

Standing Together

Working Toward Justice for All

THE ARTIST > **RISA TRITABAUGH**



Risa Tritabaugh grew up in small town Minnesota and recognized at an early age her desire to be an artist. Life took several detours along the way, and in 1988, with two young children, Risa found herself facing an ugly divorce. With the divorce behind her, Risa turned her attention to raising her children as a single parent. While there was little extra time or money, she still heeded the call to make art—even if only in a small corner of her bedroom or alongside her children at the dining room table. She also pursued a career in social work and for over 15 years worked with families struggling with poverty, domestic violence and other issues.

Several years ago, with her children grown, Risa renewed her focus on making art. She married a fellow artist (actor) who supports her artistic pursuits. Following a layoff last year, Risa is charting a new life course that includes being a full-time artist.

You can view her work at www.risatritabaugh.com

DEAR FRIENDS,

I recall a client from my early days at Legal Aid as a staff attorney. She came for family law help. The family was middle class, and appeared to be a normal, average American family.

This woman was completely beaten down. She saw herself as useless, worthless, incapable of action. Her husband completely controlled the finances, so without a free lawyer she had no place to start. We began our work together on her divorce and custody case, and it was a long and difficult legal process.

By the end, she had become an entirely different person. She learned that she could stand up and fight back for herself and for her children. It's tough to stand tall in a swirl of logistical and emotional problems if nobody has your back. By having our clients' backs, we help them stand. Once they stand, they go on to take care of themselves and their families, and to help others.

We come to work in the morning and we help our clients, but day-to-day we can't predict the long-term impact. Sometimes we find out much later. I met a woman at a meeting in Minneapolis who had been a Legal Aid client 25 years earlier. She approached me after the meeting and said, "Legal Aid changed my life, and my children's lives. You showed us that we could stand for ourselves."

As Executive Director, I didn't often meet our clients anymore, and I didn't see the enormous changes, for example, the client who now comes home to a safe house with no fear for herself or her children. And you, the donor, also may not have an opportunity to hear from the clients themselves. And so, again and again, I ask our staff attorneys to share their stories.

This year's annual report contains stories about domestic violence that show what people can do when someone has their back. Consistent and reliable financial backing from our donors enables us to provide that support to our clients. Some of those clients, as their lives change, become donors and help us with the next client, and the next.



On February 15, 2011, after 30 years as Executive Director, I stepped down with a range of feelings. I'm grateful for having been given the opportunity to be of service. I'm comfortable in my decision because I know that Legal Aid has an outstanding staff, leadership and board to carry it into its second century of helping people change their lives. I'm somewhat frustrated that the need for Legal Aid's services is going up, not down. I'm proud to be part of a legal community that has unfailingly supported our mission over my forty-one years at Legal Aid. I'm humbled by the courage, generosity and resilience demonstrated over and over again by the clients we serve, in the face of adversity the likes of which I have never experienced. And I'm excited at the prospect of devoting the final chapter of my career at Legal Aid to building our resources, so that when you and I are gone, Legal Aid will be here, and strong, when our clients need us.

Jeremy Lane, Executive Director

By having our clients' backs, we help them stand. Once they stand, they go on to take care of themselves and their families, and to help others.



An innovative partnership
between MMLA's St. Cloud office and the
Stearns County Domestic Violence Court
helps victims of domestic abuse gain access
to trusted and confidential legal services.

Weaving Threads of Trust

“I need help, but I’m afraid to tell anyone.

Do you promise you won’t tell that I told?”

St. Cloud Legal Aid Attorney Sarah Hennesy assured the caller through several phone contacts that their conversation was protected by attorney-client privilege. Finally, the woman told Sarah that her abuser, a convicted felon, was violating his no-contact order. He threatened to kill both her and her children if she reported him.

Together, the client and Sarah developed a plan for the court’s surveillance officer to make a well-timed, unscheduled visit. The officer brought the police, and the abuser was arrested and put in jail for violating the terms of his conditional release.

Sarah is part of a unique and innovative partnership between Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance’s (MMLA) St. Cloud office and the Stearns County Domestic Violence Court. The DV Court is a project that involves the County Attorney, judges, probation officers, victim services, county law enforcement, and Legal Aid. When advising Stearns County Attorney Janelle Kendall in the early planning stages, a consultant from the Center for Court Innovation in New York, said:

“The thing that will change your world is a Legal Aid lawyer.”

