



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland
Since 1925

2009 Annual Report



Total Cases Handled in 2009: 11,097

Cases Handled & Closed in 2009:	7,409
Cases Continued into 2010:	3,688

Legal Aid's Other Services 2009

Community Presentations	110
Brochures Distributed	61,750
Referrals	11,403
Policy Advocacy Opportunities	28
Neighborhood Clinics	46

Personnel 2009

Staff Attorneys	56
Other Staff	33
Pro Bono Attorneys	1,453
Law Student Volunteers	234

Client Demographics 2009

Males	30%
Females	70%
White	39%
African-American	51%
Hispanic	8%
Other	2%

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's mission

is to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are low-income and vulnerable by providing high-quality legal services and working for systemic solutions.

2009 Data and Finances

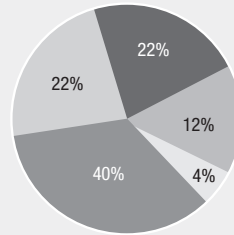
Revenue and Other Support	2009	2008
Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation (OLAF)	\$3,681,072	\$4,520,273
Legal Services Corporation (LSC)	\$2,260,819	\$2,054,329
Donations and Private Grants	\$628,276	\$1,135,809
Donated Services	\$1,081,791	\$939,809
United Way	\$245,657	\$220,193
Partner Agencies (Contracts for Legal Services)	\$440,973	\$272,985
Other Government Grants	\$243,835	\$225,839
Other Income	\$361,472	\$125,506
Total Revenue	\$8,943,895	\$9,494,743

Expenses	2009	2008
Program Services	\$7,915,245	\$7,559,914
Support Services (Administration & Development)	\$1,285,591	\$1,362,689
Total Expenses	\$9,200,836	\$8,922,603

Excess of Revenue over Expenditures	- \$256,941	\$572,140
Opening Net Assets	\$8,276,983	\$7,704,843

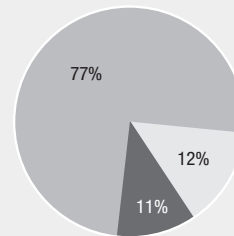
Net Assets as of 12/31/2009	\$8,020,042	\$8,276,983
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Breakdown of Net Assets	2009	2008
- Undesignated	\$96,174	\$177,389
- Net Investment in Plant	\$2,867,763	\$2,609,955
- Board Designated Reserve Fund	\$4,690,524	\$4,988,254
- Temporarily Restricted	\$363,881	\$501,385
- Permanently Restricted	\$1,700	
Net Assets	\$8,020,042	\$8,276,983



Types of Cases Closed 2009 2008 2007

Consumer (including foreclosure)	40%	34%	30%
Family	22%	22%	22%
Health-Education-Work-Income-Immigration	22%	20%	20%
Housing	12%	17%	17%
Other	4%	7%	11%



Cases by County 2009

Ashtabula, Geauga & Lake	12%
Cuyahoga	77%
Lorain	11%



Saving Homes



Jennifer Latimore was injured at her workplace in 2008 and needed a year to recover. Though she had some income from workers' compensation, the loss of wages soon took its toll. Ms. Latimore could not meet the mortgage payments

on the home where she and her husband were raising two children. The lender filed a foreclosure. Desperate to save her home, Ms. Latimore contacted Legal Aid. After assisting with a *pro se* Answer and Request for Mediation, Legal Aid referred the family to a "Save the Dream" volunteer attorney. "Save the Dream" mobilizes elements of Ohio's legal community – Legal Aid attorneys, private attorneys, bar associations, the Ohio Supreme Court and the Ohio Attorney General's Office – to match attorneys with low-income borrowers.

Volunteer attorney Jo Anne Schloz was handling her first foreclosure mediation case. She had previously worked at a bank and had seen foreclosures from the lender's perspective. She helped Ms. Latimore reach a settlement that resulted in a modification – a new principal balance, a lower, fixed interest rate, and an affordable monthly payment. The foreclosure was subsequently dismissed. Additionally, Neighborhood Housing Association, one of Legal Aid's partner organizations, provided services and assisted the family with the initial down payment. Says Ms. Latimore, "I was banking on this working out – it all came together."

Ms. Schloz is quick to minimize her role in the outcome: "I give all the credit to Ms. Latimore. She was already working with the lender. She was proactive – which made all the difference in how quickly her matter was resolved."

Legal Aid's foreclosure prevention efforts are funded by the Cuyahoga County Foreclosure Prevention Program, Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, the Institute for Foreclosure Legal Assistance and the Ohio Housing Finance Agency.



Volunteer attorney Jo Anne Schloz

Promoting Change



Legal Aid staff attorneys Joseph Meissner (left) and Matthew Vincel (center) with volunteer attorney John Kirn (right).

Legal Aid handled over 11,000 cases in 2009. Legal Aid serves this demand with a diverse group of 55 staff attorneys and hundreds of volunteer lawyers and law students.

Senior Attorney Joseph Meissner has worked for Legal Aid since 1969. He joined fresh from the civil rights movement when Legal Aid was a store-front presence in low-income neighborhoods: "We represented people on anything that came in the door. I got a very broad range of experiences in a wide variety of legal areas."

