Paving the road to success

Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
Changing Lives with Legal Help

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you for your generosity over the past year. Your support of Legal Aid’s work makes an immediate difference in the lives of individuals and families in crisis. Just-in-time legal help can mean a way out of a dangerous relationship, a safe roof over a family’s head or a path to a prosperous life for a new immigrant.

Generally, we see our clients up to the point where their situation stabilizes. Then we move on to the next client and the next crisis. But what happens to our clients as they move forward on more solid ground?

Sometimes we receive a thank you letter or an invitation to a graduation ceremony. We may run into a former client at an event or hear an update through the grapevine.

This year, we caught up with some of our former clients and asked them directly about their experience with Legal Aid. How did the boost of legal help at a most stressful time make a difference in their lives?

Each person you meet in this annual report has overcome legal obstacles and gone on to create a better future for themselves and their communities. These success stories reveal great courage and generosity of spirit.

Some former clients have gone from dependence on government services to increased levels of independence or total self-sufficiency. Others have found ways to support people in their families or in the broader society. They are our neighbors, school teachers, shop owners and community leaders. Many are now working to support the very organizations that helped them through the most difficult time in their lives.

These stories are a reminder that financial and volunteer support for Legal Aid is not charity. It’s an investment in human dignity and healthy communities. Legal help for people in crisis results in more feet on solid ground. This translates to more people able to access education, safe housing, employment, improved health, and full participation in civic life.

As a supporter of Legal Aid, you are transforming lives. Thank you for your generosity and for creating life-changing opportunities for our clients and each person they go on to help.

Cathy Haukedahl, Executive Director
A Path from Despair to Stability

When Andrea called Legal Aid, she and her six kids, ages five to fifteen, were living in a battered women’s shelter in California. They fled Minnesota to escape a dangerous abuser who was intent on tracking them down. Andrea had no job and no money. She was desperate, and her abuser’s words — “You will never make it on your own” — played in her head on repeat.

MMLA staff attorney Brent Thompson and paralegal Heather Helmer in the St. Cloud office agreed to take Andrea’s case.

“When we met Andrea, she was in crisis,” says Brent. “She had been really beaten down. She didn’t have any place to go. She didn’t want money or property and she didn’t want a court battle. She just wanted this guy out of her life so she and the kids could be safe.”

“The attorneys told me to come on back to Minnesota,” Andrea recalls. “As soon as I knew they’d fight on my behalf, it gave me hope that maybe things could work out.”

Brent and Heather got a restraining order in place, helped Andrea apply for assistance to handle the bills that had gone unpaid, and stabilized the situation. They negotiated with the bank so she could stay in the family home, which had entered the foreclosure process. Andrea enrolled at Bethel University, took on two part-time jobs, and got her kids back in school.

Meanwhile, Andrea’s ex-husband refused to comply with criminal and family law court orders. When he lost his power over Andrea and the kids, he became increasingly irrational. Ultimately, he was incarcerated and his attorney withdrew. The court awarded Andrea everything — full custody, the house, all of the property and none of the marital debt.

“The longer Andrea was away from the abuse, the more she changed,” remembers Heather. “She has truly inspired me. When we met her, she looked so defeated she could barely make eye contact. But she took a horrible situation and turned it into something amazing. She makes me grateful to be here at my desk doing this job.”

“Andrea’s transformation was remarkable,” agrees Brent. “Once she was safe, she was like a completely different person. She was outgoing, cheerful and vibrant — she filled the room!”

Andrea is now a special education teacher who works with high school students in crisis. She is enrolled at St. Mary’s University, where she is four classes shy of her graduate certificate as a K-12 principal. Her three oldest children are in college, with one about to receive a degree in counseling.

“I never felt like I did any of it alone,” Andrea reflects. “Heather and Brent backed me through the entire process and helped me change from a woman who thought I could do nothing, who was told I’d never be anything, to a woman who, with a lot of help, found the resolve to stand up for myself and my children.”

Andrea wants people to remember that fear can paralyze someone into remaining in an abusive situation. “Many people don’t know that with grit, courage and a support net like Legal Aid provides, they can change everything,” she says.