Now, when a felon enters the DV court, the victim’s contact information is sent immediately to Sarah.

“Attorney-client privilege is key,” says Sarah. “These women are mandated to testify in criminal court against the abuser, and most want no involvement whatsoever. I start by saying that I am a civil attorney and do not work in the prosecutor’s office. I explain the difference between criminal and civil law.”

Research shows that the level of availability of legal services in the county of residence has a significant, proportional effect on the likelihood that an individual woman is abused. Less availability of legal services leads to greater likelihood of abuse.

“They often decline help on the initial contact,” Sarah says. “But they may call back in a week, or even months later.” Help with the most immediate problems, usually not directly connected with the abuse, provides the first thread of trust. Sarah helped one woman whose utilities had been turned off. Several weeks later, the woman called back to ask for help with a divorce.

Since its inception in April of 2009, the program has helped 76 victims of felony abusers with divorce, custody, grandparent visitation, paternity, child support, name change, public assistance, housing, mortgage issues, health care, advice regarding termination of parental rights, Social Security or disability law, utilities, debt collection, and more.

As trust builds, clients begin to seek advice on police and/or criminal procedures, orders for protection, offenses by the abuser, and testifying in DV court. Some women go on to access other resources such as shelters, counseling, and education. The thread of trust expands and multiplies, supported by a larger community.

County Attorney Kendall says, “We do all we can to remove the abuser from the situation. We’ve gotten better at locking the abusers up, but that doesn’t solve the problem. After release, he is back and so is she. Now, we look at the entire system. Rather than asking the victim of the repeat offender, ‘What is wrong with you?’ our partnership with Legal Aid enables us to ask, ‘What happened to you, and what do you need?’”



Help with the most immediate problems, usually not directly connected with the abuse, provides the first thread of trust.

Teamwork That Works

A Legal Aid team came together to help Halima escape an abusive marriage.



My goal is to become a Legal Aid donor myself.

—Halima,
Legal Aid client

In June of 2008, a client said to Managing Attorney Peggy Russell, “There is a woman in the waiting room who has some issues. I found her crying at a bus stop. Maybe you could help her?” An hour later, Halima (not her real name) was in a taxi, on her way to HomeFree, a battered women’s shelter.

“I knew nothing that day,” says Halima. “I was so afraid. I spoke no English, and I was afraid of American people. My ex-husband always said they would prey on me and hurt me. Now, Legal Aid is like my home. I have a good feeling when I walk by the building.”

Halima arrived in the United States in August of 2007, excited to join her new husband and continue her schooling. Her husband was a United States citizen who has lived here since childhood. Theirs was an arranged marriage, according to their culture. He courted Halima in Ethiopia and they married. He obtained a visa for her to join him in Minnesota, with a conditional resident status.

The situation deteriorated quickly. Halima suffered nine months of verbal and physical abuse, and total isolation in their basement apartment. Halima’s husband refused to give her money for a bus pass to go to school. She worked for a few weeks, but he made her stop. He forced her to have an abortion, left her alone for days with no food, and finally threw her out of the apartment with no resources, no friends, and no money.

Once Halima was settled at a shelter, she began working with Legal Aid right away and received help on a myriad of issues in the months to come. Betsy Parrell took her immigration case, and referred her to Central Minnesota Legal



Services Family Law Attorney Christy Snow-Kaster for a divorce. Oromo interpreter Hashim Adam, a Legal Aid client himself and a work-study student from the University of Minnesota, provided Halima with a safe mode of reliable communication. Benefits attorney BJ Kuhn gave advice on questions of benefits, and Anne Quincy gave advice on temporary employment. Later, when Halima received notice that her ex-husband had illegally claimed non-existent children on their joint income tax the year before, she worked with tax attorney Sarah Bronson.



Throughout her months at the shelter, Halima went to weekly counseling. She attended school for eight hours or more every day for six months, determined to learn English as quickly as possible. She learned about immigration requirements, divorce proceedings, and tax responsibilities.

