



Meeting the Moment

FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE DURING A PANDEMIC

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OUR MISSION

**TO ADVOCATE FOR
THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF
DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE
TO HAVE SAFE, HEALTHY
AND INDEPENDENT LIVES IN
STRONG COMMUNITIES.**

DEAR FRIENDS,

It's been quite a year. Thank you for your support as we have adjusted to not only a virtual office environment and new ways of doing our work, but also to a constantly spinning wheel of executive orders, court challenges, injunctions, and entirely new legal problems.

Throughout the year, we saw the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, whether by overt discrimination or unintended consequences. At Legal Aid, we've prioritized a racial equity lens as we stand with our clients to find the stability and support needed more than ever.

It was a year of internal change and striving for accountability as an organization. It was a year for listening, for stepping out of our offices and into the community, and for immediate and creative response to needs as they arise. The stories in this year's Annual Report reflect our efforts to be flexible and to center the power of partnership.

Our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic switched gears quickly to help hundreds of Minnesotans navigate the IRS website and get their stimulus checks to stabilize their finances. We launched a new Justice Bus — funded by a CARES Act grant — to provide mobile outreach in greater Minnesota. Our Immigration unit and Disability Law Center continued to work on behalf of some of our community's most vulnerable members. And, in this time of high need for stable homes, our Housing unit addressed illegal evictions and fought for the civil rights of unhoused Minnesotans living in parks.

Flexible funding from donors like you helps us shift resources quickly, adapt to emerging community needs, and respond to the moment. It was a year of unpredictable challenges, from the pandemic to the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. The spike in unemployment, loss of in-person services at schools and agencies, and the fallout from rapid changes and uncertainty have shaken everyone's stability.

We thank you for standing strong and steady in the community with us, our partners, and our clients.

Drew Schaffer, Executive Director



Securing Access to Federal Stimulus Payments

In April of 2020, many people saw \$1,200 pop up in their bank accounts as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) started distributing Economic Impact Payments (EIP). However, it wasn't that easy for millions of people with low or no income who didn't have a bank account on file with the IRS.

Karon Baldwin hadn't thought to apply for an EIP until someone suggested he call Legal Aid's Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) to see if he was eligible. Baldwin had been recently released from prison and wasn't sure where to start. Xue Bai, a third-year law student at the University of Minnesota who clerks with Legal Aid, took his case.

"I wouldn't have been able to do anything without her," Baldwin says. "After 24 years everything is different. I didn't know much about setting up an email account and she helped me figure it all out."

PIVOT TO GUIDANCE ON STIMULUS PAYMENTS

Aisha Servaty, Assistant Supervising Attorney and Director of the LITC, decided in April to see if LITC could be helpful for people who needed to apply for EIPs. In the first week, she and one other LITC attorney saw over 80 intakes, far more than they could handle. The entire Consumer Law unit started working on the cases, and other units across Legal Aid pitched in as well. In the end, Servaty trained more than 35 MMLA staff, pro bono attorneys, and law clerks (including Bai) to help with the EIP work.

▶▶ **“I wouldn’t have been able to do anything without her,” Baldwin says. “After 24 years, everything is different. I didn’t know much about setting up an email account, and she helped me figure it all out.”**

On September 24, 2020, a court decision ruled that currently and recently incarcerated individuals were eligible for EIPs. The decision was quickly followed by an appeal, and mixed messaging from the IRS confused the process. Servaty scrambled to stay on top of each change and communicate accurate information not just in the Twin Cities, but throughout Minnesota.

“I’ve been so touched when I hear people say they don’t believe they’re eligible, or don’t think they deserve it,” says Bai, who helped a number of incarcerated people. “I tell them, as long as they have a Social Security number and did not and were not required to file a 2018 tax return, they’re eligible.”

REMOVING BARRIERS

Servaty worked with community organizers, the Department of Corrections, and various agencies and services to connect with people who needed the payments most and were least likely to access them on their own. A telephone pop-up clinic at the Capitol Ridge Hotel in Ramsey County served unhoused individuals with lawyers walking them through the non-filer tool over the phone.

“There are many barriers for non-English speakers, unhoused people, incarcerated individuals, and the really poor community,” Servaty explains. “They need a phone, computer and internet access, electricity, and they need to call within set hours. Our priority was to eliminate as many barriers as possible.”

STANDING WITH CLIENTS THROUGH THE PROCESS

LITC helped over 550 people with their EIPs. For some, it was confirming eligibility or giving advice.

But for most, LITC walked them through the entire process, followed up to be sure their application was accepted, and interfaced with the IRS when necessary.

Flexible funding from donors and grants was critical to cover LITC’s additional workload. Legal Aid’s ability to shift resources to the LITC team meant that hundreds of thousands of dollars were delivered to the intended recipients.

Karon Baldwin was one of the 200 recently or currently incarcerated who were helped by LITC. The personalized help he received from Bai made a huge difference.

“She was right on time, and she followed up and let me know everything was on track,” Baldwin says. “I took a lot of college courses in prison, and this payment will help me get a good start without having to ask so many people for help.”

Caught in Immigration Chaos: Miguel's Story

Miguel*, a student at Wellstone International High School, had been a Legal Aid client for two years when he was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). His recent approval for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) triggered the detention. Legal Aid's Immigration unit worked quickly, filing a motion to re-open an in absentia order that was the basis for his arrest.

"That detention was odd and horrible," says Staff Attorney Lisl Zamora. "Miguel was barely an adult and still in high school. Even when the order was rescinded and the reason for picking him up no longer existed, they didn't release him."

A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Zamora filed papers to allow a bond, helping secure Miguel's release after a few months. SIJS is a designation for juveniles who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent. When Miguel traveled alone from Guatemala to Texas at the age of 15, his uncle put him to work 60 hours per week in heavy construction. An order to appear in court was mailed to his uncle's address, but Miguel never saw it. He moved to Minnesota to live with his cousin.