John Kirn also worked with Legal Aid in the 1960s, while he attended law school. Upon retirement in 2002, he rejoined the organization, helping low-income families impacted by the high cost of utilities. Retired attorneys, attorneys-in-transition (those in-between jobs) and law students provided more than 8,000 hours of on-site support to Legal Aid in 2009.

Mr. Meissner and Mr. Kirn both work closely in the Consumer Unit with Matthew Vincel, a staff attorney who joined Legal Aid in 2008. While in law school, Mr. Vincel was a summer associate with Legal Aid. Each year, Legal Aid hosts 10-12 unpaid summer associates who are recruited from a pool of over 100 applicants in a competitive nationwide search.

Mr. Vincel is grateful for the support of more experienced attorneys: "Coming out of law school, I realized pretty quickly that there is a big difference between knowing the law and knowing how to be a lawyer. Their mentorship has helped me understand all of the small details that are necessary to transform knowledge of the law into effective advocacy for our clients."



Economics and Education

Legal Aid protects rights to income and assets, and removes barriers to employment, vocational training and education.



Access to Justice

Legal Aid continually works to increase capacity for services, engage *pro bono* support, and expand outreach to underserved and vulnerable communities, including those with limited English proficiency.

Securing Income



In the summer of 2009, Cleveland Heights resident Clinton Brewer was preparing for college and working part-time at a pizza place. When the state of Ohio increased the minimum wage, Mr. Brewer realized that his paycheck did not reflect the change. He approached the restaurant manager several times about the missing wages; the manager promised to address the issue but never followed through. Finally, Mr. Brewer took the advice of a friend and consulted Legal Aid.

Julie Clutter Cortes, Staff Attorney for Legal Aid's Northeast Ohio Wage Project, took the case. She sent a demand letter and, within a few weeks, helped Mr. Brewer reach a settlement with restaurant management. Ms. Cortes was happy with the outcome and admired her client's initiative: "Here's a young man who tried to deal with the employer, and through a small intervention on Legal Aid's part, we were able to recover his unpaid wages, including damages."

Mr. Brewer, currently a student at Mercyhurst College in Pennsylvania, was grateful for the help: "It was a good experience. [Legal Aid] was very quick and we got good results."

The Northeast Ohio Wage Project was created in 2007 to help the "working poor" – people who work regularly in low-paying jobs which create a cycle of poverty. The Wage Project, initially funded by the Thomas H. White Foundation and the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, is part of Legal Aid's Health-Education-Work-Income-Immigration Unit.



Wage Project attorneys Julie Cortes (left) and Katie Laskey-Donovan (right) with HEWII Managing Attorney Stephanie Jackson (center).

Providing Safety



Clients come to Legal Aid's Family Law Unit during the most volatile moments in their lives – moments which necessitate a divorce, change in child custody, or a Civil Protection Order. In these moments, Family Law attorneys step beyond their roles as legal representatives to become confidantes and life coaches.

Due to limited resources, the Family Law Unit focuses on cases involving domestic abuse or in which a child's safety is at risk (the Unit also provides assistance for *pro se* divorces with no property or children involved). According to Managing Attorney Tonya Whitsett, the Unit works to "empower the survivors of domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, financial exploitation and sexual assault."

The Family Law attorneys are extremely sensitive to their clients' needs. Senior Attorney Susan Stauffer notes, "Kids can be at risk for a whole lot of different reasons. They can be exposed to substance abuse or harmful behavior in the house. That's what we're aiming to prevent – children trapped in these situations." Alexandria Ruden, Senior Attorney, points out that domestic violence survivors often try to leave an abuser several times before finally succeeding: "You help them take small but continuous steps to breaking the cycle and you're there when they come back. You don't judge them. You don't want to re-victimize them."

This combination of empathy and legal expertise changes lives. Ms. Whitsett mentions a recent call from a former client. Though her case had been closed for several years, the woman had called to say, "I was just thinking about you and I really want to thank you for sticking with my case."



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"I don't know what I would have done. I'm glad Legal Aid was there."

– Emmett Clemenson, Legal Aid helped procure much-needed dental prosthetics

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Special Funds & Donors – 2009

The Community Advocacy Program (CAP)

A medical-legal partnership between The MetroHealth System and Legal Aid

In 2007, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pledged a four-year, \$500,000 grant to support Legal Aid's medical-legal partnership with The MetroHealth System. The grant was awarded through the foundation's Local Initiative Funding Partners in which local foundations and corporations agree to match the \$500,000 gift.

The 2009 local funders include:

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Special Funds & Donors – 2009

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These donors supported Legal Aid in 2009 with a gift to United Way or the Northeast Ohio Combined Federal Campaign.

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Sgt. Harry Fund Donors

The Sgt. Harry Fund was established in 2008 with funds from the first annual John and Ginny Elam *Pro Bono* Award, presented to Legal Aid board member David Kutik by the Ohio State Bar Association. The \$5,000 award has been leveraged with donations from individual donors to support Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program, which engages the private bar in Legal Aid's mission. The Fund is named for Mr. Kutik's father, Sgt. Harry Kutik.

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