Halima's divorce was final in December of 2008. Her immigration case was approved in January of 2010. Her tax case is nearly resolved, and she is preparing to apply for U.S. citizenship. Today,

Halima has two jobs and is seeking a third. She supports herself and has a place to call home. Halima is standing on her own, and moving forward.

Halima says, "I can take care of myself—I am a free woman. I am so grateful to everyone who donates to Legal Aid. You help those who have nothing. Please continue to give, and I will become one of you."



Partnering to Protect Those Most Vulnerable

Two collaborations address the needs of women with disabilities who suffer domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) got its start in 1972, when attorneys from Legal Aid filed a community integration lawsuit on behalf of institutionalized Minnesotans with developmental disabilities. Much of MDLC's early work involved the investigation and monitoring of abuse and neglect in facilities. Today, MDLC provides a range of rights protection, representation, policy advocacy, and education that impacts people with disabilities in all settings.



Working with a wide variety of individuals and organizations... is the key to comprehensive and long-lasting change.

The National Crime Victimization Survey revealed that women with disabilities are more than twice as likely to experience rape or sexual assault in their lifetime, and police response rate to violent crime is lower when the victim has a disability.

Offenders typically seek out those who they perceive as vulnerable and isolated from services, and the abuse can take a range of forms. In addition to the obvious vulnerabilities, perpetrators may impede access to necessary medication and assistive technology (wheelchairs, communication devices, etc.), deny accessible transportation, harm service animals, or withhold physical assistance. And if the abuse is reported, perpetrators may use the disability as a way to discredit the report.

Two recent MDLC collaborations seek to address the particular needs of women with disabilities who suffer domestic violence or sexual assault.

Since 2009, Duluth staff have been involved with “Building Bridges to Safety”. They have collaborated with domestic violence programs, disability groups, sexual assault services, and local police, MDLC has worked to better address the specific problems faced by these women. Police officers received training on how to better communicate with persons with disabilities. Disability service providers learned about the dynamics of abuse, and victim services agencies learned how to enhance access for women with disabilities.

This collaborative power is yielding results. Diane Naus, MDLC Legal Advocate in Duluth, has seen improvements first-hand. “Partner agencies have been able to provide a more comprehensive response, and they say this has improved their ability to serve people with disabilities who have been victims of crime,” Diane commented.

To continue this progress, a second organizing effort is now underway to increase access to domestic violence and sexual assault services for American Indian and non-Indian women with disabilities. Minnesota Accessing Paths to Safety (MAPS) is a collaborative project of four statewide organizations: MDLC, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition, Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.

MAPS was one of only seven projects in the country to receive a 2009 Disability Grant through the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women.

The basis of MAPS’ work is a belief that if we can respond to barriers and challenges faced by women who are among the most vulnerable, who encounter multiple layers of discrimination, and whose communities have a high incidence of disabilities, we will ultimately be more effective in responding to the needs of all women with disabilities.

MDLC Attorney, Anne Henry recognizes the power of collaboration. “Working with a wide variety of individuals and organizations when trying to solve problems or improve circumstances for persons with disabilities is the key to comprehensive and long-lasting change, and to creating a truly inclusive society where persons with disabilities are able to participate on the same basis as everyone else.”



As people with disabilities continue to successfully integrate with their communities, our mandate to protect and advocate continues with different challenges.

—Pamela Hoopes,
Deputy Director
of MDLC

The Art of Surviving and Thriving

The life-changing effect of offering protection and support, so battered women can stand up and rebuild their lives.



I cut phrases from a court document that spelled out several incidents of abuse, and incorporated them into the body of the figure. This became *Grace in Sorrow*.

—Risa Tritabaugh

Recently, Legal Aid Deputy Director Ann Cofell received an email that began, “Hi, I’m Risa, I don’t know if you remember me...”

Risa Tritabaugh needn’t have wondered if she was remembered. In 1987, she struggled through a difficult legal process to extricate herself and her children from a violent home. Now a social worker and accomplished artist, Risa helps other women identify and escape abusive situations.

She left art school at the University of Minnesota when she married her first husband. As he became dangerously abusive, Risa’s artistic spirit began to close down. “I lost myself in that relationship,” she says. “By the end of it, my energy was put into surviving.”