Once Miguel was informed of the order, he cooperated with law enforcement to investigate the human trafficking in Texas. Zamora filed a T-Visa for him in June of 2019, which, if approved, would give him permission to remain in the United States legally.

"I am scared about being sent back to Guatemala," Miguel said in his affidavit. "I have nothing and no one there. Here in Minnesota, I have more support. I have learned a lot of English since I arrived, and I want to continue school and learning and make a better life for myself."

HARSH ENVIRONMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Miguel is one of Legal Aid's many clients who were adversely affected by the harsh environment for immigrants, particularly communities of color, over the past four years. Travel bans, new public charge rules, increased filing fees, threats to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), as well as office closings had an immediate effect upon individuals and their families.

When the United States Citizenship and Immigration (USCIS) office closed in the spring, immigration courts remained open and ICE continued to arrest and detain immigrants like Miguel. When facilities stopped allowing visitors due to the pandemic, Legal Aid struggled to maintain contact and clear communication with their detained clients.

"We found it increasingly difficult to handle the rapid changes and mixed messages from USCIS," Supervising Attorney Alison Olson Cox explains. "A disturbing statement on the USCIS website stated they wouldn't honor the court's decision regarding DACA because they didn't want to help 'criminals.' Over the past four years, we've seen more indications of USCIS blatantly refusing to comply with court orders."

NEW FEES TO SEEK ASYLUM

In August of 2020, USCIS released news of a change to fees — including increases of 200% and more — which would have an enormous impact on Legal Aid's clients. The United States became one of only three countries in the world to charge people to apply for asylum. Many of Legal Aid's clients had cases in progress, and the entire organization made a coordinated effort to process over 100 applications before the fees were scheduled to jump. That fee raise, like many other immigration changes, began to work its way through the courts.



▶▶ “The immigrants we represent have a right to have their experiences heard, and a right to use the law the way it’s meant to be used.”

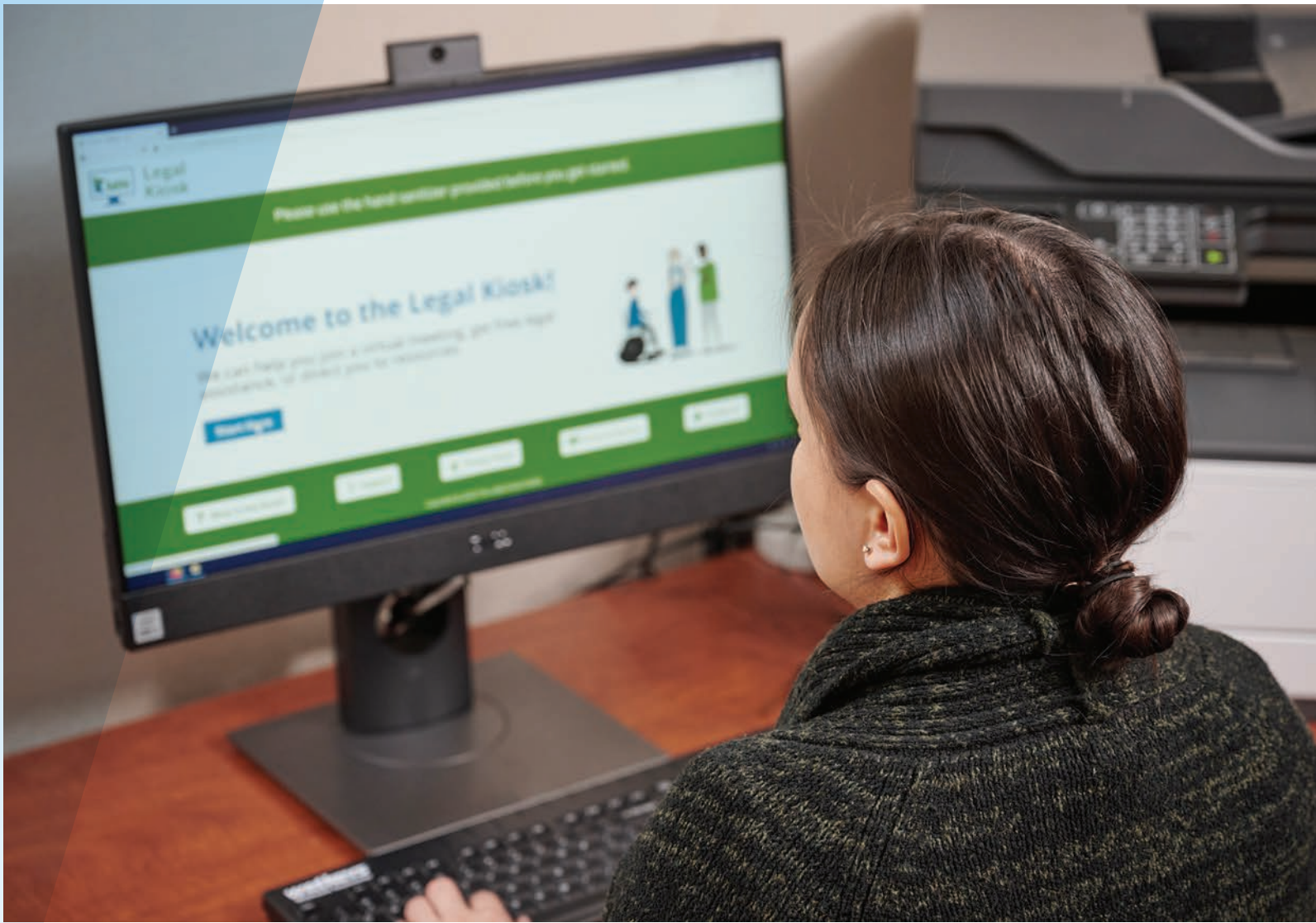
“Immigrants are being pummeled, and disparate treatment toward communities of color is the norm,” Olson Cox says. “We bring statistics and studies documenting that disparate treatment into the public conversation and into the courtroom. The immigrants we represent have a right to have their experiences heard, and a right to use the law the way it’s meant to be used.”

