassion and respect.

On back cover:

THANK YOU!

These are the words that Legal Aid Chicago clients say to us most often in many different languages! And in turn, we say thank you to YOU—our friends, supporters, and donors for making our critical work possible.



**LEGAL AID
CHICAGO**

120 S. LaSalle Street
Ste. 900
Chicago, IL 60603

legalaidthicago.org

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