




WORKING TOWARD JUSTICE FOR ALL

The Power of Partnership



2008 Legal Aid Annual Report

Minnesota

Minnesota Disability Law Center 
Grand Rapids

 Minnesota Disability Law Center
Moorhead

Served 462 members of the Mille Lacs Band Tribe in 2008.

677 seniors served in 2008.

 Saint Cloud
Saint Cloud Area
Legal Services



Purchased a new site thanks to the generosity of retired Willmar Judge John and Mary Lindstrom, funding from the Otto Bremer Foundation and the Mardag Foundation and many other donations.

Western MN Legal Services  Willmar

Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis/
Minnesota Disability Law Center

Closed 2,668 housing cases in Hennepin County alone.

Minnesota Disability Law Center  Mankato

South Dakota

North Dakota

Dear Friends,

“So how are the children doing?”

I challenge everyone — educators, policy makers, business professionals and others— to ask that question in the work you do each day. When you act in the best interest of our children, you affect our future.

Legal Aid provides legal representation to clients of all ages so that at any given time, they have adequate access to safety, food, health care, clothing, shelter and medical care. In 2008, we served over 11,000 clients speaking more than 23 languages.

Legal Aid’s work with and for children dates back almost 100 years. In the 1920s, a Legal Aid lawyer wrote the first Children’s Code in Minnesota. Legal Aid was also at the heart of domestic abuse legislation, drafting and advocating for its passage almost two generations ago. In the early 1970s, Legal Aid litigation led to removing children with disabilities from big state hospitals to more appropriate environments and closer to their families and communities.

Studies show that school failure leads to a higher risk of adult incarceration, domestic abuse and homelessness. Children who experience homelessness have a hard time performing at grade level and are about 50 percent less likely to graduate from high school than their peers. Economists at the University of Arkansas and Colgate University analyzed 10 years of national domestic violence data and found that legal services were the only significant variable in reducing domestic violence, reinforcing the fact that our work makes a difference.

I have a small, hand-lettered sign in my office, which I look at every day. It is a picture of Andreis, a nine-year-old boy, who became sick while staying with his mother in a homeless shelter. They had no health insurance and Andreis received inadequate treatment, which ultimately led to his death. At the memorial, we learned that the average Minnesota shelter resident is nine years old, just like Andreis. Andreis was not a Legal Aid client. I sometimes wonder whether, if his family had gotten to Legal Aid, we could have saved his life.

My vision for the future of Legal Aid is to ensure children like Andreis always have access to a safe place to live, proper health care, and a school system that offers them a fighting chance for a fair future.

The theme of our 2008 Annual Report is “The Power of a Partnership.” Working together, we can give all our children the resources they need to create a better future for themselves, and for all of us.



Jeremy Lane, Executive Director



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The Future Looks Bright

Kiswana McCloud and Irene Opsahl

Each year LASM's Youth Law project helps more than 300 children and teenagers to return to and stay in school and to find safe housing, health care and a real possibility for a future.

A determined 16-year-old girl marched into her high school social worker's office and said, "I have a voice and I want to be heard!" Moments later, Kiswana McCloud walked out with the phone number of a Legal Aid lawyer who would soon change her life.

Without missing a beat, the determined teenager called Irene Opsahl, a supervising attorney for Legal Aid in Minneapolis, who specializes in working with teenagers. The partnership was promising from the start. Kiswana wanted a lawyer to help her get visitation rights for her five brothers and sisters, who were placed in four different foster care settings.

"From the first time I met Irene, I felt relieved," said Kiswana. "She had such a warm personality and I could talk to her so easily. Normally, I have a hard time opening up. But when I met Irene, I knew she would help me no matter what."

Kiswana's foster care setting was also unsafe. Irene first worked to get Kiswana into a safe living environment. Then Irene represented Kiswana to negotiate visitation with her brothers and sisters. Kiswana was able to see her siblings two more times, but was unfortunately denied further visits. "Irene said something that really stuck with me. She told me I was a very strong person. She helped me realize I had the strength to get through tough situations and that I would be okay. And that really helped me."

A year later Kiswana and Irene's paths crossed again. Kiswana, by then a high school junior, was involved in an incident at school that led to a suspension and a pending assault charge. Kiswana immediately called Irene for guidance. Kiswana enjoyed school, had great friends and was a very talented basketball player. In fact, she was the leading rebounder for her city conference. Irene worked to keep Kiswana in her current school and get the assault charge dropped. "Kiswana was a good, strong kid who had already been through a lot. She was doing very well in school and in sports, and a suspension would not be in anyone's best interest," explained Irene. Irene was able to get the assault charge dismissed, but Kiswana had to transfer to another school.