FAVORABLE OUTCOME FOR MIGUEL

As lawsuits are filed, injunctions issued, and cases make their way through the courts, Legal Aid attorneys continue the daily work of defending clients and protecting their rights. In October, Zamora helped Miguel file for his green card and work authorization. His T-visa was approved in January of 2021. Now 21 years old and protected from removal, Miguel continues his studies and hopes to become a U.S. citizen.

“Miguel is one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met, so polite and accepting of how long things take,” Zamora says. “To finally have something work out for him makes me really happy.”

**Name changed to protect client identity*



JUSTICE BUS AND LEGAL KIOSKS

Safe Access to Legal Resources in the Community

Thanks to COVID-19 funding from the CARES Act, Legal Aid is spreading justice faster (hopefully!) than the novel coronavirus. A justice bus will be hitting the roads of central Minnesota in early Spring 2021, and legal kiosks are being installed throughout the 20-county service area.

The obstacles rural Minnesotans face when seeking legal help have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Legal Aid once had offices in Cambridge, Little Falls, and Marshall, but funding has not been sufficient to keep those offices open. When the offices closed, case numbers in those areas dropped. It's more difficult to maintain community relationships and trust without a physical presence.

Transportation is always an issue in rural areas. Limited public transit options come with high exposure risks, making it even harder for those living outside of urban centers to see a lawyer. The justice bus will be dedicated to the more rural parts of Legal Aid's service area.

▶▶ **The kiosks and the justice bus will form a widening circle of safe physical locations for both rural and urban Minnesotans to access legal services. The network will mitigate the social and economic effects of the pandemic for thousands.**

MOBILE LEGAL HELP

“Removing barriers to justice in rural communities, that’s always been a personal goal,” says Ann Cofell, Deputy Director of Legal Aid’s St. Cloud and Willmar offices. “The justice bus will travel on regular outreach rotations, so residents in rural areas can rely on scheduled visits from the mobile justice team.”

The bus is a retrofitted van owned by Legal Aid. It’s a small mobile office with a computer, copier, printer, fact sheets, and other informational documents that will help Legal Aid’s staff serve Minnesotans through the pandemic and long after.

“We’ll partner with other events where people are already gathered,” Cofell says. “I can see the bus pulling up to libraries, community centers, Pride festivals, Juneteenth celebrations, and health fairs. Once the weather gets nice, we’ll set up tables outside the bus with lawyers and information.”

COMMUNITY-BASED KIOSKS BROADEN ACCESS

The justice bus and a new statewide network of 250 legal kiosks will bring legal offices into high need areas, connecting with clients through trusted community partners. The kiosks will be in designated areas in community-based settings such as courts, agencies, and non-profits.

Each kiosk is fully accessible to people with disabilities and includes various communication technologies, such as terminals for direct communication

with attorneys and advocates. Clients will be able to consult directly with legal experts and participate safely in virtual legal proceedings, overcoming financial, technological, and transportation barriers.

ON-THE-SPOT LEGAL COUNSEL

One of the 250 kiosks is located at Anna Marie’s Alliance, a St. Cloud shelter that provides women and children experiencing domestic abuse a safe place to stay, along with resources to escape the abusive situation. Kim Salitros, Manager of Shelter Services, is excited to bring legal expertise directly into the shelter on a daily basis.

“Women and children often arrive late at night,” Salitros explains. “We provide a 45-day stay, but there’s so much to do during that time — healing from trauma, figuring out next moves, scheduling a meeting with a lawyer, and more. We can now provide legal services immediately, connecting a woman with Legal Aid on the first morning. Legal guidance can be part of her planning from the start.”

The kiosks and the justice bus will form a widening circle of safe physical locations for both rural and urban Minnesotans to access legal services. The network will mitigate the social and economic effects of the pandemic for thousands — especially the disproportionate numbers of people of color, people with disabilities, and seniors who have suffered under COVID-19.




Wells Fargo Pro Bono Eviction Prevention Project Launched

In August of 2020, Shaunie* broke her lease and moved her family to safety. With the help of a domestic violence advocate, she provided her landlord with the complete documentation that entitles a domestic violence victim to legally break a lease without penalty.

Rather than supporting a vulnerable tenant, the landlord held her accountable for rent payment and penalties. Despite Shaunie showing homicidal text threats and police reports to the property manager, he accused her of filing a fake form. He charged her nearly \$12,000 and threatened to send her outstanding balance to collections.

“I felt like I was being railroaded for thousands of dollars for protecting myself,” Shaunie explains. “I followed all the rules and did the right thing, and they wanted me to pay \$12,000 within two weeks. I pay rent by myself. I can’t afford collections taking a percentage out of my check.”



“Shaunie was very strong; she was protecting her child; she was following the law; and still she was having problems.”

Shaunie contacted Legal Aid for help, and her case went to Wells Fargo Attorney Abigail Cerra and Legal Assistant Lashandra Marcellus-Swayzer of the Wells Fargo Eviction Prevention Project. The Project is part of Legal Aid’s pro bono program, managed by Pro Bono Coordinator Colleen Daly.

NEW PRO BONO PROJECT

“Our capacity is dependent on the number of volunteer attorneys willing to take cases rather than specific funding,” Daly says. “This gives us flexibility. Throughout the pandemic, my goal has been to figure out what help people need right now, and how to get that help to them.”

Stable housing is always a critical concern, exacerbated by COVID-19. It’s difficult for an unrepresented tenant to successfully negotiate with landlords or to prevail in housing court. Legal Aid’s Housing unit takes many cases but doesn’t have the resources to help everyone who qualifies. In 2020, the Wells Fargo Eviction Prevention Project was created to help fill that gap.