Risa came to Legal Aid for help with a divorce, and she and Ann began their work together. Risa’s husband became more dangerous and erratic after they separated. An immigrant from a country hostile to the U.S., he threatened to take their two children there if given the chance. After he threatened to hurt Risa, the brake line on her car was cut. Risa was so scared that she considered taking the kids underground if he was allowed unsupervised visits. Even as he underwent anger management courses, she did not want him to have unsupervised visitation unless he turned over his passport and posted a bond to cover some of the costs Risa would incur if she had to fight for the children’s return.

Based on experience and consultation with other attorneys, Ann thought it unlikely the judge would agree to the conditions. Ann negotiated a good settlement that would gradually allow unsupervised parenting time following completion of anger management courses. Ann feared that if Risa did not accept the settlement, the judge would agree to unsupervised visitation sooner.

Risa stood firm against the settlement. She said “Ann, I know this is a good settlement from your perspective as a lawyer, but if he gets unsupervised visitation he will take my children. If I fight it with everything I have, and then the judge orders unsupervised visitation anyway, at least I will know I fought.” Ann told her, “Then I will fight for what you want.”

Risa had no witnesses to the severity of her husband’s abuse. The question of unrestricted custody would come down to her word against his. A friend of Risa’s husband had agreed to be a witness, but could only testify that Risa was the primary caretaker of the children. She had no personal knowledge of abuse.

On the day of the hearing, that witness told Ann that Risa’s husband had said if she testified against him, he would hurt her. The witness testified about the threat, and with the additional evidence, the judge granted every condition that Risa requested.

So when Ann received Risa’s email, she responded immediately. “I do remember you, and I tell nearly every new lawyer about your case because of all it taught me.”

Risa says, “It was huge for me to be heard, and that allowed me to fight for myself. Ann’s concern meant so much to me. Battered women often need others to recognize the danger before they take it seriously themselves.”

Risa and Ann had not seen each other in twenty years, but each has had a significant impact on the work of the other. Today, each carries that experience of combined strength, and uses it to impact the lives of others.



“I share this work because I want people to realize this does happen to their daughter, sister, co-worker, neighbor...I also want them to realize that if battered women are offered the protection and support they need, they can repair and rebuild their lives.”

Online Tools to Help Clients Combat Abuse

MMLA's State Support Center develops technology to extend the reach of services for domestic violence cases.



The new online tools help advocates and self-represented persons complete common legal forms often needed in domestic violence cases.

Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance's State Support Center, which supports legal services organizations statewide with training, community legal education materials, and other service tools, leads the way in technology innovations to address the many legal issues affecting Legal Aid clients. Domestic violence is no exception. State Support has for years made domestic violence booklets, fact sheets and contact information for shelter and advocate groups widely available to the public at www.LawHelpMN.org. Now, State Support has developed two new online tools to help advocates and pro se persons complete common legal forms often needed in domestic violence cases. These tools employ user-friendly interview software to gather the required information through simple questions presented as a conversation between the user (advocate or client) and a guide. Next, document assembly software incorporates that information into the required form as a Word document.

Harassment Restraining Order

The first and most widely used tool is the Harassment Restraining Order (HRO), which produced a total of 2,055 HROs in 2010. While the HRO is not used exclusively in domestic violence cases, it is often used either as a precursor or a strategic alternative to an Order for Protection (OFP). The HRO is the most frequently used of State Support's domestic violence document assembly tools. It is also far and away the most successful of all pro se

and advocate document assembly programs, accounting for roughly three-quarters of all documents produced through LawHelp in 2010.

The HRO tool's success arises from a partnership between State Support and Hennepin County District Court. The Harassment Restraining Order was created in coordination with the Court's Self-Help Center to address what they recognized as a clear and growing need. Staff attorneys at the Self-Help Center had become overburdened, handling eight to twelve HROs in a typical day. Now, individuals who need HROs can use any of the Self-Help Center's four public computers to create their forms, with only periodic guidance from staff. The HRO technology has freed up court staff time significantly, saving resources and allowing them to serve more clients with additional needs.