“Legal help at that crucial time can give people their freedom,” Andrea reflects. “My life is as it should be because of the help I got from Legal Aid. There are other lives like mine out there, waiting to be changed.”
When Deb Demello was in her 20s and her sons were three and four years old, she realized that she needed to leave an abusive marriage. Legal Aid helped her to go through the divorce process and get full legal and physical custody of the boys.

“Legal Aid served us at such a critical time in our lives,” she says. “I will always be grateful and proud to have been lifted out of such a very challenging situation by the supportive and capable hands of so many wonderful people. I went back to school and got my degree, moved out of state, and have built a career that has supported me and our sons. I never had to be on welfare again, and I have not had to be in an abusive marriage for one more minute.”

Today, Deb is a senior consultant at a business consulting firm. She has served on non-profit boards and continues to give back in any way she can to those who helped her family in a critical time of need.
Melvin barely remembers coming to the United States from Liberia at the age of six. He traveled with a woman who entered the U.S. as a refugee and claimed Melvin as her son. Soon after their arrival, she put him on a plane to Minnesota. He was met by another stranger introduced to him as “Grandma.” She provided a roof over his head through his childhood, but not much else.

Melvin kept a low profile moving through elementary school. When he got to junior high, he went out for seventh-grade wrestling where he befriended teammate Ty Farrell. Recognizing Melvin was in a less than stable home situation, Ty’s parents, John and Tara, often gave Melvin rides or money for food. One time, when Melvin was injured in a wrestling match, John and Tara went with him to the hospital.

“We hadn’t realized until then exactly how alone Melvin was,” says Tara. “When that grandma person Melvin lived with didn’t come and get him from the hospital, that’s when I knew he was going to be our kid for the rest of his life.”

Melvin’s “grandma” held all of his legal documents and would not give them to him. He didn’t know if he had a green card. The Farrells went to Melvin’s school counselor to find out how to proceed, and the counselor connected them with Rebecca Scholtz, staff attorney with Legal Aid’s Immigration Law Unit. She works closely with the Youth Law Unit on cases like Melvin’s.

CONNECTING LEGAL AID AND PRO BONO COUNSEL

A Journey from Trauma to Solid Ground in a New Country

IN 2015, MMLA’S PRO BONO PROJECT SERVED MORE THAN 400 CLIENTS WHO OTHERWISE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN REPRESENTED BY COUNSEL.
“It’s tough for kids like Melvin,” says Rebecca. “When we begin to advocate for them, we have to delve deeply into their personal histories. It’s a lot to ask someone who’s already been through significant hardship to trust an attorney and tell their story. It requires a leap of faith on their part, and we can’t guarantee an outcome.”

“Melvin doesn’t like talking about his past,” says John. “Rebecca somehow earned his trust and got him to open up enough so she could get an understanding of what he’d been through.”

Between Melvin’s early childhood memories and information gained from a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request that produced his original immigration documents, Rebecca learned that Melvin’s parents were in Liberia. She connected the Farrells with a pro bono attorney at Faegre Baker Daniels LLP to help them get legal custody of Melvin. Meanwhile, Rebecca helped Melvin to get a work permit and to apply for Special Immigrant Juveniles Status (SIJS).

“SIJS is an important protection for vulnerable children and a way for them to acquire lawful permanent resident status,” says Rebecca. “It puts them on a path toward permanency and stability.”

“Working with Rebecca showed me who I am and where I’m from,” Melvin reflects. “Things people told me before, they aren’t true. I learned the truth about myself in this process.”

Things changed quickly for Melvin during and after the legal proceedings. He became part of the Farrell family, adjusting to their rules and expectations. They helped him with his classes and held him accountable for his homework.

“Before I moved in with the Farrells, I didn’t have any parent or guardian to lead me in the right way, so I was just doing my own thing,” he says. “It was scary to move into a family like that, but I trusted them.”

“Melvin was the missing piece in our family’s puzzle,” says Tara. “It felt right to bring him into our lives.”

With the work permit, Melvin was able to get a part-time job. He graduated from high school on time with a successful wrestling career, including fifth place in the sectional tournament. He’s now working a full-time construction job.