As the end of her senior year approached, Kiswana and Irene paired up again for a transition conference. Irene facilitated conversations about what was next for Kiswana, including college. Today, Kiswana is a sophomore, with plans of becoming an electrical engineer or a pediatrician. "Irene and Legal Aid changed my life forever. I never could have afforded a lawyer to get the help I needed or to have my voice be heard," Kiswana said.

Irene couldn't be more proud of her client. "Legal Aid allows me to help kids use the legal system to their benefit," said Irene. "With the right information and guidance, young people can more appropriately think through how decisions they make today will help them in the future. In Kiswana's case, she has become a confident, strong woman who will accomplish her goals because of the good choices she made."



Irene helped me realize I had the strength to get through tough situations and that I would be okay.



> Legal Aid closed 2,011 cases that directly impacted the well-being of children.



Without Legal Aid, our grandkids
would have gone to foster care and we
would have lost them forever.



> Legal Aid assisted more than 1,000 victims of domestic violence in 2008.

Growing Up with the Goulds

Lynn and Darlene Gould and Karla Krueger

Darlene and Lynn Gould were sitting in their living room in Princeton, Minnesota one day in May when they received a phone call that would change their lives. Their daughter called from Duluth, Minnesota with a plea for her parents to come pick up her two young children. The Goulds hopped in the car and returned home with Ivy-Lynn, 6, and Zachary, 5.

Having raised six children themselves, the Goulds were no strangers to parenting. Ivy-Lynn and Zachary had spent several vacations with their grandparents, so they quickly found comfort in familiar surroundings. Their mother and father were struggling with drug addiction, financial issues, a criminal history and homelessness. They were simply not in a position to provide a safe, long-term living environment for their children, so grandma and grandpa stepped in.

As time went on, Darlene needed something more permanent. “I was scared. Really scared,” Darlene recalled. “Without custody of my grandkids, we couldn’t give them the things they needed. Like enrolling them in school and taking them to the doctor. I was worried that I’d look out my window and see their father there, demanding them back. And I knew how bad that could be for them.”

Through Social Services, Darlene learned they were eligible for Legal Aid assistance. At the St. Cloud Senior Center, she found Karla Krueger, the Legal Aid lawyer who came to her rescue. “Karla really listened. She assessed our situation, gave us options and explained everything to us in a way that made sense.” Darlene said.

Karla was extremely impressed by the Goulds. “Through the entire experience the Goulds only wanted what was best for their grandchildren. They were always careful to make sure that any decision they made was for the kids,” Karla remembered.

Karla helped the Goulds gain sole legal and physical custody of their grandchildren. “With our legal assistance, we were able to change the course of our clients’ lives,” Karla said. “Oftentimes, clients know what they need, but they don’t have the resources to make it happen. It has been extremely rewarding to help these children gain a permanent, stable environment where they are safe and happy.”

Darlene reflected on the outcome, “Without Legal Aid, our grandkids would have gone to foster care and we would have lost them forever. We’re just normal, middle class people. We can’t afford a lawyer. With Karla’s help, our kids are growing up with a lot of love from us and from all their other relatives. I just can’t imagine where they would be if Legal Aid hadn’t helped us.”

Ivy-Lynn, now 11, takes piano lessons and enjoys playing cards with her grandma and doing crafts. Meanwhile Zachary, now 10, works on tractors and cars with his grandpa or tries to teach his grandma how to play video games. Their mother successfully completed treatment for drug addiction and visits her children regularly. The power of this partnership has produced two “tweeners” who are ready to tackle their futures head-on!

In 2008 Legal Aid helped 55 grandparents and other relatives to obtain custody of children whose parents could not care for them.

LEGAL SERVICES ADVOCACY PROJECT:

