



Legal Aid Society
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

2008 ANNUAL REPORT

Fundraising

Volunteers

Mission

Cases

Compassion



Fighting for Justice

Dedication

Legal Aid Society

Leadership



Advocate

Commitment

COMMUNITY OF JUSTICE

"I chose to be a loaned associate to Legal Aid so that I could learn about advocating for justice from the finest poverty lawyers in the country."

Kristin Keeling, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia is a community organized around the simple ideals that the law should be fair and should be fairly applied. Since its founding in 1932 in the shadow of the great depression, Legal Aid has always been larger than the institution that carries the name.

Legal Aid's hardworking Board of Trustees and talented staff are critical to our work for equal justice. The Board's leadership and fundraising ensures that the program thrives and keeps to its mission. The advocates and others who come to work every day do a remarkable job taking the hardest cases and translating them into a just result - for individuals, for families, for neighborhoods and for the District.

The Legal Aid community also includes our clients. As much as we work on behalf of our clients, we also work with them. The cases belong to them, but we share the cause. Working together we seek to elevate disputes above their procedural requirements and to achieve fair results. Individual cases are leveraged to bring about system reform. Our clients and their stories inspire us and give us the courage to continue to look for ways to use each case to bring us one step closer to a just society.

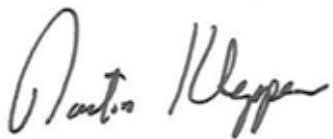
The hundreds of lawyers, law students and others who volunteer with Legal Aid in so many different ways are also part of our community. The reach of Legal Aid extends far beyond its staff through generous individuals who give time to our cases and projects.

We partner in this community effort as well with those who provide us financial support. Dedicated individuals, law firms, corporations and foundations provide meaningful contributions each year. There is a deep commitment in this bar and this city to equal justice.

Finally, our community includes our legal and social services partners. Our staff works shoulder-to-shoulder with dedicated legal services, social work and medical staff across the District.

The Legal Aid Society is a law office for people who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. Legal Aid staff take cases for litigation and provide advice, counsel and other assistance. From our individual case load, we identify systemic issues and pursue changes in government programs or business practices to address them. We have practice units in the areas of family, housing, and public benefits law and have recently formed a consumer law unit.

In this annual report, we have provided you with a snapshot of the community that is Legal Aid. We hope that you will continue to be part of our community and stand with us to ensure that all persons, regardless of income or wealth, have meaningful access to the mechanisms of our system of laws and justice.



Martin Klepper
President, Board of Trustees
Skadden, Arps, Slate,
Meagher & Flom, LLP



Jonathan M. Smith
Executive Director
Legal Aid Society of
the District of Columbia

A COMMUNITY OF JUSTICE

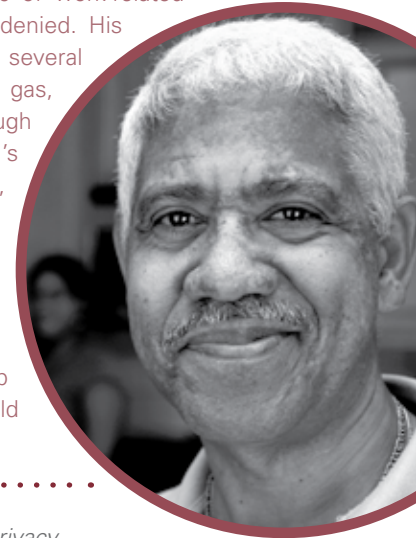
Our clients are at the center of our work. While our efforts are structured by the mechanics of the legal system, our clients' disputes and the search for just resolutions guide us. It is our clients' lives – their struggles and their successes – that motivate and inspire the Legal Aid community and that best tell our story.

GOING INTO THE COMMUNITY

Legal Aid has moved many of its services into communities of highly concentrated poverty. While we continue to serve clients in our main office in downtown Washington, in order to reduce transportation and other barriers, we have opened three offices at locations east of the Anacostia River and an office in the Landlord and Tenant Branch of the Superior Court. All of our community offices are partnerships with other legal and social services organizations. We have located them not only in our clients' neighborhoods, but in places that clients already come to seek other services. Our presence in the community allows us to help individuals and families that may lack the resources to travel downtown.

