



Poetic Justice

Volume 20 Issue 3 Fall/Winter 2023

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

Lawyers Advocate For Safe Housing



The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland relies on the commitment and expertise of volunteers to assist its many clients. Each year, approximately 20% of the people helped by Legal Aid are assisted by a *pro bono* attorney. These volunteers help in civil legal matters related to housing, education, family, work, and more. Without the support of volunteers, Legal Aid would not be able to help the many people in our community who need it the most.



Volunteer attorney Emily Viscomi

Volunteers like Emily Viscomi help to ensure that justice is within reach for those who are most vulnerable. Emily, an attorney with Dreyfuss Williams, first learned about Legal Aid from her Managing Partner when he received an email from Legal Aid looking for volunteers for a tenant eviction case. When asked to join him, Emily agreed.

The housing case involved Alexis (*name changed to protect privacy*). Alexis was shocked to find a 3-day notice for eviction on her door. She had always diligently paid her rent on time. Like clockwork, each month she would go to Western Union to purchase a money order to use to pay her rent.

Thinking the eviction notice was a mistake and wanting to rectify the problem, Alexis asked her landlord if they could meet to discuss the matter – her landlord failed to show up for the meeting.

Alexis was determined to prove that she had made her rental payments without fail. She requested that Western Union start an investigation into who cashed her money orders.

Alexis took another step, attending a Legal Aid Brief Advice Clinic to speak with an attorney for advice. After reviewing her situation and determining she was eligible for assistance, Alexis was connected with Emily through Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program.

Emily got right to work to help Alexis. After receiving documentation from Western Union proving that Alexis had made her rental payments, Emily was able to get the eviction dismissed. Thanks to Emily's counsel, Alexis avoided eviction and was able to remain in her home.

No one would have guessed this was Emily's first housing case, but Legal Aid staff supported her through the entire process. This allowed her to learn about housing court and how to best advocate for Alexis. Emily then volunteered to take on more cases.

"My experience volunteering with Legal Aid was enriching," said Emily. "We were able to help someone with their wrongful eviction and have the case dismissed. Along the way, Attorney Bobbi Saltzman with Legal Aid answered every question I had and proved to be a wealth of knowledge."

Emily encourages other attorneys to volunteer, even in areas of law that they are not familiar with, and to remember that they are resourceful and capable of advocating for a client.

"Legal Aid is vital to the city's underserved population," she said. "Every human being deserves justice and unfortunately, not every person has the opportunity and/or resources to enable them to seek the justice they deserve. Legal Aid helps right that wrong through legal representation and advocating on behalf of those persons."

Thanks to a Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant from the Legal Services Corporation, Legal Aid now has more resources to help volunteer attorneys advocate for safe housing. Learn more and sign-up at: lasclev.org/volunteer

Innovations in *Pro Bono* at Legal Aid



Mentorship and Support for Volunteers

WE 
PRO
BONO

Legal Aid relies on the dedication and expertise of volunteer attorneys to serve tens of thousands of people every year. We sincerely appreciate all our volunteers, which is why Legal Aid is committed to empowering them with the resources, guidance, and knowledge needed to tackle all kinds of civil legal issues.

Legal Aid is proud to regularly provide our volunteer attorneys with Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs, advocate trainings on specific issues like expungement or student loan debt, and direct mentorship.

And now, thanks to support from the LSC *Pro Bono* Innovation Fund, Legal Aid is pleased to offer a new video series titled **Legal-Ease: Making Pro Bono Easy**. These videos explain how Legal Aid assists our volunteer attorneys while they work with clients and let new volunteers know what to expect from their experience. This is one of the many ways we help ensure our volunteers feel prepared to join our strong community of passionate *pro bono* attorneys.

To watch these videos and find other volunteer resources, visit laslev.org/volunteer/resources.

Volunteer Awards

Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program is proud to announce its 2023 volunteer award winners, to be presented at Legal Aid's 118th Annual Meeting on November 20. The following individuals and partners performed exceptional service for Legal Aid's clients:



Mike Meehan (background) and Ellen Meehan (foreground) volunteer together at a Legal Aid Clinic.

Ellen and Michael Meehan will be presented with the **Access to Justice Award** in recognition of their dedicated commitment to volunteering and their work to foster a new Medical Legal Partnership between Legal Aid and the Cleveland Clinic.

