



# Poetic Justice

Volume 20 Issue 2 Summer 2023

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

## *Survivor gains safety and housing with Legal Aid help*

Controlling behavior is a hallmark of domestic violence: abusers seek control of their victims' lives—restricting their autonomy, limiting their engagement with other people in their life, and curtailing their movement.

Helen (*alias for privacy*) has lived in her home for over 30 years. While there, her then-husband physically and emotionally abused both Helen and her children. She thought she had obtained her freedom when she divorced her abuser, but to her horror he found ways to maintain his control.

During the divorce case, the judge issued an order for Helen's ex-husband to transfer the house to her via quitclaim deed, but he never complied. While her ex-husband was no longer residing in the home, he routinely showed up uninvited, going so far as to break in and assault Helen on multiple occasions.

Matters escalated when Helen's ex-husband took a bold step and filed an eviction against her.

When her ex-husband and his attorney began to pursue their unjust effort to kick Helen out of her home, she was devastated—but she knew there were resources available, and she reached out to Legal Aid.

Legal Aid responded, and the complex nature of the case required thoughtful collaboration between multiple practice groups. Intake specialists, paralegals, and attorneys worked together to address Helen's legal needs.



**Zoe Suntheimer**, Staff Attorney in Housing worked closely with **Haley Martinelli**, Supervising Attorney in Family Law to pursue an aggressive defense of Helen's rights, filing counterclaims on her behalf to underscore the binding nature of the original court order granting Helen the deed to the home.

A terrific outcome followed – Helen's ex complied with the court order and transferred the deed to the home that very same day.

With Legal Aid's help, Helen had won a total victory, and with it the first true peace of mind she had known in 30 years.

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*Special thanks to the staff collaboration that made this successful outcome possible – kudos to Intake Specialists Tracy Ayers and Laura Post, as well as Paralegals Anna Kallmeyer, Anthony Perrins, and Anna Seballos for their support.*



**Join Legal Aid's work to Extend Justice.**

Use enclosed envelope or give online at  
***lasclev.org/donate***

# Legal Aid Celebrates 20 years of Medical-Legal Partnerships

On June 13, 2023, Legal Aid supporters gathered to celebrate Founders' Day. This special event honored 118 years of Legal Aid's continued work to extend justice across Northeast Ohio and recognized 20 years of Legal Aid's work to solve legal problems that affect a person's health through Medical- Legal Partnerships.

Legal Aid created the first Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) in Ohio in 2003 by formalizing a partnership with MetroHealth. At the time, this was only the fourth MLP in the United States. Today, Medical-Legal Partnerships exist in 450 health organizations across 49 states and Washington, D.C.

Medical-Legal Partnerships are an important tool in addressing social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These social and environmental factors – like safe housing and neighborhoods; reliable transportation; access to nutritious foods; and development of literacy skills – have a major impact on people's health, well-being, and quality of life.

Through these innovative partnerships, Legal Aid works directly with healthcare providers to help clinicians, case managers, and social workers address the structural problems at the root of so many health inequities.

During the Founders' Day event, leaders from the four major hospital systems in Northeast Ohio shared their perspectives on the impact of these partnerships in a discussion moderated by **E. Harry Walker, MD** (Chair, The MetroHealth System Board of Trustees).

**Harlin G. Adelman, Esq.** (Chief Legal Officer, University Hospitals); **Shannon Fogarty Jerse, Esq.** (General Counsel, Sisters of Charity Health System); **Sonja Rajki, Esq.** (Co-General Counsel, The MetroHealth System); and **David W. Rowan, Esq.** (Chief Legal Officer, Cleveland Clinic) each spoke passionately about the impact of having Legal Aid attorneys integrated into the delivery of medical care, and highlighted the positive outcomes for patients and providers that can be achieved through this holistic approach.