..... *Michael*

Michael came to Legal Aid's office in Southeast DC seeking assistance to obtain Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Forty-seven years old with a wife and four children to support, Michael suffers from a serious heart condition and diabetes that prevent him from doing even the most basic of work-related activities. Nevertheless, Michael's application for SSI was denied. His family's financial situation was dire. They fell behind on rent several times and received shut-off threats due to unpaid electricity, gas, and telephone bills. Some weeks, they struggled to buy enough food for their children. Had Legal Aid not been in Michael's neighborhood and had he been required to pay for transportation, he might have been unable to obtain help. A Legal Aid lawyer was able to take on his case immediately. Legal Aid appealed the denial and presented evidence of the disability. Nearly a year after his original application was denied, Michael's SSI was approved, and he received back payments in full. Said Michael, "Legal Aid did a great deal for me. Without Legal Aid's help I don't think I would have ever gotten the assistance I should have gotten a long time ago."



.....
All client names in this report have been changed to protect privacy.

"Through my work on the Board I am able to contribute to our larger community in a meaningful way, and I am inspired by the talented and dedicated attorneys and staff of LAS who do so much to help the most vulnerable among us."

Joyce Trimble Gwadz, Dow Lohnes PLLC

PROTECTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It takes strength and courage to escape domestic violence. In many cases, victims can secure an order without a lawyer, but in far too many cases the lack of counsel can be disastrous. Legal Aid gives the highest priority to helping victims secure protective orders and to solving the myriad of related issues that confront a person escaping an abusive partner.

Rose

A mother came to Legal Aid after years of unrelenting violence and verbal abuse. As an immigrant without a strong extended family or social network around her for support, she felt particularly vulnerable to her husband's almost daily threats. He called her a "slave" and asserted that he could do with her what he pleased. Her abuser was the sole breadwinner and Rose was not allowed to work and had no money of her own.

He refused to provide money for food and clothing unless she submitted to unwanted sex. For years, he threatened to burn down the house with the family inside, telling Rose and the children that he would kill them all if she ever took legal action against him. When outsiders intervened, he dismissed them, asserting that his abuses were his right as a husband. Once Rose was ready to take action, Legal Aid sought and won a Civil Protection Order ("CPO") which included an order granting our client temporary exclusive custody. The father was allowed to visit the children only under supervision and was required to vacate the family home and pay child support. The payments to Rose enabled her to establish an independent household and to care for the daily needs of herself and her children. For the first time in many years, our client and her children can sleep and live in their home safely, happily, and peacefully. "I give Legal Aid 10 out of 10," Rose said.

"Without you I would never have made it."



PREVENTING EVICTIONS

Important protections are built into the District's landlord and tenant laws, including the right to safe and well maintained housing, freedom from retaliation for reporting housing code violations, and the right to be accommodated for a disability. However, the procedures are structured to make it very difficult for a tenant to assert these rights without a lawyer. Legal Aid staff step in to protect tenants from avoidable evictions and to ensure that the housing code is enforced.

Maria

Maria came to Legal Aid in danger of being evicted from the house where she lived with her two children. Her landlord had fallen into foreclosure and the bank, which assumed ownership of the house, tried to evict her as a squatter. The eviction was improper; Maria had a valid tenancy and thus a right to stay. Faced with our legal challenge, the bank then tried to evict Maria for nonpayment of rent. She uses a government voucher to pay a portion of the rent and the bank had not taken the appropriate steps to secure payment from the D.C. Housing Authority (DCHA). Compounding matters, the property was not up to code, and was thus ineligible for the voucher program. Working with DCHA and the bank, Legal Aid forced necessary repairs, got the bank enrolled in the voucher program and saved our client's tenancy. Maria and her children now have a new one-year lease with the bank. Additionally, the eviction case against her was dismissed. "If it wasn't for Legal Aid, I would be out in the street," Maria said. "I wouldn't have known what to do. I am a success from Legal Aid."

SECURING MEDICAL CARE

The health care safety net in the District of Columbia is among the best in the nation. Nevertheless, many low-income children and adults confront barriers to securing care. Legal Aid's staff work with clients to ensure that they have access to medications and treatment.

