



I'VE SEEN LEGAL AID'S IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY.

Since 1905, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland has helped families in poverty across Northeast Ohio stop civil legal issues from escalating. And, Legal Aid provides counsel at the moment civil legal issues threaten basic needs.

- An eviction notice can lead to a family's homelessness
- Domestic violence threatens a family's safety
- Illegal school policies can exclude a child from learning
- Unlawful finance terms can pin a couple under debt
- Auto repossession can prevent a dedicated employee from getting to work

"At one of our libraries, an elderly gentleman came in to the Legal Aid clinic about two minutes after it ended. The Legal Aid team still brought him in. He told them his story, and you could see his sadness. But they listened to him and gave him advice, and he was actually laughing by the end. Legal Aid transforms people's lives by listening and counseling."

-Felton Thomas Jr., Executive Director and CEO, Cleveland Public Library

"I see Legal Aid give people a safe place to get help to make their case and move in the right direction instead of the wrong direction."

-Judge Diane M. Palos, Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court

THIS IS #MY LEGAL AID STORY

Share your story. Visit MyLegalAidStory.org



 **The Legal Aid Society**
of Cleveland
The Annual Campaign for Legal Aid
1223 West Sixth Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

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Poetic Justice

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Stories of Philanthropy and Hope from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

Loan shark pushed woman to homelessness, makes recompense when confronted by attorney



Katherine Hollingsworth, Esq.

All of Hannah Richard's money was going toward what seemed like never-ending payments on a \$2,000 auto title loan she had taken out to fix her car after an accident. An auto title loan is a loan for a small amount of money and for a short time. To get an auto title loan, you give the lender the title to your vehicle – for example, your car, truck or motorcycle. You also pay the lender a fee to borrow the money. You usually have to repay the loan in 30 days. These types of loans can easily trap someone like Ms. Richards in a downward spiral of debt.

As the debt snowballed, Ms. Richards (name changed to protect client privacy) was no longer able to pay her rent. The 61-year-old, had to leave her long administrative career because of health issues, and was reduced to couch surfing and living out of her car. Yet the loan company insisted she still owed them nearly \$1,600, even after she paid them more than double the original loan amount.

Ms. Richards turned to Legal Aid, where attorney Katherine Hollingsworth, paralegal Kristen Nawrocki and social worker Dani Lachina worked on her case. Despite being homeless, Ms. Richards had kept all her financial documentation. Armed with this evidence, Ms. Hollingsworth contacted the lender's attorney, who was quick to offer to drop the lien, return the title, and give Ms. Richards \$1,000.

"When she went to the lender herself they were unsympathetic," said Ms. Hollingsworth. "But the company seems to have made a business decision to offer a quick settlement if they are contacted by a lawyer."

In addition to saving Ms. Richard's car from wrongful repossession and recovering some of the thousands she had paid in fees and interest over the course of the loan, Legal Aid helped connect her to affordable housing options. Now that her monthly income isn't disappearing into an endless loan payment, Ms. Richards is in a better position to move into stable housing.

"I'm very grateful for the help," Ms. Richards says of her Legal Aid experience. "My attorney and paralegal were extremely thorough, professional and caring. They made the nightmare end."



Kristen Nawrocki



Dani Lachina, LSW

Join Legal Aid's fight for justice and help more people like Ms. Richards. The single biggest obstacle to Legal Aid playing a greater role in the community's solutions to systemic poverty is having the financial resources to reach more families when and where they need civil legal counsel. Give today at www.lasclev.org/donate

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JAM FOR JUSTICE

THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2018

5:00 – doors open • 6:00 – music begins

Aloft Hotel and courtyard of Ernst & Young Tower
with Lago Custom Events

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Legal Aid addresses need for affordable housing on four fronts

Making safe, affordable housing available to all families has long been a pillar in Legal Aid's strategic work.

In the past several months, Legal Aid has been stepping up to address housing inequity on four major fronts.



Desmond's Evicted sparks community housing conversations

One Community Reads is a collaboration among the City Club of Cleveland, Playhouse Square, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging and all nine local public library systems to create a shared reading experience for the Greater Cleveland community. This year's selection, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Dr. Matthew Desmond, has transformed Northeast Ohio's understanding of poverty and the centrality of home. It has also made people more aware of Legal Aid's necessary role to ensure housing stability.

Tenant Information Line for Rental Housing Questions

216-861-5955



Hazel Remesch paves the way for Cleveland families facing eviction

Legal Aid recognizes this as an important community resource: more than 350 calls were fielded in the first four weeks. Legal Aid also agreed to carry on the work of CTO's eviction diversion program to help tenants fight improper evictions.