Independent studies have shown results echoing what the panelists described – when legal expertise and services are used to address poverty-related problems that impact a person's health and well-being, positive outcomes follow.\* For instance, people with chronic illnesses are healthier and admitted to the hospital less frequently; people are more stably housed and their utilities are less likely to be shut off; and people report less stress and experience improvements in mental health.

\*Source: National Center for Medical Legal Partnership

## Legal Aid is proud of our collaboration through these Medical-Legal Partnerships



(MLP established 2003)



(MLP established 2017)



(MLP established 2018)



(MLP established 2022)



**Left to right:** Hollis Bryant III, Legal Aid client, shares how the Medical-Legal Partnership helped him. Dr. E. Harry Walker moderates a panel featuring Harlin G. Adelman, Esq. - Chief Legal Officer, University Hospitals; Sonja Rajki, Esq. - Co-General Counsel, The MetroHealth System; David W. Rowan, Esq. - Chief Legal Officer, Cleveland Clinic; Shannon Fogarty Jerse, Esq. - General Counsel, Sisters of Charity Health System. Legal Aid Board President Jonathan Leiken, Esq. presents a special recognition to Legal Aid supporter Jennifer Sullivan Corkern.

Legal Aid has a dedicated team of attorneys and paralegals in our Health & Opportunity Practice Group who focus on the Medical-Legal Partnership program. However, clients have access to the full scope of Legal Aid's expertise in all our practice areas, including Housing, Family Law, and Economic Justice.

# #MyLegalAidStory: Laura Post



Laura Post

Laura Post (right) discusses a case with Managing attorney Jessica Baggett (left)

For the past 25 years, Laura Post has offered a warm welcome to all arrivals at Legal Aid’s office in Elyria. First starting out as a legal secretary, Laura now serves as an Intake Specialist 2. Her expertise and tenure have established her as a fixture of the Lorain County legal community.

A proud lifelong resident of Sheffield Township, Laura lives just down the street from her childhood home and her alma mater, Clearview High School. After graduating from Lorain County Community College, Laura initially began her career as a legal secretary at a small law firm before joining Legal Aid in 1997.

Laura serves as a critical liaison between Legal Aid’s offices. In addition to enabling the day-to-day functioning of the Lorain County office, Laura enhances organizational capacity by supporting the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP)—an especially important task in Lorain County.

“We need to work hard to find volunteer attorneys in Lorain County, since the biggest law firm is located in Avon and most other firms are small when compared to those in Cleveland,” Laura observed. Laura’s role as a connector has brought about deep relationships with attorneys who have expertise in areas such as family law, bankruptcy, immigration, and tax law – all areas of great need in Lorain County.

Laura is dedicated to her work and provides excellent customer service to clients: “I do this work because I love seeing the positive impact Legal Aid has in people’s lives.”

# Partnerships to Extend Justice in Lorain County



## Connect to a Cause with the Community Foundation of Lorain

The Community Foundation of Lorain County will host Connect to a Cause, their annual crowdfunding campaign, on **September 21, 2023**. This unique event allows community members to donate directly to non-profit organizations, including The Legal Aid Society, that align with their values and interests.

Connect to a Cause provides both immediate and long-term support for participating organizations, enabling them to meet current budgetary needs and build their endowment. This unique approach empowers organizations to be proactive and sustainable in their efforts to make a lasting impact in Lorain County. Learn more at [peoplewhocare.org/c2c2023](http://peoplewhocare.org/c2c2023).

Legal Aid is grateful for the support of The Community Foundation of Lorain County through responsive grantmaking, a special endowment fund, and Connect to a Cause.

## New Locations for Brief Advice Clinics



Deb Dallman, Esq. – a Legal Aid attorney based in the Elyria Office.

In addition to hosting frequent legal advice clinics with Lorain County organizations **El Centro** and **Oberlin Community Services**, Legal Aid has been busy expanding our network of partners across the county. In spring 2023, Legal Aid

hosted a clinic at **Lorain County Community College**. Coming up soon are clinics at the **Lorain Public Library** and **Full Gospel Faith Fellowship** (Rapha International Center).