The second new tool is an Order for Protection (OFP), released in 2010. This tool is based on an OFP interview created specifically for attorneys and advocates in collaboration with legal services providers and victim advocates. Each interview produces three documents: the OFP Request, the Order itself, and the Law Enforcement Information Sheet.

The OFP tool is now available to pro se litigants and advocates alike, and State Support will work to expand its use in 2011. In contrast to the HRO, many advocates and attorneys throughout the state assist victims with OFPs. Because victim safety is a critical concern, the tool issues warnings about pro se action. It instructs users not to use the tool unless they are certain they are safe, and encourages them instead to call Minnesota's Domestic Violence Hotline to find advocate help in obtaining an OFP and other services. Recognizing this primary need for victim safety, State Support's promotional focus for this tool will be to support the work of domestic violence advocates and court self-help centers across the state, helping them provide a clear, simple, and efficient means of completing OFP legal documents, and freeing up critical staff time for additional victim advocacy.

FINANCIALS

REVENUE & EXPENDITURES > 2010

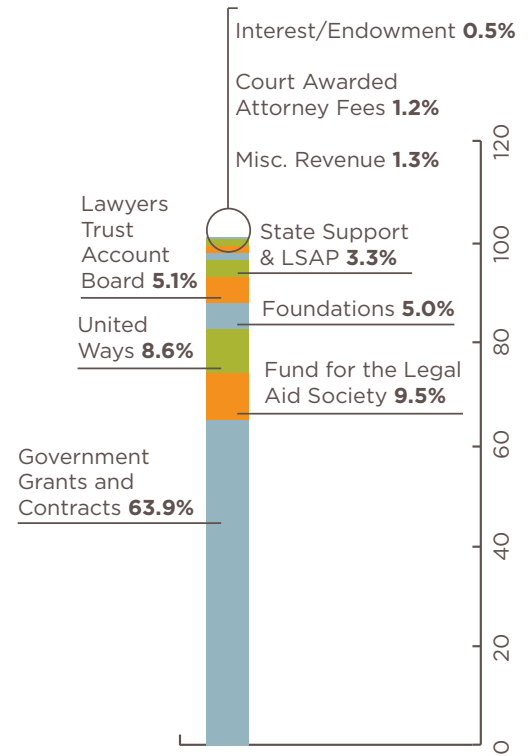
REVENUE

Government Grants and Contracts	7,444,070
United Ways	995,611
Foundations	584,624
Fund For the Legal Aid Society	1,100,000
Lawyers Trust Account Board	593,961
Miscellaneous Revenue	155,534
Court Awarded Attorney Fees	142,842
Interest/Endowment Earnings	52,057
Other Legal Services Programs to support (State Support & LSAP)	386,670
Fellowships and Clerks	183,981
TOTAL	11,639,350

EXPENDITURES

Poverty Law Services	7,447,541
Disability Law Services	2,018,579
Administration	1,162,440
Fundraising	403,056
State Support Services	524,592
Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP)	482,755
TOTAL	12,038,963
Prior Reserve	2,909,031
Year End Reserve	2,509,419

REVENUE



FINANCIALS

CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEETS > DEC. 31, 2010

ASSETS

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$3,149,225
Receivables:	
Grants and Contracts	1,378,523
Pledges and Other	71,614
Prepaid Expenses	62,742
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	4,662,104

PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, at cost

Less Accumulated Depreciation	(387,660)
TOTAL PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT (NET)	868,442

OTHER LONG-TERM ASSETS

Funds Held by Community Foundation	2,037,648
Client Escrow Funds	13,756
Grants and Contracts Receivable	—
TOTAL OTHER LONG-TERM ASSETS	2,051,404
TOTAL ASSETS	\$7,581,950

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

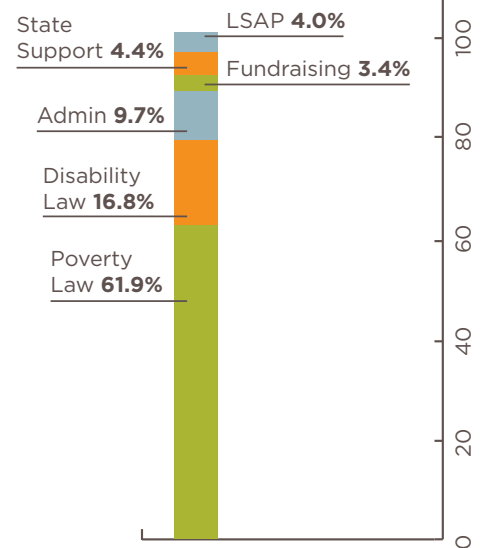
CURRENT LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$359,465
Client Trust Deposits	12,756
Accrued Expenses	354,219
Grant Advances	—
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	726,440