Cerra, a former Legal Aid employee, worked with Daly and the housing attorneys to develop the partnership. The goal of the Project is to negotiate settlements with landlords or find legal defenses the client can use to substantially reduce the amount owed. Shaunie’s case was a perfect fit.

“Shaunie had all the documentation in place,” says Marcellus-Swayzer. “In Minnesota, tenants in domestic violence situations don’t have to be victimized and stay in an unsafe place. She did the right thing by removing herself from the situation.”

APPLYING A RACIAL EQUITY LENS

Daly, who formerly worked as a housing attorney, has seen that a majority of Legal Aid’s housing clients are people of color who end up in substandard housing. A strong racial equity lens is a critical component of

the pro bono program’s approach to advocacy, and Shaunie’s predicament speaks to the need for community collaboration, education, and a strong support structure for volunteers.

“I started to feel like the landlord thought I was just another Black person trying to get out of paying money,” Shaunie says. “That’s how I felt they looked at me when they realized I was breaking my lease.”

RESOLVING THE INJUSTICE

In a typical pattern, the landlord did not back off until Cerra and Marcellus-Swayzer stepped in to support Shaunie’s defense. Building off the research and self-advocacy Shaunie had done on her own, they were able to intervene with the landlord and keep the matter out of collections. Shaunie only had to pay a small, legitimate fee, and she avoided a hit to her credit score. That was essential for her ability to rent in the future.

“I want lawyers and community members to know that a person could be following the law, doing everything right and still have a problem that requires a lawyer’s help,” Cerra says, “This case is a perfect example. Shaunie was very strong. She was protecting her child, she was following the law, and still she was having problems.”

The Wells Fargo volunteers, trained in housing law by the Legal Aid housing team, took five cases in 2020, and continue their work in 2021. Daly coordinates the intake of clients and provides support as needed.

“I’m thankful for Legal Aid and for the team that worked on my case,” Shaunie says. “If we feel in danger, that’s what the law is here for. They stood behind the law and I appreciate it. I also appreciate the patience, the time, and the act of listening. That was key for me, and I’m so grateful.”

**Name changed to protect client identity*

Supporting the Rights and Self-Advocacy of Young Adults with Disabilities

Chloe Nicol is a self-advocate with disabilities who helps Legal Aid’s Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) spread the word to other youth with disabilities about their rights and the resources available to them. She has volunteered with the Mankato office, and was recently featured in *Disability Rights and How to Vote*, a video produced by MDLC’s *Into Adulthood* project.

“Nobody knows what you need more than you do,” Nicol says. “You’re the best advocate you could have for yourself. Especially in the disability community it’s important for everyone to advocate for themselves so their needs get met and they have a better life. I think that’s good advice for everyone, not just people with disabilities.”

INTO ADULTHOOD

That outlook is the driving force behind *Into Adulthood*, a project that seeks to support young people with disabilities as they transition into adulthood. Assistant Supervising Attorney Kristina Petronko has taken the lead on this project, joined by Legal Assistants Cate Cavalier and Hanne Goetz, and Staff Attorneys Beau RaRa and Kelsey Mize. RaRa and Mize divide their time between MDLC and Legal Aid’s Youth Law Project, bringing a wide range of experience working with youth.

“For youth with disabilities, navigating state and county systems has never been easy,” Petronko says. “We want to provide them with the entire spectrum of information they need. We also want them to understand that MDLC is not just about bringing lawsuits. We can bring professional legal tools when needed, but we also provide self-advocacy skills and information.”

MDLC views housing, education, employment, and vocational rehabilitation as pieces of the same puzzle for youth moving toward independence. *Into Adulthood*’s collaborative process, seeks creative ways to inform young people of their options.

“It’s important to have as many information sharing avenues as possible,” Nicol notes. “Everyone learns differently, and it makes sense to provide different formats.”

Youth also have wide disparities in access. Some have phones and others don’t. Some have parental support and others are homeless. Black and Native students, who are disproportionately diagnosed with emotional behavioral disorders, tend to have less access to in-person services from schools. In recognition of differences and disparities, the project produces resources in multiple formats, including podcasts and videos.

PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCES

“The youth we work with are often so focused on their immediate needs, they don’t have time to sift through every resource that’s out there,” says Mize. “We put together all of the information in one place in a variety of formats, so youth can access that as a starting point.”

Rather than presuming what youth and their advocates might need, *Into Adulthood* takes an attitude of humility, with a careful focus on listening and learning their way into relationships. They seek to partner with self-advocates and with youth-serving groups, including Trans- and Native-serving organizations.



▶▶ **“I began to see value in myself once I started studying disability rights,” Nicol says. “Often as a community we get dismissed or devalued by various groups. It’s important to realize your own value and advocate for yourself.”**

“The disparities that already existed have been magnified by the pandemic,” RaRa says. “I worked with a young Native client on an eviction case who didn’t have good technology at home and didn’t know where to start. Her case came to us through a community partner. Without representation, she would have been facing the risk of going to court in person and possibly becoming homeless.”

PROMOTING SELF-ADVOCACY

The goal is to build self-advocacy, empower youth to stand for their rights, and back them up when they need support or legal representation. The project has inspired MDLC to brainstorm creative ways to partner with youth, lift their voices, and get the message out to others.

“I began to see value in myself once I started studying disability rights,” Nicol says. “Often as a community we get dismissed or devalued by various groups. It’s important to realize your own value and advocate for yourself.”

Raids on Encampments Spawn Class Action Lawsuit

Public parks were the best housing option for many unhoused people in the Twin Cities in 2020. Even when space in public shelters was available — which was rare — they were a hazardous option in a pandemic. More than 300 of the 3000+ unhoused people in the Twin Cities made their homes in urban outdoor spaces.

This year was Henrietta Brown’s first time living in a tent in public space. On a September morning before dawn, she was awakened by bright lights in her face. Law enforcement shook Brown’s tent and told her she had 30 minutes to get out.