**AUGUST 26, 2023**  
**10:00 - 11:00 AM**  
**Lorain Public Library, Main Library**  
351 W. Sixth Street, Lorain, OH 44052

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2023**  
**2:30 - 4:30 PM**  
**FGFF Rapha International Center**  
700 Gulf Road, Elyria, OH 44035

Volunteer attorneys are always needed to provide brief advice at these trusted neighborhood locations. Learn more and sign up on Legal Aid’s website: [laslev.org/volunteer/attorneys](http://laslev.org/volunteer/attorneys).

For additional clinic dates and locations, visit [laslev.org/events](http://laslev.org/events).

# Legal Aid in the Community



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1. Howard Coburn, Esq. (KeyBank) provides free legal advice at a clinic in honor of KeyBank Neighbors Make the Difference Day. 2. Legal Aid Board Members Jon Leiken, Esq. (Diebold) and Jan Roller, Esq. (Perez Morris) at the West Side Catholic Center for a free legal advice clinic. 3. Legal Aid’s summer staff pose for a photo on their first day. Read more about the summer 2023 team at: [tinyurl.com/2023summerstaff](http://tinyurl.com/2023summerstaff). 4. Tenille N. Kaus, Esq. (left) and Tom Mlakar, Esq. (right) of Legal Aid meet with Ohio Representative Sarah Fowler Arthur to discuss Legal Aid’s work in OH-99. 5. Carmen Verhosek, Esq. (Dooley Gembala) helps a U.S. Veteran at a recent free legal advice clinic. 6. Melanie Shakarian, Esq. (middle) accepts a generous gift for Legal Aid from members of the Ashtabula Foundation Board of Directors. 7. Jeannette Knudsen, Esq. and Cherrie Portmann (both of The J.M. Smucker Company) promote Legal Aid at Smucker’s employee engagement event. 8. Diane Citrino, Esq., Sonja Rajki, Esq. (MetroHealth) and Suzanne Bretz Blum, Esq. (Brouse McDowell) at Legal Aid’s Founder’s Day event. 9. Anne Sowell, Dr. E. Harry Walker, and Mallory Curran, Esq. reunite to honor 20 years of Medical-Legal Partnership at Legal Aid’s Founder’s Day event. 10. Nancy Donnelly, Esq. (Steris) and Ellen Meehan, Esq. (Squire Patton Boggs) team up to provide pro bono service at an advice clinic. 11. Volunteer Lawyers Program Administrative Assistants Aliah Lawson, Teresa Mather and Isabel McClain pose at a recent free legal advice clinic.

# Partners in Justice: Ambassadors for Legal Aid

Legal Aid works with local leaders across Northeast Ohio’s business and legal community to extend our reach. Known as “Partners in Justice,” these representatives act as Legal Aid ambassadors within their law firms and organizations – helping increase awareness and support through volunteering, educational campaigns, and fundraising.

This year, 110 ambassadors are participating from 65 law firms and corporations across the region. You can see the full list of 2023 Partners in Justice at: [tinyurl.com/2023Pij](https://tinyurl.com/2023Pij). Here’s what a few of them had to say when asked about their participation in the program:



Michael Quinlan, Esq.

“Being a Partner in Justice gives me an opportunity to educate other lawyers about the tremendous work that Legal Aid does in our community, and I can act as a resource for younger lawyers to encourage them to come to Brief Advice Clinics, take on a pro bono case from Legal Aid, or participate in the Right to Counsel housing cases we’ve been handling.” - **Michael Quinlan, Jones Day**

“Being a part of a community of like-minded individuals who are committed to justice and fairness can be a source of support and encouragement. Being a Partner in Justice can also have practical benefits, such as improving one’s communication and leadership skills, building networks and connections with others, and potentially opening up career opportunities in fields such as law, advocacy, or public policy.” - **Luis Carrion, Renner Otto**



Luis Carrion, Esq.