Donna

Donna, an 82 year-old woman living with breast cancer, sought help from Legal Aid to solve problems with medical care. Two years ago, an insurance salesman talked her into enrolling in a private Medicare HMO. The plan was inappropriate for Donna's medical needs, something that should have been apparent to the broker and the insurer. Had she stayed in traditional Medicare, her premiums would have been paid by Medicaid and all of her health care costs would have been covered. The HMO required her to pay co-payments for every doctor's visit and medical procedure. Unable to pay, Donna was taken to court following a mastectomy. She paid as many bills as she could and as she fell farther behind in payments, she stopped seeking medical care. When Legal Aid first began working with her, Donna had been to the doctor only once in the past four months. She had also stopped taking some of her cancer medications. We persuaded her to immediately resume her doctors visits while we worked to restore her original benefits. We intervened with the insurance company and federal Medicare officials. As a result of our advocacy, Donna had her original benefits restored. She can now seek treatment and get medications whenever she needs them without worrying that she will not be able to buy food or pay rent. "I can't thank you enough for what you've done," Donna said. "You're very reliable people. You do what you say you're going to do and work hard until it's done. You can't get any better help than Legal Aid."

PRESERVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In recent decades the shortage of affordable housing has grown worse and poverty has grown more concentrated. Legal Aid works with tenants and tenant associations in the District to save buildings and preserve them from conversion to condominiums or luxury apartments with the goal of an affordable and economically integrated city.

Six tenants living in a building in Southeast Washington came to Legal Aid after their landlord imposed massive and illegal rent increases. The landlord was attempting to convert the building to condominiums and the tenants had voted against the move. In retaliation, the landlord increased rents as much as 46% in some units in violation of the District's rent control law. Our clients are low-income and could not afford to stay if they were forced to pay the higher rents. Legal Aid lawyers sought relief from the Office of Administrative Hearings. The administrative law judge ruled that the increases were illegal and rolled back the rent. In addition, the landlord was fined \$2500 as a penalty for acting in bad faith and engaging in retaliation. This case succeeded in preventing this group of clients from being forced from their homes.



“Our attorneys find representation of clients referred by the Legal Aid Society quite rewarding because they are able to help them with compelling legal needs, such as housing or legal custody of their children. The dedicated and experienced Legal Aid staff attorneys provide excellent mentoring and support enabling our attorneys with no background in poverty law to take on these deserving clients. Our Firm and its pro bono program are proud to be a part of the Legal Aid referral network.”

Susan Hoffman, Public Service Partner, Crowell & Moring LLP

ESTABLISHING PRECEDENT

Most disputes involving persons living in poverty are resolved in high-volume courts or before under-resourced administrative tribunals. The law often takes second seat to efficiency and justice is subordinated to speed. The unavailability of counsel and the structure of the proceedings augers against the development of legal precedent that may define and protect the rights of thousands of litigants seeking relief in subsequent cases.

To address this gap, Legal Aid established an appellate litigation project. The project’s lawyers bring cases in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals that present the opportunity to create decisional law that will advance and protect the rights of low-income individuals and communities. We have won important decisions concerning the rights of tenants, persons with disabilities and victims of domestic violence.

The Appellate Advocacy Project will also take a series of cases in an area and build the precedent from one decision to the next, thus expanding the law beyond what can be achieved by a single decision. For example, Legal Aid has long been concerned that the District’s administrative tribunal, the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), has established rules so strict that many disputes are resolved on procedural missteps by pro se clients, rather than on the merits. We prioritized appeals that illustrated the hostility of OAH to pro se litigants and sought reversals. Case-by-case, the decisions of the Court of Appeals have re-written OAH’s rules of procedure.



ENSURING FAMILY STABILITY

Child custody and support arrangements can be a critical part of helping a family find stability. Without judicial intervention, many parents are unable to reach an agreement that is in the best interest of the family. Legal Aid represents parents to secure court orders that bring family stability.

..... Celia

Celia was desperate after her ex-boyfriend kidnapped their six-year-old son and refused to return him to her custody. The father had a history of brutally abusive behavior toward Celia; including pulling out her hair and trapping her hands in the window of a car door to drag her down the street. As a result of this abuse, and the loss of her child, Celia was struggling with depression. Before coming to Legal Aid, she had unsuccessfully sought help from the police and the courts. Legal Aid lawyers treated Celia’s case as an emergency. We secured a court order granting her primary physical custody of her son, although the father was allowed visitation. It quickly became clear that the child was being neglected and abused during their visits. We moved for and secured an order of sole legal and physical custody for Celia. Visits with the father were thereafter supervised. At the same time, other Legal Aid lawyers worked to secure Medicaid benefits for Celia, through which she was able to access therapy to address the trauma she experienced. Celia and her son have started a new life: they are living in their own two-bedroom apartment, she is attending school and expecting to graduate into a full time job in the health care industry, and her son is faring much better in school.



