

# TOWARD JUSTICE

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## COMMUNITY SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

# Aspiring attorney makes an impact at community legal clinic

**A**yanle Ali, aspiring attorney and volunteer staff at Legal Aid's East African Community Legal Clinic says, "When you see the raw emotion — some people end up crying, just of relief — you understand why you do what you do and it's all worth it. There will always be people who need that kind of help."

Ayanle came to the United States with his family in 1996 at the age of 5. They moved to Minnesota in 1999, and he grew up in Brooklyn Park. A graduate of Osseo High School, he earned a degree in business and marketing education from the University of Minnesota. He is now a student at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

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The legal community comes together to expand MMLA's capacity

The legal community in Hennepin County has a long and dedicated history of supporting MMLA's work through The Fund for Legal Aid and Pro Bono services.

94

**VOLUNTEER LEADERS**



44 in-house and firm attorneys serve on The Fund board — and an additional 50 associate attorneys volunteer — to lead the annual One Hour of Sharing Campaign.

\$1.3

**MILLION RAISED**



Through the One Hour of Sharing Annual Campaign and Law Day Testimonial Dinner, you provide much-needed funding for MMLA's services.

414

**CASES CLOSED**



Attorneys, paralegals, law clerks, students and interpreters donate their skills to the Legal Aid Pro Bono Program. Serving clients through workshops, community partnerships or full representation.

**MMLA is grateful to all those who donate their skills and talents to the Legal Aid Pro Bono Program and who support The Fund for Legal Aid with monetary donations.**

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. GET INVOLVED!

Contact MMLA's Pro Bono Coordinator, Kirsten Olson at 612-746-3716 or at [klolson@mylegalaid.org](mailto:klolson@mylegalaid.org). Or visit [mylegalaid.org/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities](http://mylegalaid.org/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities) for more information.

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“Back in Somalia, there isn't much justice from the legal system,” says Ayanle. “Justice is an important value to me.”

For most of the past year, he has been working closely with Staff Attorney Greger Calhan in the legal clinic, which is generously funded by the Pat and Tom Grossman Family Fund of the Minnesota Community Foundation. The clinic aims to improve access to justice in Minnesota's East African and Somali communities.

### **Helping the East African Immigrant Community**

“Ayanle did tremendous work from the very start of the clinic project,” says Greger. “He is perhaps the most promising, dedicated, hard-working young person I have ever encountered. I can't overstate the value of Ayanle's assistance to the project and its clients.”

Ayanle helps Greger staff the clinic's satellite office 3 days a week at Isuroon, a non-profit that focuses on the public health needs of East African women and families by providing culturally-appropriate, comprehensive social services. Working

closely with Isuroon staff, Greger and Ayanle provide legal advice and representation through an embedded community services model.

In addition to interpreting for non-English-speaking clients, Ayanle schedules appointments, translates documents into Somali, interfaces with government agencies, and coordinates wraparound services with other providers. He periodically sits in on the weekly file review meetings of Legal Aid's various substantive units (e.g., immigration, housing, benefits, family law).

“I'm always learning,” says Ayanle. “Even when we're doing routine work. Anytime I have a question, I bring it up and Greger is more than willing to explain things to me in detail. He's been an outstanding mentor and it's a great opportunity. I've learned so much from him.”

### **A Future in International and Immigration Law**

Ayanle is interested in international and immigration law, and working with the clinic has given him experience with the

day-to-day realities of legal work. In one case, he completely recreated a client's daily work and travel history from 2015 — a complicated and labor-intensive task — in order to help her resolve a serious tax dispute with the IRS.

Many clients come to Isuroon traumatized and distrustful of the legal system, and Ayanle has learned a lot about building the rapport and trust necessary to successfully represent a client.

“First of all, the client has to feel comfortable,” he says. “They need to speak in their own language and express their problems in a clear way. If they struggle with a language barrier, they're not going to be able to explain everything, and they might still be frustrated afterwards.

“It's also important to explain the legal concepts to them. Speaking the same language helps to filter through information and explain things better.”

Greger, who has been deeply impressed by Ayanle's integrity, professionalism, and commitment to community, has been delighted to introduce him to colleagues in the legal profession. In the spring, Greger invited Ayanle to attend Legal Aid's Law Day Testimonial Dinner, Minnesota's largest gathering of lawyers.

“That was a great experience,” says Ayanle. “I met so many people. It was good to see how the legal community comes together and helps out. They donate even when they don't know every detail of the work — they still feel the need to contribute.”