Kate Vlasek, Esq.

“Being a Partner in Justice is valuable to me because it gives me an opportunity to support Legal Aid and to advocate for support within the firm. I enjoy knowing that I’m a small part of helping Legal Aid be successful in the community.” - **Kate Vlasek, Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff**

“Legal Aid is an invaluable resource in our community because it provides access to civil justice for so many people. Being a Partner in Justice gives me the opportunity to help bring Legal Aid top-of-mind to my colleagues. It also provides the opportunity to connect our new lawyers with Legal Aid.” - **Ron Johnson, KeyBank**



Ron Johnson, Esq.

**Want to learn more about the Partners in Justice program? Reach out to Camille Dickson at 216.861.5590 for details.**

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# Legal Aid News



**Legal Aid** joined **Plexus LGBT & Allied Chamber of Commerce** as a supporting member. Plexus represents a unique and influential network providing connection, education, and advocacy across the LGBT and allied professional and business communities.



Stephen M. Fazio, Esq.

**Colleen M. Cotter**, Executive Director, was appointed to the board of trustees of the **Lakewood Community Services Center**, a non-profit organization that provides basic needs assistance and referral services with food, housing, senior services, and youth programming.

**Stephen M. Fazio**, *president emeritus* of Legal Aid’s board of directors, was recognized by Squire Patton Boggs as the **Pro Bono Partner of the Year** for his outstanding commitment to *pro bono* service.

**Lauren Hamilton**, Supervising Attorney in Housing, was elected to the board of directors of **Neighborhood Pets**, a non-profit organization that supports low-income people by assisting with pet care and other needs.



Julie Reed, Esq.

**Katherine Hollingsworth**, Managing Attorney of Economic Justice, was selected as an inaugural member of The Ohio Workforce Coalition’s **Workforce Leadership Academy**, a fellowship designed to build capacity in the local workforce ecosystem and present innovative solutions to challenges faced by workers or businesses.

**Jennifer Kinsley Smith**, Senior Attorney in Health and Opportunity, was elected to the board of directors of **Magnolia Clubhouse**, a non-profit organization that offers a rehabilitative support program for adults who live with mental illness.



Karen Wu, Esq.

**Julie Reed**, Supervising Attorney in Volunteer Lawyers Program & Intake, and **Karen Wu**, Senior Attorney in Housing, were both selected to take part in the inaugural class of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association’s **Diversity Equity & Inclusion Fellowship**, designed to accelerate racial equity within the law.

**Krystle S. Rivera**, Staff Attorney in Health and Opportunity, was elected to the board of directors of the **Cleveland Kids’ Book Bank**, a local non-profit that fosters literacy and a love of reading by distributing free books to children in need.

**Joshua D. Rovenger**, Supervising Attorney in Economic Justice was appointed to join the Board of Directors of the **Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association**.

**Alexandria Ruden**, Supervising Attorney in Family Law, was honored by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center with a **2023 Visionary Voice Award** for her work protecting survivors of domestic violence through legal representation and policy advocacy.

**Melanie A. Shakarian**, Director of Development and Communications, was appointed to the board of trustees of the **Cleveland Public Library**.



New CMBA President, Judge John J. Russo with Josh Rovenger, Esq.



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of Cleveland

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# JAM FOR JUSTICE

## WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2023

5:30 p.m. – doors open • 6:00 p.m. – first band

Beachland Ballroom & Tavern • 15711 Waterloo Road, Cleveland

**New for 2023:** a staggered schedule of bands on two stages.

Support Legal Aid while enjoying a variety of musical acts  
headlined by local attorneys, judges, law faculty, and law students.

**A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR EARLY SPONSORS FOR 2023**

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**Learn more at: [lasclev.org/2023Jam](https://lasclev.org/2023Jam)**