NET ASSETS

Unrestricted Net Assets	4,166,947
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	650,915
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	2,037,648
TOTAL NET ASSETS	6,855,510
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$7,581,950

EXPENDITURES



2010 Giving Report

Legal Aid's success depends on the generosity of those who support us. We are forever grateful, particularly in today's challenging economic times, for the support of individuals, law firms, corporations and foundations who have provided gifts to The Fund for the Legal Aid Society, the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, St. Cloud Area Legal Services, Western Minnesota Legal Services, and the Minnesota Disability Law Center.

FOUNDATIONS

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Equal Justice Foundation
Family Housing Fund
Federal Bar Association - Minnesota Chapter
Hennepin County Bar Foundation
Lutheran Social Services (St. Cloud)
Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger
The McKnight Foundation
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Minnesota Justice Foundation
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United Way of Central Minnesota
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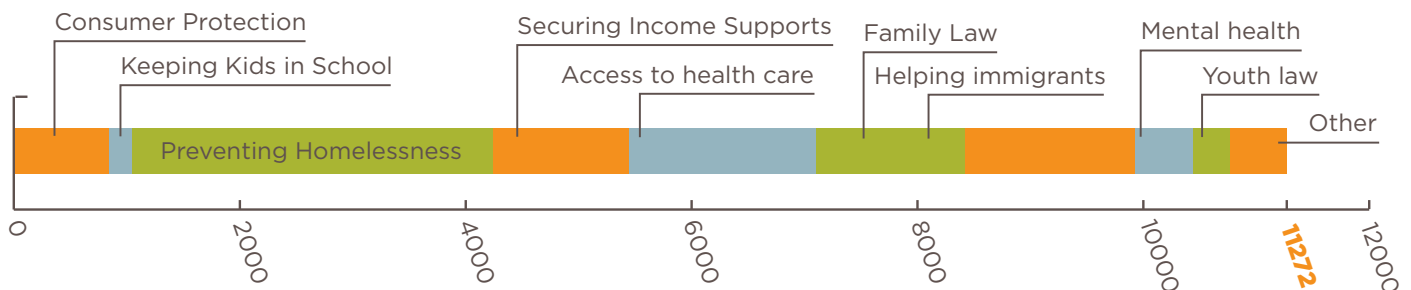
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Allen Saeks

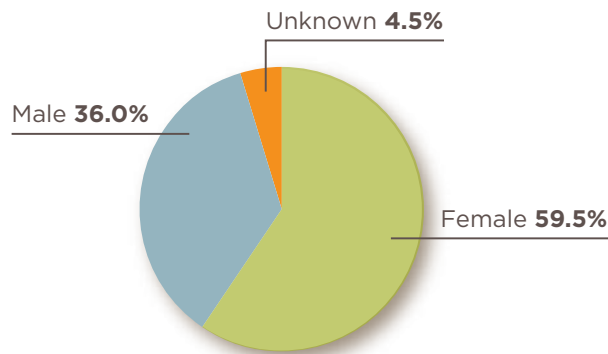
BY THE NUMBERS CASES CLOSED > **AREA OF LAW**

Helping people with housing issues represent more than 1 in 4 legal aid cases each year.