A Powerful Force Behind the Scenes

Maureen O’Connell

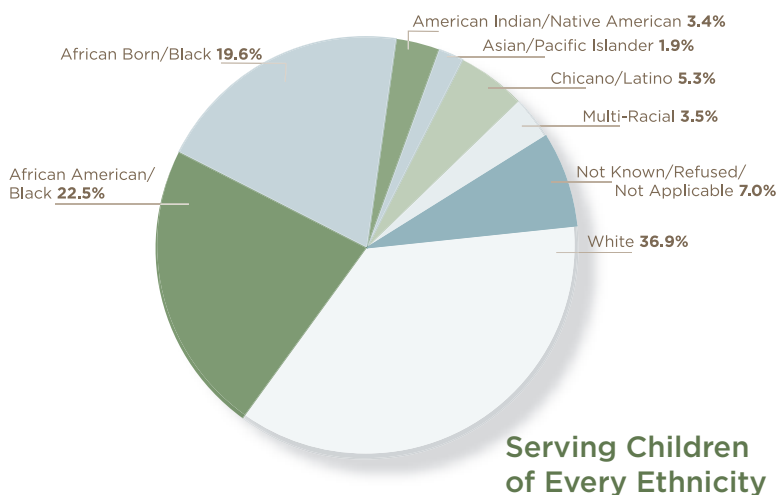
“The legislative system needs to work on behalf of Minnesota’s most vulnerable citizens. Our mission at LSAP is to make sure it does,” says Maureen O’Connell, Advocacy Director of the Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP). LSAP is a division of Legal Aid that works behind the scenes to advocate on legislative and administrative matters, conduct research and analyze policies. “We partner with Legal Aid attorneys to understand issues that are getting in the way of a family’s success and we focus our efforts on influencing legislation that will improve our families’ outcomes. We’re able to provide another tool in the toolbox for our Legal Aid attorneys,” Maureen explained.

In 2008, the LSAP team had reason to be proud. In the midst of a changing political climate and one of the nation’s most severe economic downturns, they came up with some key successes. Legal Aid held a statewide summit to raise awareness about hunger, child nutrition, and the best practices of anti-hunger public policy. As a result of this work, LSAP is bringing forth a bill to expand free school lunch to 54,000 more low-income Minnesota children. “We know a growing number of low-income kids are being turned away from lunch counters across the state because they cannot afford to pay even a reduced price, and that school districts are under no obligation to feed these children. The bill we’ve helped propose ensures more low-income Minnesota children are given the nutrition they need. We know well-nourished kids are healthier and perform better in school, which reduces health care expenses and the risk of school failure,” Maureen said.

Legal Aid’s rural offices have a Minnesota Care health insurance outreach program. In 2008 they assisted 478 families with Minnesota Care applications and eligibility issues.

Improving access to health care for low-income children has also been a longstanding initiative for LSAP. In 2008 LSAP helped shape legislation to increase access for families and children to Minnesota’s public health care programs. The legislation reduced barriers and made the Minnesota Care program more affordable for families. LSAP has also taken in active role in expanding dental services for low-income children.

“Now more than ever, it’s critical that we represent our clients’ voice,” said Maureen. “The LSAP team worked tirelessly, and successfully, in 2008 to impact legislation that equips our children with the resources they need for a brighter future.”





The legislative system needs to work on behalf of Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens. Our mission at LSAP is to make sure it does.



> In 2008, Legal Aid's cases affected the lives of more than 11,000 children and youth.



I needed an advocate. It was really frustrating trying to get my son the help he needed. I felt very alone.



> 1 in 5 cases for the Minnesota Disability Law Center were special education.

Connecting Parents with the Right Resources

Dan Stewart & Faysal Langner

A young mother walked into her son's elementary school to sign some papers. As she passed her son's classroom, she saw something that broke her heart. At that moment, finding an advocate became her top priority.

Amanda Langner is the single mother of a six-year-old boy with severe autism, Faysal. Since Faysal's birth, Amanda has been navigating the myriad of medical, legal and social challenges that come with having a special needs child. And that day in the classroom was no exception. Amanda saw her son sitting alone, strapped in a chair with shoulder and lap restraints. The teachers, the aide and the students were engaged in other activities. When Faysal recognized his mother, he tried to scoot toward the door, with the chair in tow, to reach her. Amanda knew she needed help.

"I needed an advocate. It was really frustrating trying to get my son the help he needed. I felt very alone," commented Amanda. She called Legal Aid and reached Dan Stewart, an attorney for the Minnesota Disability Law Center, a division of Legal Aid. "Dan really listened and he validated my concerns. I knew I had finally connected with someone who would really help me," Amanda said with relief.

"Faysal's situation was complicated," explained Dan. In addition to severe autism, Faysal has other serious medical conditions that require specialized care. "As I listened to my client's story, it was clear they needed help getting proper care for Faysal." Dan talked with Amanda, the school and the social worker and developed a plan to proceed with getting the right resources to keep Faysal in school in a safe environment for him as well as for the other children.