Brown grabbed her purse and a blanket. The officers threatened arrest when she went back for more items. She watched as her tent — with her birth certificate, application for medical assistance, and personal belongings — were thrown into the garbage.

“The whole experience was so traumatizing,” says Brown. “I wasn’t really awake, it was cold, raining really hard, and I had no notice. I couldn’t understand why police didn’t realize that what camp residents have in our tents is all we have.”

Brown and others who were evicted that morning received help from ZACAH, a non-profit that supports Minnesotans facing poverty and displacement from their homes. ZACAH paid for a Super 8 hotel room for Brown in the following weeks.

FIGHTING BACK

Brown joined eight others who had been evicted from their tent homes, along with ZACAH, in a class action suit against the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and Hennepin County. The suit, filed by Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid and the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota, alleged that the park board, city, and county violated the constitutional rights of the plaintiffs and others living in the parks by destroying

encampments with little or no notice, bulldozing people’s shelters, and trashing their personal belongings.

“It’s good to fight back,” Brown says. “Nobody deserves or wants to be treated the way I was. If I see something wrong, I’m going to speak up — especially when it comes to the elderly, the disabled, or the homeless.”

When advocates who work with the unsheltered homeless community contacted Legal Aid for help, the housing team began an investigation immediately. The challenges involved in working with unhoused individuals during a pandemic were great. With no mailing addresses or reliable access to cell phones and electricity, face-to-face meetings were essential.

Staff Attorney Rebecca Stillman traveled between camps to build relationships with residents while navigating the difficulties of doing this in a pandemic. Her daily presence meant that she knew the people, was familiar with the camps’ day-to-day functions, and often witnessed events as they transpired.

“ON THE GROUND” LEGAL ADVOCATES

“I was there on the ground,” says Stillman, who was later able to identify inaccuracies in the defendants’ briefs. “It upset our clients to hear defendants say things that weren’t true to their experience. When they asked how that could happen, I didn’t have a good answer. But we are doing our best to represent them and their experience.”

Similar cases have been brought in other cities and states. Legal Aid has chosen to focus this suit on due process and privacy rights, noting the troublesome intersection of these evictions with Governor Walz’s executive order placing a moratorium on evictions.

“Most of these folks have been consistently mistreated by a network of systems that do not serve them, resulting in a cycle of homelessness,” Stillman



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reflects. “They’re subject to outrageous stereotyping. Stories about encampments leave out important details, like how tents are people’s homes, with decorations and personal belongings, just like anyone’s home.”

“Working with Rebecca has been great,” says Brown. “She’s been very informative, and I know she cares. She’s a good listener, and she’s competent. That’s what you call a winning lawyer in my book.”

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

Legal Aid hopes to hold the city, park board, and county accountable for their actions. The sweeps have exacerbated the problems of an already vulnerable — and disproportionately Black and Indigenous — population. Legal Aid seeks to ensure the civil rights of every individual, regardless of their resources or lack thereof, are protected.

“We’re at an unprecedented moment with the dilemma of unhoused residents,” says Stillman. “We are clearly unequipped — structurally, physically, or emotionally. Rather than treating people without housing as ‘public safety threats,’ we should be working on ways to welcome them into our community as neighbors.”



Community Awards

ANNA MARIE'S PEACEMAKER

Anna Marie's Alliance honors individuals that have supported the mission of non-violence for women and children and displayed a commitment to ending domestic violence. This year, the Peacemaker award was presented to **Ann Cofell**, Deputy Director of Legal Aid's St. Cloud and Willmar offices.



"If I had to describe Ann, I'd describe her as being quiet, yet powerful with her voice. She lends her voice to those who can't always speak for themselves," says Kim Salitros, Manager of Shelter Services at Anna Marie's Alliance.

Cofell has been practicing with Legal Aid for over 40 years. In addition to managing two offices, she represents clients, mentors young attorneys, and has established a number of critical community partnerships, including one with the Stearns County Domestic Violence Court.

"For four decades, Ann has been an incredible leader in the world of justice-seekers in Minnesota," says MMLA Executive Director Drew

Schaffer. "Her dedication to people in the communities we serve is unrivaled, and her longstanding advocacy for survivors of crime and violence has set the highest of standards for this work at MMLA and beyond. I feel so fortunate and privileged to work with Ann and to learn from her every day."

HCBA 2020 EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Hennepin County Bar Association (HCBA) honors bar members for their service to the local legal profession, the community, and the association. **Luke Grundman**, Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's housing unit, was awarded a 2020 HCBA Improving Access to Justice award for expanding access to full representation cases for clients in need. Grundman also protects civil rights of clients for low-income tenants under the federal Fair Housing Act and the Minnesota Human Rights Act in both state and federal courts.



Grundman, who has shepherded the housing unit through a doubling in attorneys and support staff, led a complex

civil lawsuit against Hennepin County's slumlords, argued an appellate case involving access to justice for low-income tenants, and delivered comments to the Minnesota Supreme Court on proposed amendments to the Minnesota Rules of General Practice regarding the representation of corporations in housing court matters.

"Luke is one of the finest, scrappiest litigators we have fighting for clients," says Deputy Director Greg Marita. "His work is infused with a smoldering passion for justice and sense of moral outrage that our clients are so often denied it. His tireless advocacy inspires our Housing unit staff and reminds us all why we do this work."

BERNARD P. BECKER "ADVOCATE" AWARD

The Bernard P. Becker Advocate Award is presented to a non-attorney legal aid staff member for outstanding service in the legal services field with commitment to providing legal services to low-income and disadvantaged clients. This year's award recognizes **Pam Manthei's** committed, long-term service to the community, providing excellent legal help to low income and disadvantaged Minnesotans.