Carrying on Cleveland Tenants Organization's legacy

After long-time Legal Aid partner, Cleveland Tenants Organization (CTO), suspended operations in February 2017, Legal Aid hired veteran Tenant Information Line intake specialist Valerie Holley-Staten to continue service to Northeast Ohio renters who call 216-861-5955 with questions about conditions, rent deposit and notice requirements. Legal Aid recognizes this as an important community resource: more than 350 calls were fielded in the first four weeks. Legal Aid also agreed to carry on the work of CTO's eviction diversion program to help tenants fight improper evictions.

Fighting for renters' right to counsel

"You have the right to speak to an attorney... If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be provided for you at government expense," reads the standard warning of the Miranda Rights to those accused of a crime. But to those facing unlawful eviction, there is no such provision. Hazel Remesch thinks this should change. The Legal Aid supervising attorney was selected as a Sisters of Charity Innovation Fellow for her proposal to establish the right to free legal counsel for the 10,000-plus Cleveland tenants facing eviction each year. Remesch hopes to make Cleveland the first city in Ohio to pilot a program like successful "Right to Counsel" initiatives in New York and California, which have dramatically reduced improper evictions.

Leading the fight on childhood lead poisoning

The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation has partnered with Legal Aid in advocating for healthy homes with a \$175,000 grant over two years. Mt. Sinai funding will support Legal Aid's direct representation, community legal education, and advocacy with the government to craft laws that will hold landlords responsible for remediating lead hazards before children suffer the irreversible damage of lead poisoning. In addition to helping Legal Aid provide direct representation to low-income renters in landlord-tenant cases, the grant supports Legal Aid's work to illuminate the disparate impact of household lead hazards on minority families.

Armed with legal advice, woman wins claim against slipshod mechanic



Leslie Wolfe, Esq.
Walter | Haverfield LLP

Legal Aid's work to empower clients happens not only through representation and outreach activities, but also coaching on *pro se* advice. Because of this work, low-income community members know their rights and how to stand up for them.

Kimberly Davis was fed up with her mechanic. Though she had been a loyal customer at the popular auto shop, Ms. Davis discovered they had "repaired" her exhaust system with coat hangers and adhesive.

"The third time my muffler fell off, I went to a specialist who said I could pay \$269 to have it properly welded," Ms. Davis said. Having already spent more than three times as much at the original shop, Ms. Davis asked them to give her the money back.

When the mechanic offered only \$100, Ms. Davis decided to take them to court — something she'd never done before. She attended a Legal Aid brief advice clinic at a local library where volunteer Leslie Wolfe, an attorney at Walter | Haverfield LLP and a Legal Aid Partner in Justice, agreed to prep Ms. Davis for small claims court.

"She told me how to present myself, what subjects to begin with and how to close. She showed me how to set up my notes as I presented my case, to gather all my receipts and the pictures I had," Ms. Davis said. "It was very helpful to me, and it worked out great."

In the end, the mechanic settled with Ms. Davis, fixing her car the right way, and giving her a one year warranty on parts and labor, as well as \$300 in cash.

Ms. Wolfe was happy to learn her brief advice client's good news, and encourages other unsatisfied customers to file their complaints.

"You shouldn't think it's a loss because you're just a little guy; go and give small claims court a try," Ms. Wolfe explained.

Applause for Members of our 15-Year Giving Society

The following people provided annual support to The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland for 15 years or more, as of December 31, 2017.

A special reception to honor current and new members of Legal Aid's 5-year, 10-year and 15-year Giving Societies will be held on May 22, 2018. Legal Aid donors should watch their mail for the invitation to this special event!

Thanks to our reception sponsors Cleveland Reporting Partners and Major Legal Services, an Alliance Solutions Group Company.

In the meantime, we hold these people in high esteem. We publicly thank them for the consistent support – our work is not possible without their partnership.

Ken and Polly Burns

Sandra Buzney

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Diane Citrino

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and John Cooney

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Jerome Weiss and Judith Salomon

Magistrate Perdexter Williams



1. Jackie Staple, Esq. (Benesch) and Nathan Sargent, Esq. (Benesch)

2. Tom Fisher, Esq. (West Shore Bar Association)

3. Mary Catherine Barrett, Esq. (West Shore Bar Association)

4. Pat Haggerty, Esq. (Frantz Ward)

5. St. Edward High School Alumni Legal Eagles: Cornelius "Corky" O'Sullivan, Esq. and John Duffy, Esq.

6. Cal Griffin, Jr., Esq. (Jones Day)

Legal Aid in the neighborhood

Legal Aid is there when and where people need civil legal help

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Thank you, Brynna Fish!

For the past two years, Brynna has volunteered her time to document Legal Aid's summer fundraiser, Jam for Justice. Photos in the last issue of Poetic Justice were by Brynna, and we thank her for using her talent to support Legal Aid's great mission.