Declared Celia, “Legal Aid has renewed my life.”

.....

“I work for Legal Aid because of the wonderful support and guidance I receive from my colleagues and the pleasure I get from assisting our clientele. The opportunity to provide quality legal assistance to those individuals who cannot afford counsel and give back to the community is very rewarding.”

Trisha Monroe, Senior Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PRO BONO

The Legal Aid community includes the hundreds of lawyers and law students who volunteer at Legal Aid's offices or agree to take a Legal Aid case *pro bono*. Volunteer lawyers work with Legal Aid in a myriad of ways. In the past year:

- More than 100 cases were placed through Legal Aid's Pro Bono Program. The private practice and government agency attorneys that took these cases ensured that clients who would have been turned away from Legal Aid due to constraints on staff time and resources had access to a lawyer.
- Attorneys from Arent Fox LLP, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, and Hogan & Hartson LLP conducted initial interviews and, together with Legal Aid staff, provided advice and brief assistance. These volunteers help us remain open three afternoons a week for initial meetings with potential clients.
- Arnold & Porter LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; and Steptoe & Johnson LLP each sent an associate to work full-time in Legal Aid's offices on a six-month rotation.
- Volunteers from Latham & Watkins LLP; Covington & Burling LLP; Hogan & Hartson LLP; Dickstein Shapiro LLP; Alston & Bird LLP; Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP; Arnold & Porter LLP; Shearman & Sterling LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Goodwin Procter LLP; Crowell & Moring LLP; and Dewey & LeBoeuf LLP worked with staff from Legal Aid and the Whitman-Walker Clinic Legal Services Program to help Medicare recipients with problems related to their Medicare drug benefit.

When Geoff Gettinger, an associate at the law firm of Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP, took a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) case from Legal Aid's Pro Bono Program, he had no idea that it would involve so many hearings and appeals. These cases usually resolve in months with only one hearing. Geoff's client is unable to work as a result of significant physical and mental impairments. He had applied for benefits on his own and been denied. Cadwalader represented the client at a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), who denied the appeal. Convinced that their client was entitled to benefits, the firm appealed. They were successful at the Appeals Council and the case was sent back to the ALJ for a second hearing and eventually a third. The ALJ continued to deny benefits. Again, Geoff and his colleagues appealed, and this time the Appeals Council remanded the case and assigned a new ALJ. The new ALJ issued a fully favorable decision, awarding the client monthly benefits and a back award of \$30,000. These funds make an immeasurable difference in the life of Geoff's client by providing him with a steady income to meet his basic needs. "Helping a client in need navigate the legal and regulatory process to successful conclusion is a tremendously rewarding aspect of legal practice," said Geoff Gettinger. "I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to help our client achieve a measure of financial security and peace of mind."

"There are many reasons I give my time to Legal Aid: smart and dedicated lawyers, a chance to help the most vulnerable, the hope to make a lasting difference. But it comes down to this: working with Legal Aid keeps me young."

David Reiser, Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

2008 GENEROUS ASSOCIATES CAMPAIGN: GIVING FOR JUSTICE

Associates in the District's law firm community rallied together for this year's effort to raise an unprecedented \$780,000 from their colleagues and firms to support the work of Legal Aid.

The competition between the firms was intense this year, with many setting new records in fundraising. The following are the top-contributing firms in each size category in order of the amount raised:

251+ ATTORNEYS

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Latham & Watkins LLP
Hogan & Hartson LLP
Crowell & Moring LLP

201-250 ATTORNEYS

Williams & Connolly LLP
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP
Jones Day
Arent Fox LLP
McDermott Will & Emery

151-200 ATTORNEYS

Mayer Brown LLP
O'Melveny & Myers LLP
Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP
Kirkpatrick & Lockhart
Preston Gates Ellis LLP
White & Case LLP

101-150 ATTORNEYS

Baker Botts L.L.P.
Dow Lohnes PLLC
Kelley Drye & Warren LLP
Alston & Bird LLP
McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP

51-100 ATTORNEYS

Reed Smith LLP
Epstein Becker & Green, P.C.
Miller & Chevalier Chartered
Van Ness Feldman, PC
Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP

1-50 ATTORNEYS

Gilbert Randolph LLP
Boies, Schiller & Flexner LLP
Wilson Sonsini
Goodrich & Rosati
Baach Robinson & Lewis, PLLC
Clifford Chance US LLP

Legal Aid offers its heartfelt thanks to our Campaign Honorary Chair for his support:

Anthony Herman
Covington & Burling LLP

In addition, the leadership of the Campaign truly did a remarkable job. Thank you to all the Campaign Co-Chairs:

Thomas G. Allen
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP

Wesley D. Bizzell
Altria Corporate Services, Inc.