"With Dan as my advocate they took me more seriously," commented Amanda. With Dan's help, an independent expert who has specific knowledge about autism was brought in to observe in the classroom, review class records and make recommendations. The use of the chair with restraints was discontinued and a new plan is being formulated for Faysal.

"At Legal Aid, we use the law as a positive resource to improve the lives of those who cannot always help themselves," states Dan. "Some needs are extreme while others are less severe. But with each case, we improve the quality of life for our clients. And that's powerful."

In Faysal's case, getting him the help he needed meant keeping him in a regular community school living at home with his mother. "I know that eventually my son will have to go to a group home. But I want to keep him with me as long as possible. A son needs his mother. With Dan's help, I feel like we're giving my son the best possible experience. I am very thankful for Legal Aid and what they've done for us."

The Minnesota Disability Law Center provided legal assistance to 1,350 clients throughout Minnesota.

Cases Closed By Category

- Consumer: 954**
- Education: 292**
- Employment: 239**
- Family law: 1,299**
- Health: 1,125**
- Housing: 3,481**
- Immigration: 1,581**
- Income maintenance: 892**
- Individual rights: 600**
- Juvenile: 345**
- Miscellaneous: 575**

Total Cases Closed

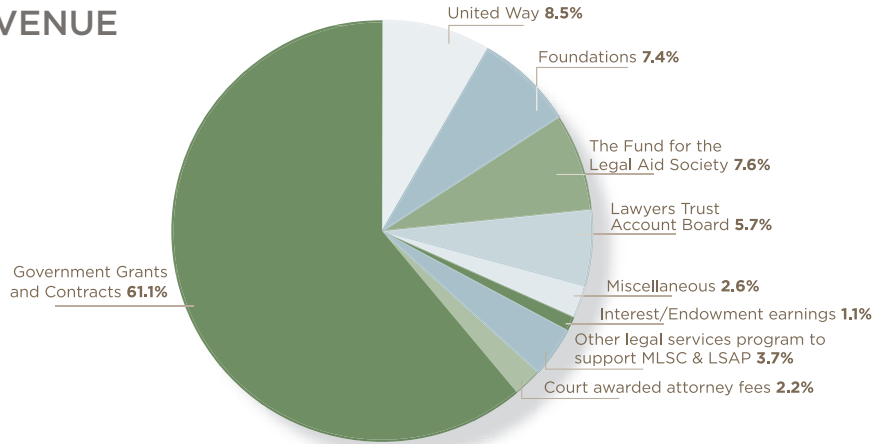
11,383*

*This includes all cases for Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance, including the Minnesota Disability Law Center.

Cases Closed By Region

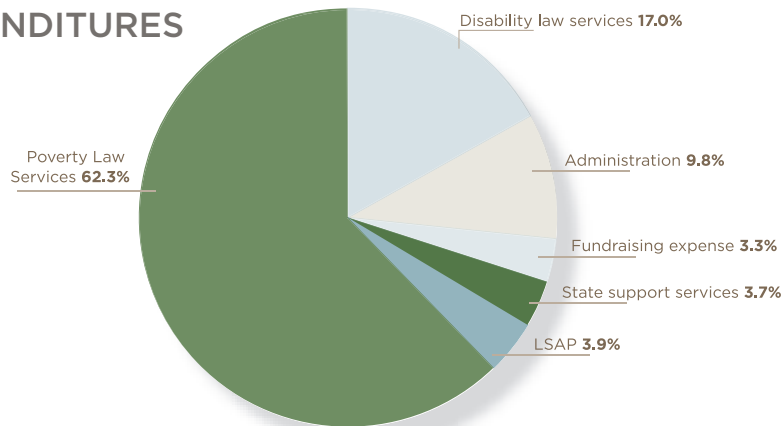
- Minneapolis: 5,691**
- St. Cloud: 2,225**
- Willmar: 1,194**
- Cambridge: 923**
- Minnesota Disability Law Center: 1,350**

REVENUE



Government Grants and Contracts	\$8,047,642	61.1%
United Way	1,120,540	8.5%
Foundations	981,647	7.4%
Fund for the Legal Aid Society	1,000,000	7.6%
Lawyers Trust Account Board	753,916	5.7%
Miscellaneous Revenue	344,301	2.6%
Court Awarded Attorney Fees	294,038	2.2%
Interest/Endowment Earnings	145,751	1.1%
Other legal services program to support MLSC & LSAP	491,287	3.7%
TOTAL	\$13,179,122	100%

EXPENDITURES



Poverty Law Services	\$7,997,823	62.3%
Disability Law Services	2,178,635	17.0%
Administration	1,261,320	9.8%
Fundraising Expenses	420,436	3.3%
State Support Services	478,746	3.7%
LSAP	499,206	3.9%
TOTAL	\$12,836,166	100%
Prior Reserve	\$3,280,923	
Year End Reserve	\$3,623,879	

2008 Giving Report

The donors listed on these pages represent all those who give to support Legal Aid's work. Legal Aid is fortunate to have the support of individuals, law firms, corporations and foundations, with gifts donated to The Fund for the Legal Aid Society, The Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, St. Cloud Area Legal Services, Western Minnesota Legal Services, East Central Legal Services, and the Minnesota Disability Law Center.