Manthei, a legal advocate in Legal Aid's St. Cloud office, helps clients with housing, guardianship, health care, and financial exploration



issues. She is adept at identifying issues, acquiring vital facts, and discovering solutions. In her 26 years at Legal Aid, she has provided high-quality representation to over 5,000 households, and has given hundreds of educational presentations to help people in the community to prevent and identify legal issues. Manthei goes above and beyond with every case, creatively thinking of ways to meet each client's needs. When a door closes, Manthei looks for an open one and if she cannot find one, she creates it.

"Pam is an amazing advocate for her clients," explains Deputy Director Ann Cofell. "She advocates with landlords and with service providers, but she also advocates with our staff — to be sure that we are doing everything possible for our clients."

"5 UNDER 40"

St. Cloud Times named **Sarah McGuire** as one of five business leaders in central Minnesota under the age of 40 who is making an impact in both her career and community. The honor recognizes

McGuire's demonstrated ability to exchange ideas with other generations to improve products, services, and the workplace.

McGuire is an assistant supervising attorney in Legal Aid's St. Cloud office and has worked with the Stearns County Domestic Violence Court (DVC) for five years. DVC tracks recurring domestic violence felons and provides wraparound legal services for their victims and children. McGuire graduated college with a degree in sociology, and after several years of working beside lawyers, she believed she could help people better as a lawyer herself. She clerked for a judge who dealt with felony level domestic violence and found her calling. An "Empowered women empower women" sign hangs in her office, and she feels the best part of her job is helping clients gain safety.



"McGuire is a leader in our office and in the community when issues arise relating to Domestic Violence," observes Deputy Director Ann Cofell. "Her knowledge, her

compassion, and her skills benefit the people she serves."

**BERNARD P. BECKER
"LEGACY OF
EXCELLENCE" AWARD**

The Becker Legacy of Excellence Award was presented this year to Litigation Director **Galen Robinson**. The award recognizes a career-long commitment to excellence in the legal services field, with diligence in providing skilled legal representation for low-income and disadvantaged clients.



In his decades at Legal Aid, Robinson has been a fierce advocate for his clients. For example, *Brayton et al v. Pawlenty et al*, one of the many successes in Robinson's distinguished legal career, resulted in a Minnesota Supreme Court decision prohibiting the governor from using unallotment to defund entire programs. The case established important legal principles, but more important to Robinson, it protected vulnerable Minnesotans from having their food and nutrition program decimated.

"Galen has given his whole career, now in its fourth

decade, to Legal Aid's mission and the clients we serve," says Deputy Director Greg Marita. "Through his days as a staff attorney excelling in consumer and housing law, his time managing our Minneapolis Southside office, and now as a litigation director, Galen has inspired excellence in others and demanded it from himself. He brings his fierce intellect, maddening attention to detail, and unabashed loquacious nature to bear on every project, large and small. Through it all, he has shown us — clients, colleagues, and supporters — a generosity of spirit as large as his ponytail is long."

FINANCIALS

REVENUE & EXPENDITURES | 2020

REVENUE

United Ways	\$261,396
Federal	2,793,488
State	5,109,181
Foundations	1,733,984
Local Government	971,754
Fund for Legal Aid	700,000
Legal Services Advisory Committee (LSAC)	1,627,366
State Support and LSAP	479,447
Attorney Fees	128,721
Miscellaneous	2,951,415
TOTAL	\$16,756,752

EXPENDITURES

Poverty Law	\$10,174,348
Disability Law	2,378,104
Administration	1,820,988
Legal Services Advocacy Program (LSAP)	540,282
State Support	804,923
Fundraising	372,974
TOTAL	\$16,091,619
Prior Reserve	3,886,965
Year End Reserve	4,552,098

CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEETS | 12.31.20

ASSETS

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$6,618,001
Client Escrow Funds	35,387
Receivables:	
Grants and Contracts	2,334,508
Pledges and Other	230,336
Prepaid Expenses	41,936
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	9,260,168

PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, at cost

Less Accumulated Depreciation	(471,603)
TOTAL PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT (NET)	\$1,547,070

OTHER LONG-TERM ASSETS

Funds Held by Community Foundation	3,115,794
TOTAL OTHER LONG-TERM ASSETS	3,115,794
TOTAL ASSETS	\$13,923,032

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

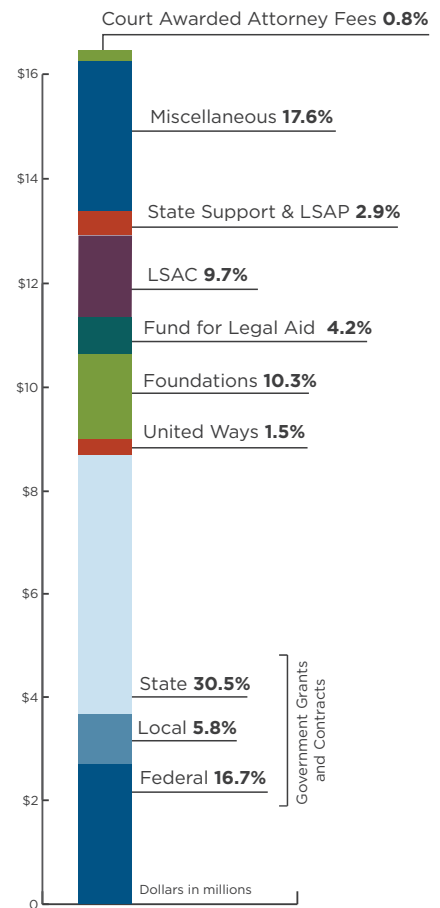
CURRENT LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$894,052
Client Trust Deposits	35,382
Accrued Expenses	504,885
Grant Advances	1,355,957
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	2,790,276