Randall Brater
Arent Fox LLP

Janna Chesno
Van Ness Feldman, PC

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Ryan C. Tisch
Crowell & Moring LLP

Daniel Wendt
Miller & Chevalier Chartered

Kevin S. Willen
Hogan & Hartson LLP

Howard A. Wolf-Rodda
Brown Rudnick LLP

ANNUAL SERVANT OF JUSTICE AWARDS DINNER

Legal Aid hosted its 19th annual fundraising dinner on April 29, 2008. The Servant of Justice Award was presented to Professor Richard Roe of Georgetown University Law Center who has been involved for 35 years with the Street Law Program, and Seth Waxman of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP for his long-standing commitment to equal justice issues, both locally and nationally.

In addition to the Servant of Justice Awards, Legal Aid recognized two non-lawyer individuals from the community with its recently introduced Partnership Awards. Gloria WilderBrathwaite, MD, MPH and Ronique Shields-Harris, MD, MHA received these awards for creating Legal Aid's collaboration with the Children's Health Project at the Town Hall Education, Arts & Recreation Campus (THEARC) in Anacostia, D.C.

The Klepper Prize for Volunteer Excellence made its debut at the event and was presented to Melissa Bianchi of Hogan & Hartson LLP for her significant volunteer services to Legal Aid's Medicare Part D Project. The prize was created through the generosity of Arlene & Martin Klepper.

Dinner Co-Chairs Joyce Trimble Gwadz of Dow Lohnes PLLC and Michael E. Nannes of Dickstein Shapiro LLP, along with the Dinner Steering Committee, successfully raised over \$750,000 from the legal and corporate communities!



Servant of Justice Award recipients Seth Waxman (left) and Professor Richard Roe

Anthony Pierce, Legal Aid Board President (left); Melissa K. Bianchi, Klepper Prize for Volunteer Excellence recipient; Arlene Fine Klepper; and Jonathan Smith, Legal Aid Executive Director

Partnership Award recipients Dr. Gloria WilderBrathwaite (left) and Dr. Ronique Shields-Harris

"As is true of many legal services organizations in the District, the work of the Legal Aid Society makes a tangible difference in the lives of each of their clients. This is all the more true in the current economic times, where jobs are harder to find and where the cost of living for those on limited incomes is so impacted by rising energy and food costs. Our donations will mean the difference in how many lawyers these programs can hire, in how many clients they serve, and in the lives of those clients."

William J. Perlstein, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP

LEADERSHIP CABINET

ANNUAL GIFT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

The Legal Aid Society created the Leadership Cabinet in order to recognize those donors who support the organization in significant ways. We are proud to recognize members for their generosity during the period of 9/1/2007 through 8/31/2008:

PLATINUM PATRON

\$75,000 and above

The District of Columbia Bar Foundation
Martin & Arlene Klepper

GOLD PATRON

\$50,000 - \$74,999

Covington & Burling LLP
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

SILVER PATRON

\$30,000 - \$49,999

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Alston & Bird LLP
Arent Fox LLP
Dickstein Shapiro LLP
Equal Justice Works
Hogan & Hartson LLP
Mayer Brown LLP
Williams & Connolly LLP

BRONZE PATRON

\$20,000 - \$29,999

CB Richard Ellis
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\$10,000 - \$19,999

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Vinson & Elkins LLP
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
Wiley Rein LLP
Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

Legal Aid would also like to thank the District of Columbia's Office of Victim Services and the Office of the Tenant Advocate for their support of our Family Law and Housing Programs.

SUPPORTERS

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia extends its gratitude to the following supporters for their generosity (gifts from 9/1/2007 – 8/31/2008):

\$5,000 - \$9,999

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& Lara L. Sessum
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REVENUE (1/1/2007 TO 12/31/2007)

Grants and Contributions	\$2,406,303
Contributed Services	4,619,059
Special Events	747,354
Interest	71,837
Total Revenue	7,844,553
Total Revenue Less Contributed Services	3,225,494

EXPENSES

Program Services	\$6,388,840
Management and General	250,493
Fundraising	348,182
Total Expenses	6,987,515
Total Expenses Less Contributed Services	2,368,456

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