Partners For The Future

We thank the following people who made planned gifts to Legal Aid. If you made a planned gift, let us know so we can show our appreciation.

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Iris C. Freeman and Warren D. Woessner	Nancy J. Kleeman	Tom Tinkham
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At Legal Aid, we have the privilege and the honor to positively impact the lives of each person we help. However, our work would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. We're pleased to recognize two of our outstanding 2008 donors — **Iris C. Freeman** and **Warren Woessner**. Iris and Warren have equally changed the lives of so many men, women and children through their continued financial donations year over year. We gratefully acknowledge their dedication to social justice and to investing in the ability to build a better tomorrow.

Iris C. Freeman

"I joined the Board of Directors of the Legal Aid Society as a Community Member in 1985. As director of a small social service agency concerned with protecting the rights of vulnerable adults, I'd already had years of experience working with Legal Aid attorneys to help our clients. My commitment to the work came from direct observation and collaboration."

Warren Woessner

"When Iris finished her terms, I joined the Board of The Fund for the Legal Aid Society to increase my firm's participation in fundraising efforts for the Society. With our shared commitment to the mission of the Legal Aid Society, we decided to increase our level of personal giving to The Fund, with direct donations from our Family Foundation and by including The Fund in our estate planning."

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Thank you to our 27th Annual Law Day Testimonial Dinner Sponsors! The 27th Annual Law Day Testimonial Dinner, held on May 1, 2008, and honoring Professor Laura Cooper of the University of Minnesota Law School, raised over \$200,000 for Legal Aid. Many thanks to The Fund for the Legal Aid Society, the Hennepin County Bar Association, the individual Dinner contributors recognized in the annual giving list, and the firm and corporate Dinner sponsors listed below:

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**Laura Cooper, Legal Aid's Law
Day Testimonial Dinner Honoree,
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Each year, Legal Aid brings justice to Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens by providing legal services for housing, immigration, family law, consumer affairs and other civil legal issues.

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2008 Community Awards

Partners With Passion

In 2008, Legal Aid staff received several awards that serve as a testament to the high quality of our Legal Aid staff members.

- Communication Services for the Deaf of Minnesota and the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf presented **Rick Macpherson** and **Emily Teplin**, attorneys for the Minnesota Disability Law Center, with awards for Legal Work on Behalf of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People.
- The Minnesota Justice Foundation presented **Larry McDonough**, Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Minneapolis Housing Unit, with their 2008 Distinguished Service Award.
- The Minnesota Justice Foundation also presented **Galen Robinson**, Litigation Director for Legal Aid, with their 2008 Direct Legal Services Award.
- **Pat Siebert**, a staff attorney with Minnesota Disability Law Center, was awarded the 2008 Hennepin County Bar Association Public Sector Pro Bono Award, in recognition of 27 years of dedicated service to vulnerable people. Pat has served with Legal Aid for 24 years.
- The American Bar Association granted Legal Aid's Executive Director **Jeremy Lane** the Dorsey Award for Public Defender or Legal Aid Lawyer. This award pays tribute to Jeremy's 38 years of tireless work with poor and underprivileged populations.

All of our award recipients exemplify the dedication and passion that comes into play every day as Legal Aid works to change the lives of Minnesota's most vulnerable adults, families and children.

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Legal Aid closed 247 cases in 2008 involving foreclosure issues. In addition Legal Aid Staff trained more than 832 attorneys, outreach workers, social workers and other individuals on foreclosure issues.

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In 2008, Legal Aid closed 634 more cases than in 2007.

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Santas, Dreidels & Elves Run for Legal Aid!

If you were on Nicollet Mall on December 6, 2008 you may have seen Santas, Dreidels and elves giggling and dancing their way through the streets to raise money for free civil legal services for impoverished Minnesotans. A raging success, the third annual Santa run brought in \$33,000 for Legal Aid!