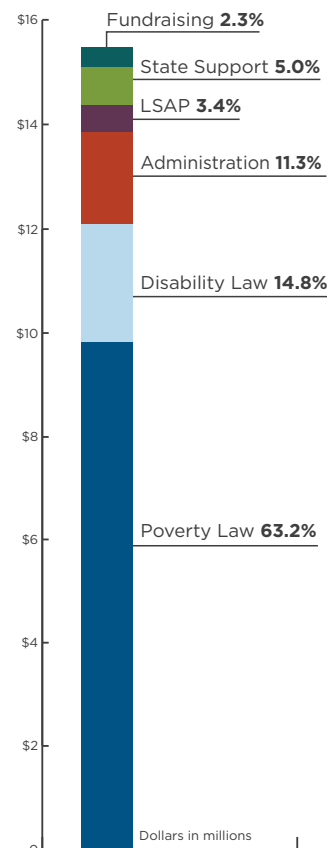
NET ASSETS

Net assets without donor restrictions	\$7,442,829
Net assets with donor restrictions	3,689,927
TOTAL NET ASSETS	11,132,756
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$13,923,032

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EXPENDITURES



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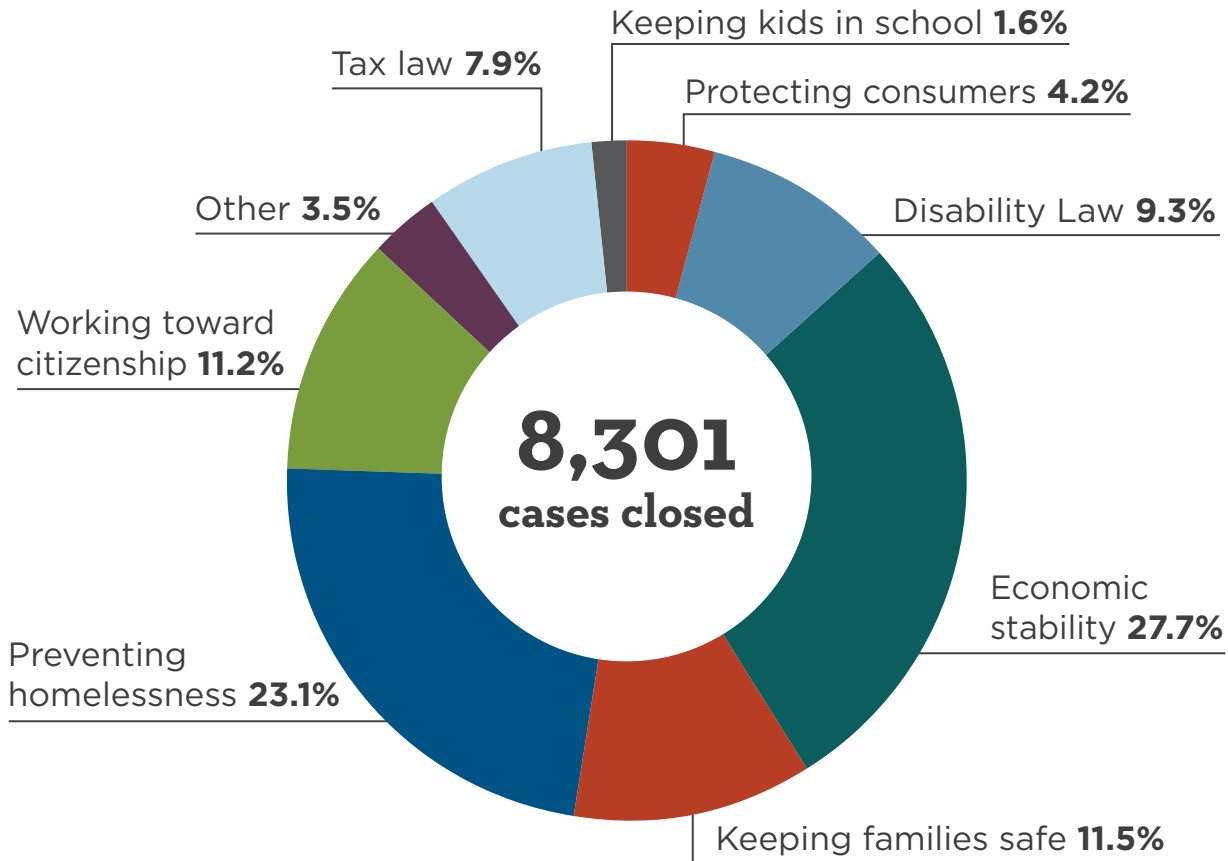
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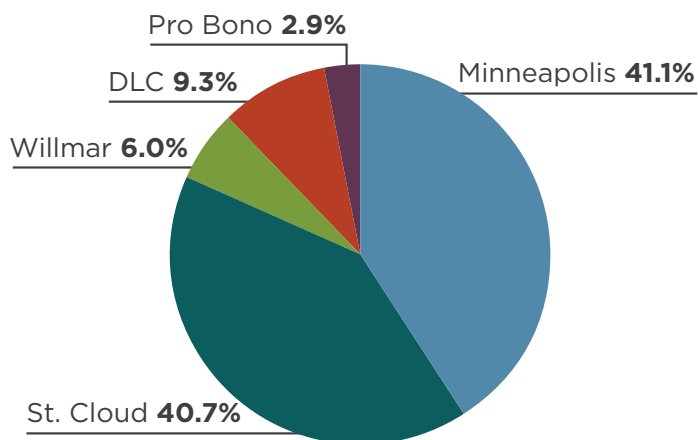
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In Memoriam Tamia Cramer

Legal Aid mourns the loss of staff member Tamia Cramer, 1959–2020. When Tamia first interviewed for a position as a legal assistant at Legal Aid’s Cambridge office in 2002, she said, “I know hiring can be tough, but there’s no other person who will work harder or do better at this job.”

“We hired her,” says Deputy Director Ann Cofell. “And she was correct.”



Cramer was originally hired to help develop a collaborative project with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. She built strong relationships with the tribal court and community centers and took on creative tasks and ideas that expanded the project beyond the original vision.