“We install doors and windows,” he says. “It’s a fast pace so I’m never bored, and I’m learning the trade. I hope to still be in construction in five years, but I want to get a degree. I’d like to have my own business one day.”

Melvin is also interested in working with kids like himself. He spoke recently with his high school coach about helping the wrestling team as an assistant coach.

“Melvin went from being a kid on his own to being part of a community,” says Rebecca. “He belongs to a family who loves him, and he belongs here in the United States. His strength of character was there all along. We gave him a boost through the complexities of the immigration system, and now his outstanding personal qualities and family support can take him wherever he chooses to go.”

MORE ABOUT PRO BONO SERVICES

Legal Aid’s Pro Bono Project seeks innovative ways to match Minnesota’s deep well of volunteer attorneys with the many clients MMLA has to turn away each year. The Project strengthens pro bono partnerships with law firms and lawyers throughout the state, complementing and reinforcing existing pro bono resources.

The Pro Bono Project currently consists of two programs: workshops for limited scope representation and referral panels for full representation.

The workshops help populations with discrete needs to get their legal documents completed. Legal Aid trains volunteer attorneys and paralegals, screens and prepares clients, and provides support as needed. Workshops currently assist clients in housing, tax, estate planning, immigration and special education.

The referral panels are comprised of a network of direct pro bono referrals for individual clients. Many clients (see Melvin’s story on this page) have legal needs that fall outside of Legal Aid’s priorities or an issue that requires more resources than Legal Aid can provide. Legal Aid coordinates with volunteer attorneys, working to provide holistic services whenever possible.

To learn more about pro bono opportunities, visit mylegalaid.org/get-involved.
Sabrina Banks, age 45, has managed her mental illness throughout adulthood. Today, she lives in an apartment in south Minneapolis, handles her finances, cooks for herself, welcomes her adult daughters to stay with her occasionally, and hopes to get a job at Goodwill. Her road to this level of independence was courageous and hard-fought.

In 2013, Sabrina was living in a highly regimented facility with locked doors and restricted phone access. In addition to being heavily medicated, she was receiving twice-weekly Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) treatments “for stability.” She was very unhappy with her situation, but her case manager wasn’t seeking different treatment or placement for Sabrina because “nobody else would take her.” The case manager said that Sabrina was “not capable of doing better with her life.”

Sabrina’s brother Selvin was deeply concerned about her deterioration over the two years she’d been under commitment, and called MMLA’s Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) to ask if Sabrina had any rights. When MDLC staff attorney Patricia Siebert began to investigate, she saw immediately that things were not right. “An assisted living situation is supposed to encourage people to be independent, but this was an awful place and the case manager had a terrible attitude,” says Patricia. “They treated Sabrina like a throwaway person.”

“That social worker was so rude to me,” says Sabrina. “She tried to keep my brother from visiting me, and my daughter couldn’t come up and stay with me. I felt so lonely there. They drugged me so bad I couldn’t remember anything. I didn’t trust taking medication from them.”

“They had written Sabrina off and the treatment was way too severe,” says Selvin. “I believe their intention was to keep her there forever and get funding. It was a shame the way they treated her. I was so hurt when I’d see her. I knew she could do better. Once Patricia got involved, people started doing what they were supposed to do in the first place.”

“When Patricia came in, she took charge,” agrees Sabrina. “She said ‘This is not right,’ and showed compassion to me right away. She was more like a friend than a lawyer.”

Patricia discovered that Sabrina had a commitment hearing coming up. She called the court-appointed attorney assigned to Sabrina’s case and talked him into opposing the ECT petition, which ended up being dismissed.

“That was the first step,” Patricia explains. “Sabrina’s short-term memory was impaired, but she began to pick up and do better as soon as the ECT treatments stopped. The next step was to get her out of that facility and to get her a different case worker.”

Patricia got Sabrina on the waiting list for a state-of-the-art independent living apartment with support services for people with mental illness. In the interim, Sabrina moved to an adult foster care home and started working with a new case manager.

“It’s the nutshell of what we’re supposed to do in our disability rights advocacy,” says Patricia. “I didn’t sue anyone, but I did muscle some people around.”