Stephen Hobt will be honored (*posthumously*) with the **Legacy of Justice Award** for helping hundreds of people find freedom from debt over the course of his two decades of volunteer work with Legal Aid.



The Norman S. Minor Bar Association will be presented with the **Community Impact Award** in recognition of their consistent partnership with Legal Aid, including adopting Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program as their official *pro bono* project and encouraging members to "take a case."

Celebrate Pro Bono

Legal Aid is excited to participate in the American Bar Association's National Celebration of *Pro Bono*! While the national celebration officially occurs the week of October 22 – 28, 2023, Legal Aid extends the celebration throughout the entire month of October.

Every year, this important Celebration of *Pro Bono* draws attention to the need for *pro bono* participation and thanks those who give their time year-round. Our 2023 celebration includes Legal Aid, numerous bar associations, the judiciary, community-based organizations, and volunteer attorneys. Throughout October, Legal Aid will host a variety of virtual and in-person events - including clinics, opportunities for attorneys to learn more about *pro bono* practice, and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs. Events will be hosted throughout the 5 counties Legal Aid serves.

To see more details on events and ways to participate, visit laslev.org/2023probonoweek.

Corporate Partner Profile: Sherwin-Williams



Greg Jolivet of Sherwin-Williams provides counsel to a Legal Aid client.

Legal Aid is grateful for its awesome partnership with the Sherwin-Williams Company. Sherwin-Williams has supported the mission of Legal Aid by awarding grants to ensure that people are able to live in safe and healthy housing. In addition to monetary support, Sherwin-Williams employees also give generously of their time, volunteering with Legal Aid and recruiting others to do the same.

Greg Jolivet, Vice President and Associate General Counsel at Sherwin-Williams, has been a Legal Aid volunteer for more than a decade, "I find it very rewarding to work with Legal Aid," said Greg. "I can help individuals and families who often are struggling and facing tough challenges and really make a difference in their lives."

Mary Garceau, Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary at Sherwin-Williams understands how important it is to give back to those in need. "The Sherwin-Williams Company is proud to support Legal Aid in our shared mission to support access to safe and healthy housing, and improve the quality of life for some of the most vulnerable members of our community," said Mary.

Legal Aid thanks Sherwin-Williams for their dedication in helping us to create a more fair and just society for all.

#MyLegalAidStory: VLP Administrative Assistants



Isabel McClain, Teresa Mathern, and Aliah Lawson (pictured, left to right), Administrative Assistants for Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program, help set the tone and keep everything organized at Brief Advice Clinics. Additionally, they support volunteer attorneys who take cases for extended help and representation.

From coordinating with community partners, to helping match clients with attorneys and ensuring that volunteers have the resources needed, they are indispensable to Legal Aid's *pro bono* work.

Enjoy this excerpt from an interview with Aliah, Isabel and Teresa below, and read the full interview at lasclev.org/VLPAdmin.

Why do you enjoy working with volunteers?

Aliah: It is fun to see the different perspectives that each person brings to a Brief Advice Clinic. Some attorneys are nervous because they may not have much experience with the issues our clients face, but our team helps and encourages them through it.

Isabel: My role allows me to meet people from other organizations and to learn about people from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds.

Teresa: I love meeting new people and developing relationships with individuals willing to donate their time and experience to assist those that might otherwise not have legal representation.

What would you say to encourage others to volunteer?

Aliah: Attorneys will be able to work with clients who are in need. Even the smallest contribution of your time can make a huge difference.

Isabel: I can't emphasize enough how important volunteers are. Sometimes volunteers are scared that they do not know enough to be helpful, but they don't realize the peace of mind that they can give a client when they are in a legal battle.

Teresa: I would let them know that they are needed, and that there are individuals and families that their volunteer work would have the potential to change lives.