Legal Aid extends a special Thank You to The National Honor Society from St. Louis Park High School, who volunteered to help manage the event. They did such a great job they're on board again for 2009!

And the 2008 winners are...

Most Runners in a large firm (over 50 employees):	Faegre & Benson LLP
Most Runners in a small firm (50 or fewer employees):	Speeter and Johnson
Individual bringing in the most sponsorship money (\$1,700):	Bob McGillivray
Non-law-firm team with the most runners:	Minnesota RollerGirls

The Santa Run annual fundraiser keeps on growing, with more runners and more teams across the region in 2008!

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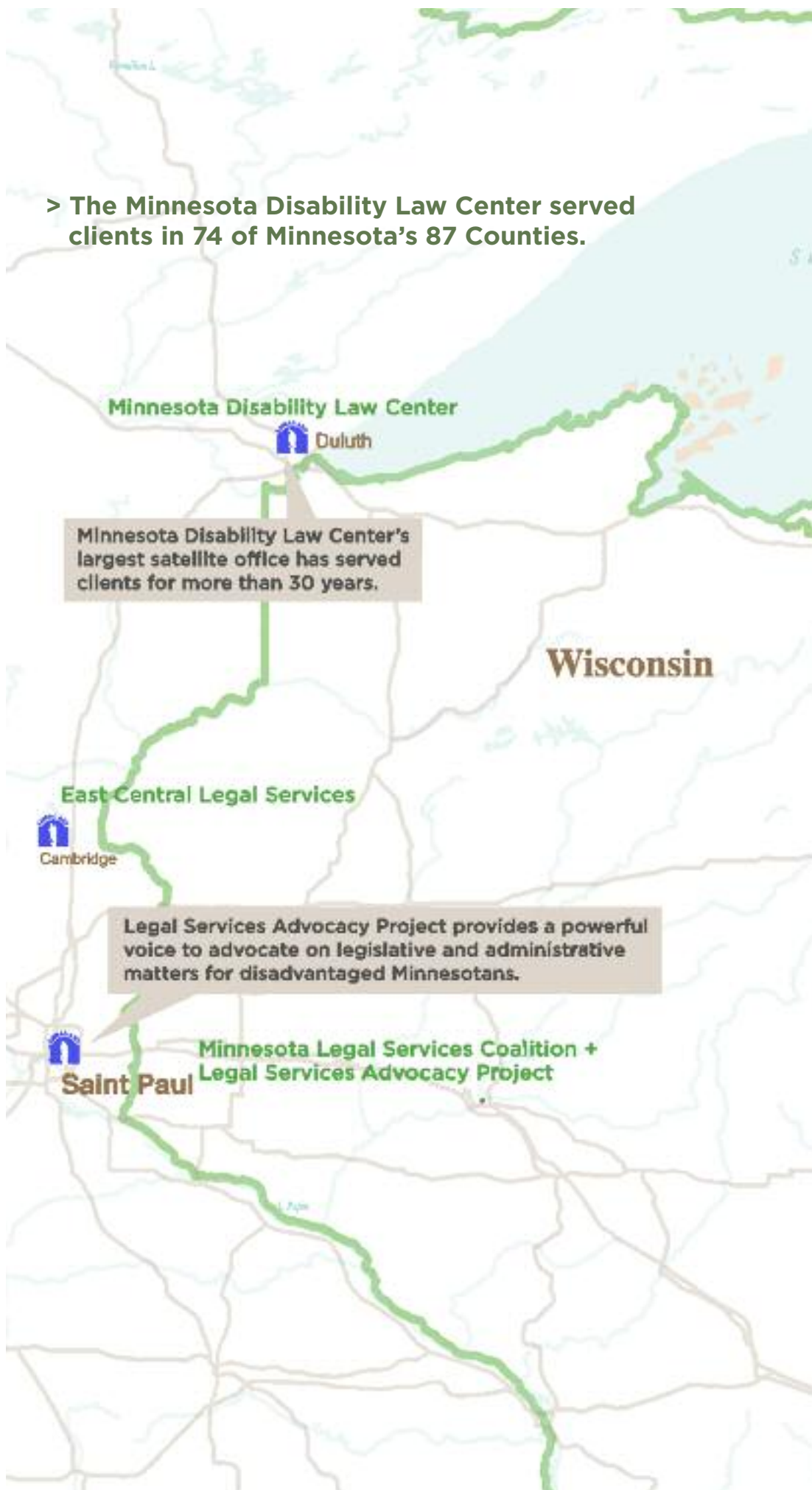
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