Within a year, Sabrina moved into an apartment with her own furniture. Her case manager’s office is next door, and the facility offers Internet access, yoga, acupuncture, an exercise room, a garden, and outings such as bowling, shopping and laser tag. Sabrina makes her own decisions now. She is her own legal guardian, her own payee, and she has a good relationship with her case manager.

“They said it wasn’t possible,” says Selvin, who is happy to have his sister back. “I told them they were wrong and she needed a chance. I knew she could do better.”
In 2011, MMLA’s Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) represented Rose Hollermann in a lawsuit against the Minnesota State High School League, which had rules prohibiting wheelchair athletes from competing against able-bodied athletes or scoring team points in competition. The League settled and created new guidelines making track and field programs more inclusive for student athletes throughout the state.

“Living with a disability is difficult,” Rose says. “With the legal help of organizations like MDLC, people with disabilities are not only able to help themselves, but they’re also able to change the future for everyone with disabilities.”

Rose is now a student at University of Texas at Arlington majoring in Early Childhood Education and is the youngest member of the wheelchair basketball Women’s Team USA. She was leading scorer in the Parapan Am gold-medal game against Canada last summer, was selected National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Athlete of the Week in November 2015, and is headed with Team USA to the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games.
Bashir was born in Somalia and fled with his parents to Kenya during the war. He came to the United States on a visa to join his wife in Willmar on September 10, 2001.

“I was lucky to arrive when I did,” he says. “I arrived late that night, and when I woke up the next morning on 9/11, everything was different.”

In 2004, Bashir came to MMLA’s Willmar office for help applying for Legal Permanent Resident Status (a green card) and employment authorization. His name had been misspelled on his original immigration documents, and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) listed his last name as his first name. They had also mistakenly designated him as a refugee instead of an asylee. Legal Aid helped Bashir to submit all of the necessary corrective paperwork.
Michael Elliott first encountered MMLA as a child, when his family fled persecution in Liberia and sought permanent residency in the United States. He returned as a young adult for help in applying for citizenship.

“To apply for permanent residency you have to tell your story, and that’s not an easy thing to do when you’re from a war-torn country,” Michael says. “Legal Aid attorneys made me feel safe. It’s a daunting task to apply for residency and then citizenship. The help we received from Legal Aid made it possible.”

Michael, now a U.S. citizen, is director of FastForward, a program he developed when he was a student at Brooklyn Center High School. The program helps students set goals and carry them through, improve their academic standing and develop a vision for their future. Michael also currently serves on two local non-profit boards, including the Legal Aid Board, and is the father of an academic-excelling, violin-playing, science-experimenting third-grade daughter.
n 2010, Rebecca Nathan, a single mother with four children, was overwhelmed. Her north Minneapolis rental unit had a mold problem, and the building owner was completely unresponsive to her requests for repairs.

“I didn't even know what options I had,” she says. “If you’re living in a low-income neighborhood, it’s really easy to have situations where the housing system is set up to work against you. It’s often hard to even figure out who is the right person to contact.”

Rebecca went to the advice clinic at the housing court, where she met MMLA Managing Attorney Drew Schaffer. He and paralegal Dawn Smith gave Rebecca advice on how to enforce her habitability rights. They helped her document the mold and other repair problems and contact the building owner.

“Legal Aid offered support and information without judgment,” Rebecca remembers. “Overall, I was willing to move my situation forward, but at some points, I couldn’t act beyond survival in the moment. Legal Aid didn't self-righteously walk away as many others in the business of ‘doing good’ might have. Instead, they provided consistent, kind and empowering support.”

Rebecca decided that, rather than trying to force repairs where she was, she would move to a different home in north Minneapolis. Drew and Dawn helped her negotiate a smooth exit from her lease.

Unfortunately, Rebecca noticed serious repair issues in the new home. The landlord was overseas, and a confusing array of companies and individuals claimed management of the property. Again, Rebecca wasn’t sure who had legitimate authority. She came back to Legal Aid for help.

“The property had a number of health and safety issues,” says Drew. “There was no rental license, and that can be a sign that the landlord is trying to stay off the grid of health and safety regulators. I’ve found it to be a proxy for a lot of bad things going on, and that’s what was happening in this case.”