Legal Aid in the Community



1. Members of the band **Out of Order** perform at Jam for Justice on August 23: **Vince Ruffa** (Ruffa Grandinetti); **Emily Dettmer** (Sherwin-Williams); **Marcus Sidoti** (Friedman, Gilbert + Gerhardtstein); **Dave Thein** (Signet Jewelers); **Joe Grandinetti** (Ruffa Grandinetti) **2.** **Hugh McKay** (Porter Wright, and lead singer in **The No Name Band**), **Kris Treu** (Buckingham) and **Sue McKay** at Jam for Justice. **3.** Members of **State Road** on the Beachland Ballroom's Tavern Stage at Jam for Justice: **Mike Cicero** (Nicola, Gudbranson & Cooper), **Morgan Ellington** (Newbury Technologies), **David Marinelli**, and **Brent Pace** (Sherwin-Williams) **4.** (l-r) **Lillie Burkons** (Legal Aid), **Rich Wesorick** (Tarolli, Sundheim, Cowell & Tummino, and lead singer of **Faith & Whiskey**), **Nina Cherian** (Legal Aid), **Neil Cherian** (Cleveland Clinic) **5.** (l-r) **Dan Natalie** (Legal Aid) works with **Yelizaveta Mikhaylova** (University of Akron) and **Rinda Vas** (American Greetings) at a recent Brief Advice Clinic. **6.** Volunteer attorneys **Teo Marzano** (l) and **James Roosa** (r) counsel a client at Legal Aid event. Teo and James are part of the Ohio Supreme Court's mentor program. **7.** **Dave Hopkins** (Benesch) and **Lily Mann** (Legal Aid) work together at a recent clinic. **8.** Members of **Razing the Bar**, the Law School band from Case Western Reserve University, pose together during Jam for Justice. **9.** **Dennis Dobos** (Legal Aid) is interviewed on BBC Community Radio, WOJU, on your rights related to tax law. **10.** Attorney Hayden Gilbert of **Hayden Gilbert and The Ruckus** makes his debut at Jam for Justice 2023. Thanks to Hayden and the 8 other music groups – more than \$120,000 was raised for Legal Aid!

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12 ANGRY JURORS

Sunday, October 22, 2023

Legal Aid board president Jon Leiken and friends will present a staged reading of 12 Angry Jurors as a benefit for Legal Aid. The adaptation of Reginald Rose's classic play explores the deliberations of a jury and helps us challenge our assumptions and biases. It also reminds us of the importance of putting analytical abilities to use, to be comfortable with the discomfort of uncertainty and doubt, and the power of racism to obscure the truth.

Cast features: Michael Jeans, Robyn Minter Smyers, Toni Cervino, Peter Lawson Jones, Leon Bibb, Beth Grove, Brandt Butze, Jon Leiken, Xavier McLean, Colleen Mahoney, John Gidez, Avery Friedman, and Ohio Supreme Court Justice Michael Donnelly.

The event is free, but gifts to Legal Aid are encouraged. Learn more at lasclev.org/2023LeikenBenefitEvent

Annual Meeting on November 20

The November 20th event will begin promptly at 4:00 p.m. (doors open at 3:30 p.m.). The one-hour program (CLE credit pending for attorneys) will be followed by a social reception with food and drinks.

*Hold fast
to Dreams* 

Legal Aid executive director Colleen M. Cotter and board president Jon Leiken will begin the program, themed on the Langston Hughes quote, "Hold fast to dreams." They will highlight hope, extend gratitude, and provide updates on high-impact community partnerships and initiatives.

The 118th Annual Meeting will feature a special panel discussion with:

- **Gina Beredo**, executive vice president, general counsel, corporate secretary of **Owens Corning**,
- **April Miller Boise**, executive vice president and chief legal officer at **Intel Corporation**,
- **Paul Grewal**, chief legal officer at **Coinbase**, and
- **Taras ("Terry") Szmagala, Jr.**, executive vice president and chief legal officer for **Eaton**

Moderated by board vice president Quo Vadis Cobb, these corporate leaders will discuss how their corporate social responsibility initiatives align with Legal Aid's work to promote fairness, racial equity, and social justice – illustrating why civil legal aid is imperative to all. Legal Aid's Annual Meeting is a chance for community members, philanthropists, nonprofit organizations, and business leaders to gather and reflect on Legal Aid's accomplishments over the past year, as well as learn about new initiatives and plans for the year ahead.

Legal Aid's dedicated staff, volunteers, and strong regional partnerships will be celebrated during the event. Awards will be presented to outstanding employees, volunteers, and community organizations who demonstrate profound support for Legal Aid's mission. Additionally, Vanetta Jamison will be presented with Legal Aid's highest honor, the Louis Stokes Paragon Award. Ms. Jamison was the first non-attorney president of Legal Aid in 2015 and 2016.

Sponsorships for Legal Aid's 118th Annual Meeting are still available, and individual \$150 tickets are on sale now. All proceeds from ticket sales support Legal Aid's work to extend justice across Northeast Ohio. Learn more at lasclev.org/2023Event.



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