BY THE NUMBERS

CASES CLOSED > **GENDER**



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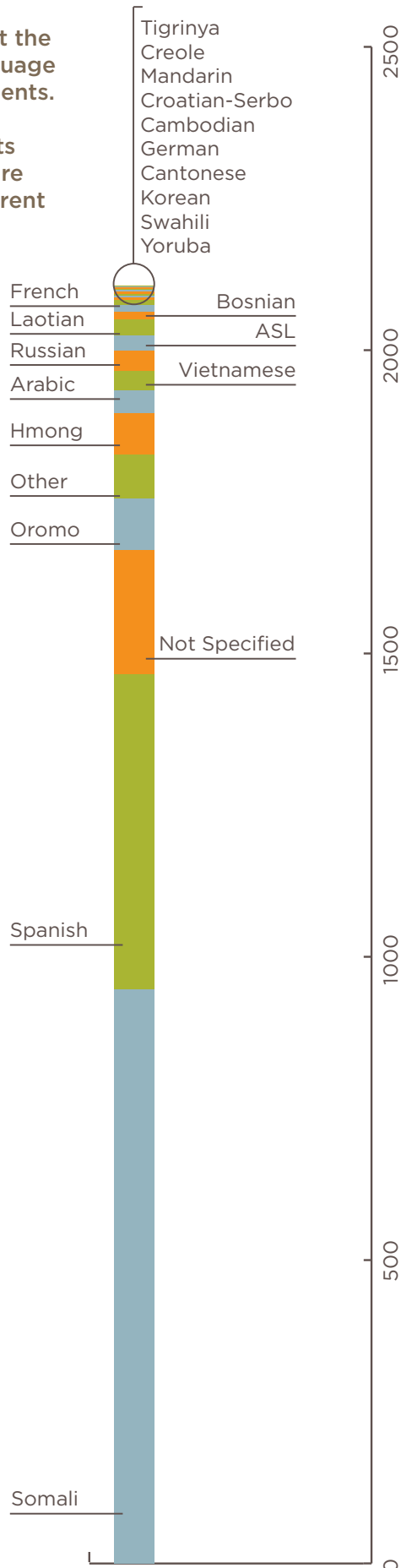
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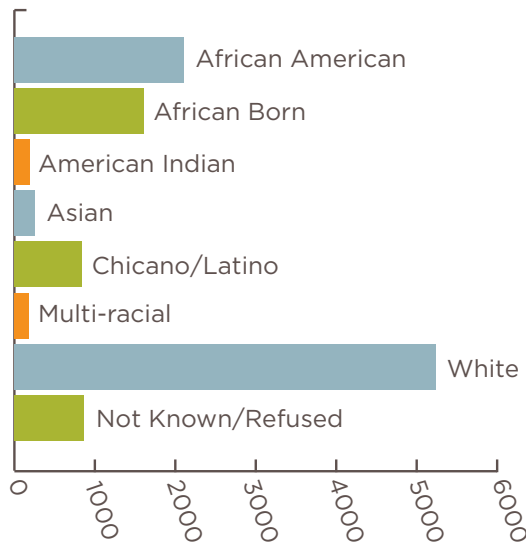
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Andrea Kaufman has served on the board of The Fund for the Legal Aid Society since 1993, including a term as Board Chair from 2008–2010, and four years as Leaders in Giving Chair. She exemplifies the passionate leadership, generosity, and broad vision that Legal Aid relies upon from the private sector in Hennepin County.

“Legal Aid donations are not a hard sell to the business and legal communities,” says Andrea, formerly Senior Deputy General Counsel for U.S. Bank. “Lawyers and business people understand the importance of the work Legal Aid does—not only for the individuals seeking help, but for all of us. Access to needed legal services enables people to stabilize their lives so they can go to school, maintain jobs, and care for their families. This not only contributes to a vibrant community, but it increases the pool of available resources for others in need, as clients become donors.”

“I am rarely told no when I ask for donations to Legal Aid,” Andrea says. “The challenge is to reach donors in a deeper way, and encourage them to grow their commitment, to make decisions about larger gifts and involvement as their careers grow.”

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ASSOCIATES CAMPAIGN

Standing for Justice

The Associates' Campaign has an immediate annual impact on Legal Aid's vision of justice for all. The Campaign brings tremendous energy and focus to fundraising for near-term objectives, while passing the commitment of support to each new generation of attorneys.