Drew used public search records to determine addresses for every potential company or individual he could find who was related to the property. He helped Rebecca send a letter to all of these entities demanding they license the home as a legal rental property and deal with the health and safety issues.

In response, the management obtained a provisional rental license subject to inspection. Drew helped Rebecca schedule a city inspection at the property. The inspector documented a number of code violations – several in addition to those Rebecca had identified.

When the landlord did not act on the repair orders after a few months, Drew helped Rebecca file a rent escrow action, a simple legal action based on expired inspection orders and a 14-day demand from the tenant. The landlord retained counsel and fought the case. Ultimately, Rebecca and Drew worked together to negotiate a solution with opposing counsel.

“Repair issues aside, I liked the home and location, and I wanted to stay there,” said Rebecca. “As part of the settlement, I received two and a half months’ rent and a renewal of the lease.”

The landlord hired a licensed plumber and addressed all of the major repair concerns. The rental license and another year’s lease stabilized the housing situation for Rebecca and her family, and they have enjoyed stable housing ever since.

“Legal Aid was a great resource that escorted me through a stormy life season,” she says. “Help at that critical time enabled me to move past housing problems and challenges with troubling landlords so I could focus on the rest of my life.”

Rebecca now designs and facilitates courses for the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), which empowers parents to support their children’s school and life success. She also has a leadership role with Urban Homeworks, a non-profit organization that works to provide equitable, dignified housing, and she serves as a member on Legal Aid’s Board of Directors.

“In my work, I talk to many families who share housing and landlord challenges,” Rebecca says. “I can relate and encourage them from firsthand experience. I often suggest families contact Legal Aid like I did.”
“Legal Aid helped me at a difficult time in my life,” says Michelle Basham, a former client of MMLA’s Youth Law Unit. “The people there taught me by example the importance of giving a voice to the voiceless and helping low-income and homeless individuals and youth. What they did impacted me so profoundly that I developed a deep and powerful commitment to passing it on and trying to do for others what Legal Aid did for me.”

At the age of 19, Michelle started Avenues for Homeless Youth, one of Minnesota’s leading social service organizations that provides shelter and supportive services for homeless youth. She went on to earn a law degree and master’s degree in Public Administration from Hamline University. Since 2008, she has led several non-profit organizations including FamilyWise and the YWCA of Delaware. She is now serving as executive director of the Bridge for Youth. In addition to her full-time work, Michelle co-founded the Minnesota Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition, the Nonprofit Emerging Leaders Academy and other efforts aimed at helping homeless and trafficked youth. She has received numerous awards for her work, fighting for those who are oppressed, abused, or the subject of discrimination.
2015 Community Awards

ATHENA AWARD
The Women’s Fund of Central Minnesota Community Foundation named MMLA Deputy Director Ann Cofell the 2015 Athena Award recipient. The Athena Award recognizes and honors Central Minnesota women who have achieved excellence in their career and who inspire others. Ann was chosen because of her commitment to improving the lives of others and her dedication to serving members of the St. Cloud community with her creativity and innovation.

Ann has dedicated herself to educating individuals and communities about how the DV Court works and how Stearns County’s model can be tailored to fit the needs of other communities.

“Ann is a role model for all of us,” says MMLA Executive Director Cathy Haukedahl. “She's very client-centered in her work, yet she's always aware of — and in touch with — the broader community. She has many years of experience, but her perspective is always fresh, and she has helped change the lives of more people than I can count.”

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD
The Minnesota Justice Foundation honored MMLA Staff Attorney BJ Kuhn with its 2015 Outstanding Service Award for an attorney engaged in Direct Legal Service. The award honors those members of the Minnesota legal community who have made a substantial contribution to the lives of the state’s low-income community.

BJ has served hundreds of clients out of multiple offices for more than three decades. She has been an important mentor for younger attorneys, modeling and teaching what it means to be the consummate legal services attorney. She’s always up to something — most recently, she and Supervising Attorney Kathleen Davis have been leading a work group that is helping to rewrite Minnesota’s food support policies and increase eligibility for adults across the state.