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

# Rick Solum

Rick Solum is a former judge in Hennepin County and retired partner from Dorsey & Whitney LLP. He has generously and consistently supported Legal Aid for more than 15 years as a Leader in Giving and Centennial Circle donor.

During a recent event, Legal Aid's immigration attorneys spoke about their daily work to provide stability for immigrant clients during uncertain times. Rick decided on the spot to double his contribution to The Fund for Legal Aid's annual campaign. In addition, he wrote a powerful thank-you note the following day:

*“I am so impressed with young lawyers who are dedicated to using their professional education and skills to advance the well-being of marginalized people.*

*If lawyers stand against nothing else, they should stand against injustice. And where the law comes in contact, evermore hostile contact, with marginalized people, each of us in the profession must ask what we are doing to protect against injustice in respect to such contact.*

*Because of a sea change in the view and application of the law toward such people, so compounded by the efforts to decrease funding for the legal services for the same people, the need for Legal Aid services to protect against injustice in our communities has profoundly increased.*

*The profession's giving to support legal services for marginalized people is the only giving advancing our profession's role in mitigating injustice.”*

**We are grateful for the steady support of Rick and donors like him, particularly in these times. Thank you for helping us stand against injustice — for our clients, for the community and for us all.**

## Every Dollar Helps

Your generous support makes it possible for MMLA to meet increasing demands and provide much needed assistance to vulnerable individuals and families in Minnesota. Your gift can change lives.

Donate online at [mylegalaid.org/donate](http://mylegalaid.org/donate)  
or contact Andrea Kaufman, Director of Development  
612-746-3744 | [akaufman@mylegalaid.org](mailto:akaufman@mylegalaid.org)



## MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP

# Improving access to health care and a path to citizenship for seniors

On February 15, 2017, Francisco became a citizen of the United States. In March, he and his wife Elizarraraz donated \$200 to Legal Aid.

When asked why he made the donation (Legal Aid's services are free), Francisco said, "I felt it was the right thing to do. I felt grateful for what you did for me."

Francisco left school after fourth grade in Mexico and began doing agricultural work. He followed the work, crossing the border frequently to cut lettuce and harvest various other crops. He has worked in the United States for many years.

Francisco, now 71 years old, and Elizarraraz work 35-45 hours per week at Jennie-O making \$13/hour. Legal permanent residents since 2006, they own a home and live close to their four adult children in central Minnesota. In addition to supporting themselves, they send money to help support their grandchildren and Francisco's brother in Mexico.

### One Stop for Medical and Legal Help

Although the couple has health insurance through their employer, they wanted to apply for help with prescription costs and other medical expenses not covered by their plan. This is where the medical-legal partnership (MLP) between Francisco's health clinic and Legal Aid came into play. When Francisco told his physician at CentraCare's Melrose Clinic that he was not a citizen and needed help to pay for health care, he was connected with Staff Attorney Tracy Roy.

"Seniors are a priority for us," says Tracy. "Green card holders can only receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for five years. If they don't become citizens, they're no longer eligible. Francisco has worked hard in the United States for many years — it's only right that he should become a citizen and be assured of SSI."

Francisco's case was fairly straightforward. The only complication was that because of his age and lack of schooling, the citizenship exam presented a real barrier. Tracy helped



**"I would tell anybody — Legal Aid is a good place. You can get help there."**

Francisco to file Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions, which waives the English and civics requirements for citizenship. Francisco studied hard for the exam, but it was a huge relief when the N-648 was approved.

### Achieving Citizenship

Navigating the citizenship process is complicated and can be difficult for anyone. For someone like Francisco, who is not fluent in English or comfortable dealing with bureaucracy, it can seem close to impossible. All these years, Francisco was unaware that legal help was available to him. The MLP connects many patients with Legal Aid, so they can get help with any number of legal issues that affect their health — housing, food support, domestic violence or, like Francisco, immigration.

"I really liked the way I was treated by Legal Aid," says Francisco. "Being a citizen makes me feel much more secure in this country. I didn't know I could get help with the application process, but now I would tell anybody — Legal Aid is a good place. You can get help there."

# Reuniting families on the path to citizenship

Ten years ago, Sara had to close her clothing store in Ecuador. She had no way to make a living, so she reluctantly left her children in the care of her parents and traveled to the United States. She found a job, sent money, called the kids every few days and dreamed of the day her family could be together again.