In 2003, Joel Bergstrom, who had participated in New York's Associates' Campaign, proposed the concept to Legal Aid as a program with potential for fundraising among newer attorneys. The first Associates' Campaign launched that fall as an expansion of The Fund for the Legal Aid Society's One Hour of Sharing Campaign. Joel and other associates established teams of solicitors in about 30 firms to reach out to their colleagues through direct, personal contact. The Campaign has grown every year, with raised funds increasing from \$18,579 in 2003-2004 to over \$85,000 last year, with more than 60 firms now participating.

Julia Dayton Klein, 2010 Co-Chair from Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, eloquently described the benefits of the Associates' Campaign: "The people at Legal Aid do what most of us wish we had the time and courage to do—help those who need it the most at the most fundamental level. It is encouraging to see the generosity of my colleagues who share this value. It reinforces the idea that is sometimes lost in the trenches: that we are members of a profession and collectively ascribe to the higher calling of justice."

Julia is one of a group of dedicated associate co-chairs spearheading the Campaign. This year's co-chairs are from seven Minneapolis law firms: Dorsey & Whitney; Faegre & Benson; Leonard, Street and Deinard; Lindquist & Vennum; Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand; Nichols Kaster; and Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi.

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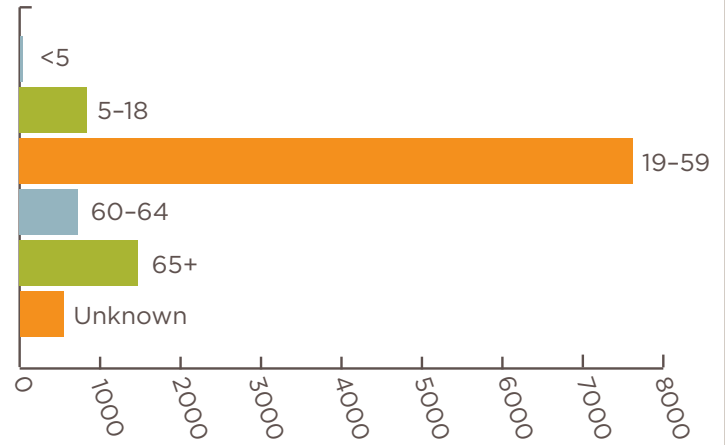
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Partners With Passion

Working toward justice for all is not just a mission statement—hundreds in our legal community stand up for it every day, with passion and intent. Recently two staff members of Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance were recognized for the quality of their work in 2010. These awards are a testament to their concern for others and their energy in delivering the benefits of benevolence. These awards are a testament to their experience, skill, talent and dedication.

Jerry Lane—2010 Denison Ray “Denny” Award

Jerry Lane was awarded the Denison Ray “Denny” Award, presented by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) to honor persons who have provided at least five years of service to the legal services community. The award recognizes Jerry’s unrelenting pursuit of justice for the poor for over four decades. Jerry serves as an incredible example of service and perseverance to benefit those who are unable to help themselves.



Ron Elwood—2010 Bernard P. Becker Award

Ron Elwood, Staff Attorney at the Legal Services Advocacy Project, received the Minnesota Bar Association’s 2010 Bernard P. Becker Award. The Becker Award recognizes Ron’s work on consumer protection issues in Minnesota, which has been used as the basis for legislation at the national level and in other states. The historic Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Title XIV) includes many provisions of Minnesota’s landmark 2007 predatory mortgage lending

law, spearheaded by Ron with support by the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office and a broad coalition. Ron joined Legal Aid in 1998, and is also a board member of the National Low Income Energy Consortium and the Energy Cents Coalition.

Congratulations to Jerry and Ron, who continue to make an impact on the lives of the people and organizations they support every day.

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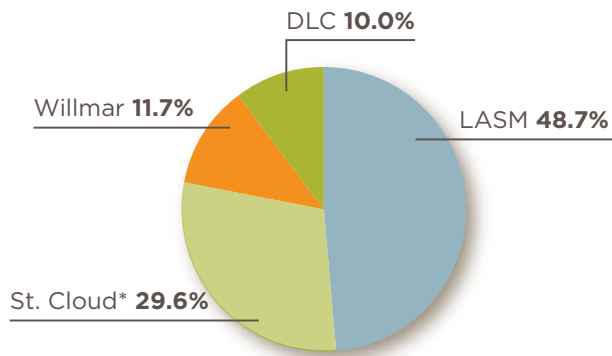
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