MMLA Deputy Director Greg Marita says, “For more than 35 years, BJ has been working her creative, compassionate magic for our clients. She is a master at drilling down into the intricacies of public benefits law to help individuals and families find ways to stabilize or transform their lives. She gets people back on MFIP, keeps them on SSI, maintains their access to health care, increases their food support and helps them to stay safe.”

UNSUNG LEGAL HEROES
Diane Leibrenz, legal secretary in MMLA’s St. Cloud office, was selected as one of Minnesota Lawyer’s Unsung Legal Heroes of 2015. The Unsung Legal Heroes award honors law firm employees who consistently go above and beyond the call of duty, often behind the scenes. The award is reserved for the state’s most talented and dedicated legal support professionals.

According to MMLA Deputy Director Ann Cofell, Liebrenz’s strongest attributes are compassion and professionalism, which she combines to solve problems and handle a heavy workload. In addition to answering phones and screening clients, Diane helps new staff with everything from finding forms to determining next steps in a client case.

“Diane’s work and her impact on clients is hard to adequately describe,” says Cofell. “In her years at Legal Aid, Diane has worked on cases for more than 10,000 clients, very few of whom have met her. But her work is a critical piece of success in each client’s case.”
STUDENT LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT EXTERNAL HUSKY AWARD
St. Cloud State University (SCSU) Division of Student Life and Development voted unanimously to select MMLA Supervising Attorney Ralonda Mason for its 2015 Student Life and Development External Husky Award. The award recognizes individuals from the university and the broader regional community for their partnership with the Division and their service to SCSU students.

“IT is fitting that Ralonda was selected for an award that honors community partnerships,” says Ralonda’s supervisor, MMLA Deputy Director Ann Cofell. “Throughout her career, her ability to work in partnership with educational institutions, non-profit organizations, government offices and health care providers has resulted in improved and expanded services to people in need. And, most importantly, her work leads to better long-term outcomes for the people she serves.”

UP & COMING ATTORNEYS OF 2015
Minnesota Lawyer selected MMLA staff attorney Riann Meyer as one of the Up & Coming Attorneys of 2015. The Up & Coming Attorneys award recognizes lawyers in their first 10 years of practice who have already distinguished themselves in the field.

Ralonda was selected because of her work with Legal Aid’s ProjectCare, partnering with the SCSU Division of Student Life and Development to expand health care access. Ralonda’s tremendous support of and engagement with SCSU students through ProjectCare aims to ensure that all students have the health care insurance needed to meet ongoing and emergency medical needs.

Riann is the lead civil attorney for the renowned Stearns County Domestic Violence Court. In her work with the court, Riann tailors her representation not only to deal with the legal issues faced by her clients, but also to address personal concerns, such as loss of income and custody protection. At any one time, she is providing advice and representation to more than 70 victims of severe violence.

MMLA Deputy Director Ann Cofell says, “Riann’s leadership in the Stearns County Domestic Violence Court Project has resulted in better outcomes and safer lives for victims. Her professionalism, strong legal skills, and hard work to ensure that a system intended to benefit victims of abuse achieves that goal.”

PRO BONO PUBLICO AWARD
The Hennepin County Bar Association (HCBA) gives annual pro bono awards to recognize individuals for their commitment to legal services. In 2015, the HCBA recognized MMLA Staff Attorney Dorinda Wider with the Pro Bono Publico Award for Excellence by an Attorney in the Public/Government/Judicial Sector.

In her three-decade career with MMLA, Dorinda has been an advocate for vulnerable Hennepin County tenants. In addition to serving hundreds of clients in routine housing matters, she has undertaken impact litigation in state and federal courts and is nationally recognized as a housing expert, particularly on tenants’ rights in subsidized housing programs.

Dorinda is also a committed champion for those victimized by sexual assault and domestic violence. She assisted Senator Al Franken’s office in work to expand the housing protections provided in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). She also served as a liaison between the legal services and victim advocate communities, drafting and providing policy support leading to passage of state legislation that increased protections for victims.

GENDER AND SOCIAL CHANGE AWARD
In 2015, Dorinda Wider was also awarded the 11th Anniversary Century College Gender and
Social Change Award. Award recipients “have worked to embody feminist principles of social justice: to empower or increase opportunities for diverse, underrepresented groups in our community. Central to their work is the way gender intersects with race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, disability, etc. The awards recognize recipients from a variety of backgrounds and fields.” Century College is a two-year community college in the Twin Cities with a high number of first generation college students.