Things did not go well for Sara's children. Their grandparents hit them, called them names and did not give them enough to eat. The two oldest boys, Kevin and John, had to work long hours on the farm and often missed school because of the work. Sara did what she could to intervene and worked hard to support them from Minnesota.



## **Dangerous Days for Children Left Behind**

When Kevin and John reached their early teens, local gangs wanted them to join and sell drugs. The boys faced harassment and beatings on their way to and from school. Gang members broke Kevin's nose and threatened to kill him and John.

Between the gang danger and the abuse at home, John and Kevin knew they had to get out of Ecuador. Together, they made the long and difficult journey to the United States. At the border, they were caught and held in detention by immigration authorities. They were in a shelter for six weeks before being released to Sara's care.

"Once they arrived in Minnesota, we started to look for a lawyer," says Sara. "The lawyers I spoke with were expensive, and they said there was no case. They told me the best course

of action would be for the boys to return to Ecuador. I had no hope."

Legal Aid Staff Attorney Laura Wilson was part of a special screening project at Immigration Court. Legal Aid, the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, and Advocates for Human Rights watched the court dockets for families and children, and contacted the families who didn't have attorneys. Laura saw Kevin's name on the docket, and she called Sara.

## **Legal Aid "Changed Everything"**

"That call from Legal Aid changed everything," Sara says. "You come to the United States and work hard, but there's not enough money to pay a lawyer."

Laura talked to the family and assessed the situation. She helped Kevin and John file asylum applications. Meanwhile, she worked with Sara's husband, Fidel, to become a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) and to file a derivative application for Sara.

"We hadn't done an asylum case for unaccompanied minors based on child abuse before," says Laura. "We didn't know how it would turn out. It helped that the family is close and both Sara and Fidel are here and so supportive."

Kevin and John were granted asylum. They both work full-time with Fidel installing carpeting. Fidel now has LPR status, and the entire family is working toward citizenship.

## **Pursuing the American Dream**

"It's everyone's dream," Fidel says. "There are so many people who want the same as us. You want to move forward, but without citizenship, it's hard to advance. You're working and working so hard, but it's like someone has a hand on your chest blocking you from moving forward. You can make enough money for the basics, but it's barely enough, especially if you have kids."

Esteban, Sara's youngest son, is still in Ecuador with his grandparents. Laura helped the family to submit documents for visa processing, and Esteban is waiting for his interview while the family saves money for his travel. When the immigration and travel details are worked out, he will enter the United States legally and come directly to join his family.

"It would be impossible for my family to be together without the help from Legal Aid," says Sara. "Legal Aid is making our dream a reality."



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Legal Aid has received the Charities Review Seal, given to nonprofits exemplifying quality, ethics, accountability and transparency.

## Dear Friends

As Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid's new executive director, I have a renewed appreciation for the many ways the local and legal communities help us do our work. Thank you for your generous support, your partnership, and your participation in the pursuit of justice for all.

I first recognized the devastating effect of systemic injustice when I participated in the University of Minnesota Law School's Housing Clinic. There, I witnessed the difference that access to justice made, and I experienced the satisfaction of hands-on legal work.



During my 11 years in Legal Aid's Housing Unit, I found that helping people overcome long odds to achieve justice was the most engaging, highly motivating work I could imagine. I found a love of mentoring, empowering others, and sharing strategies. I'm excited to use these skills to support my colleagues in their work and to further the mission of MMLA.

The stories you'll read in this newsletter are quintessentially American. They reflect the ideals of family, sacrifice, and working hard for a better life. With

wraparound legal services, we do more than protect immigrants' rights. We keep families together and help people to stabilize their lives so they can work and contribute to their communities.

Some of our clients have lived and worked here for decades. They are our friends, neighbors, and co-workers. They are farmers, laborers, students, and aspiring attorneys. They love America and, when given the opportunity to become citizens, they uniformly pledge their lives in defense of the country that they know now as their only home.

The demand for our help to support people's existing immigration rights is well beyond the resources MMLA has to meet it. With decades of experience in many different areas of the law, we provide comprehensive services and fix system failures whenever possible. Always, our focus is on the needs of our clients, protecting families, removing unjust barriers, and saving lives.

Thank you for your support of Legal Aid throughout Cathy Haukedahl's tenure. I look forward to our work together in the years to come as we continue to pursue the vision of justice for all. I cannot imagine a better way to spend every day.

Sincerely,

*Drew P. Schaffer, Executive Director*