“The Gender and Social Change Award highlights perfectly the passion our advocates and attorneys bring to this difficult rewarding work,” says Deputy Director Greg Marita. “Sometimes landlords, agencies and systems tell our clients they are ‘less than.’ Throughout her career, Dorinda has stood with her clients, with all of their unique challenges and talents, and used the law to say, ‘NO — absolutely equal to!’ Her work is fueled by this passion and she kindles it in others as well.”

Three MMLA attorneys were among the 41 fellows selected by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law to participate in the 2015 Racial Justice Training Institute (RJTI), a groundbreaking national program.

Supervising Attorney Ralonda Mason of the St. Cloud Office, Staff Attorney Justin Page of the Minnesota Disability Law Center and Supervising Attorney Lael Robertson of the Minneapolis office’s Housing Discrimination unit were chosen for the program, which builds the capacity of legal aid offices to deploy up-to-date racial justice advocacy skills that address the role racism plays in causing and perpetuating poverty.

MMLA Executive Director Cathy Haukedahl says, “Minnesota faces significant and persistent racial disparities in education, health, housing and employment. The Shriver Fellows’ experience with the Institute will support Legal Aid’s efforts to identify and address these disparities on behalf of our clients.”

The RJTI included a combination of online and onsite training activities structured over six months. Fellows participated in a training program as part of racial equity teams, and then with support from skilled faculty and other RJTI fellows, they began applying new knowledge and skills to racial justice initiatives within their organizations and communities. Following the training, the fellows have joined a growing national alumni network of advocates working to advance a coordinated racial justice agenda.

“Legal Aid was so fortunate that the Shriver Center chose our applicants to participate in its 2015 Racial Justice Training Institute,” says Deputy Director Greg Marita. “The training deepened the ability of these talented attorneys to see the work we do for our clients through a racial equity lens, and strengthen our ongoing commitment to understand and address the effects of our own inherent bias on the organization’s policies, procedures and practices.”

Ralonda Mason says, “RJTI provided the opportunity to step back from our day-to-day responsibilities and evaluate the impact of our individual and collective work. Working with a cadre of advocates committed to addressing racial inequity was a powerful and energizing experience that we are excited to share with our colleagues.”

“I was honored to have the opportunity to participate in RJTI,” says Justin Page. “Racial justice is one of the great issues facing us as a nation. We have a long way to go, but having met a number of committed, passionate and smart advocates working on these issues I am optimistic that one day we will get there.”
## Financials

### Revenue & Expenditures | 2015

#### Revenue

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<td>589,644</td>
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<td>571,213</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>405,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior Reserve 2,646,534
Year End Reserve 2,646,981

**Consolidated Balance Sheets | 12.31.15**

#### Assets

**Current Assets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and Cash Equivalents</td>
<td>$3,635,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receivables:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and Contracts</td>
<td>1,608,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledges and Other</td>
<td>220,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid Expenses</td>
<td>84,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Current Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,548,966</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Property and Equipment, at cost**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funds Held by Community Foundation</td>
<td>2,409,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Escrow Funds</td>
<td>5,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Other Long-Term Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,414,881</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,525,220</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Liabilities and Net Assets

**Current Liabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts Payable</td>
<td>$510,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Trust Deposits</td>
<td>5,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued Expenses</td>
<td>378,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Current Liabilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>$893,746</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Net Assets</td>
<td>4,324,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily Restricted Net Assets</td>
<td>1,624,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently Restricted Net Assets</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Financials

#### Revenues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Ways</td>
<td>$586,343</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>2,859,899</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>4,021,580</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>879,611</td>
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<td>Local Government</td>
<td>730,757</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fund for Legal Aid</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Services Advisory Committee (LSAC)</td>
<td>1,168,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Support and LSAP</td>
<td>360,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowships/Clerks</td>
<td>374,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney Fees</td>
<td>387,911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>304,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,874,437</strong></td>
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#### Expenditures

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