In 2005, Cramer was promoted to Supervising Legal Assistant. When the Mille Lacs project ended and Legal Aid’s Cambridge office closed, Cramer moved to Legal Aid’s St. Cloud office. She eventually became a paralegal in senior law, an outreach specialist, and coordinator of the Domestic Violence Court (DVC) Project. She traveled throughout central rural Minnesota, working with clients, educating the public, and building relationships.

“Tamia was very happy with the work she did with the Mille Lacs Band and proud of her DVC work,” her husband Michael Finnegan says. “It sounds simplistic, but she was happiest when she could help people.”

Cramer certainly succeeded in that. In her 18 years at Legal Aid, she helped over 8,000 people. If Legal Aid couldn’t take someone’s case, she always tried to find other avenues.

“She never complained,” Cofell remembers. “She handled challenging clients so professionally and was always looking at what she could do better. Tamia was selfless in the workplace, offering to share an office when we had a space crunch. She always kept a positive attitude, and we will miss her greatly.”

“Tamia explained everything really well. She was the best. The world needs more like her.”

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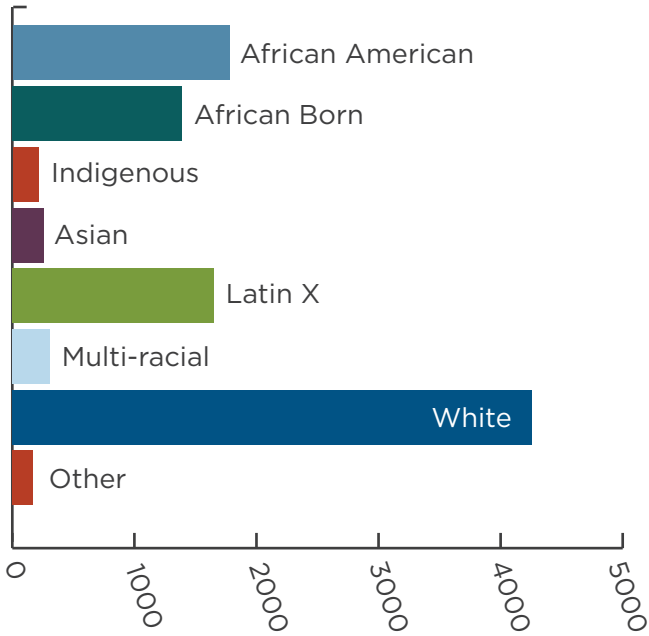
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The Associates' Campaign carries out a friendly competition to benefit Legal Aid's clients. Firms are grouped by number of associates and compete for the top spots. Robins Kaplan LLP was again the engine that drove the Campaign, bringing in over \$14,000 with a single-firm record of 10 Emerging Leaders.

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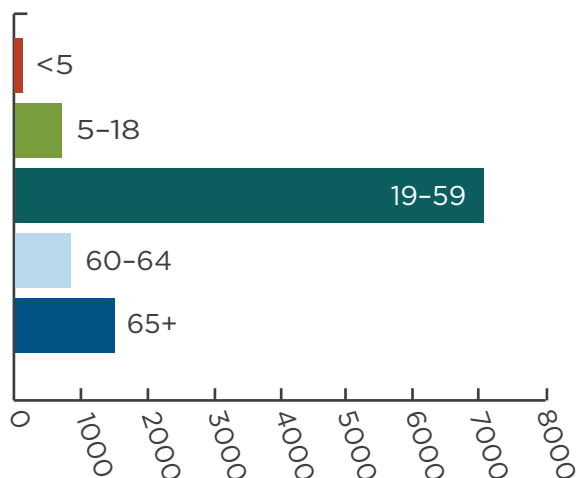
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MMLA HELPED APPROXIMATELY

402

**PEOPLE COMPLETE THE NON-FILER TOOL
TO ACCESS THEIR STIMULUS CHECK**

AMOUNTING TO APPROXIMATELY

\$482,400

IN STIMULUS PAYMENTS.

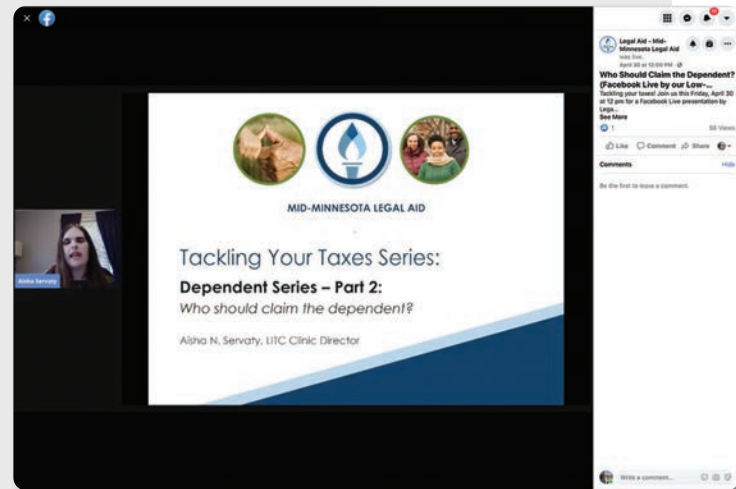
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Going Viral

Last spring, the COVID-19 pandemic brought most of Legal Aid’s outreach efforts to a screeching halt.

Meanwhile, Minnesotans still needed to know their rights and find accurate legal information. Legal Aid turned to Facebook (FB) Live to continue providing information and self-advocacy support to the community.

Aisha Servaty, Supervising Attorney and Director of Legal Aid’s Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC), kicked off Legal Aid’s new FB Live tool in April of 2020. In a 23-minute presentation, she broke down the CARES Act and COVID-19 stimulus payments, with information about the non-filer tax tool and deadlines. She also reviewed the services provided by LITC and fielded questions from the public.



“Facebook is a social media platform that taxpayers tend to be familiar with,” says Aisha Servaty. “It’s a good way to reach out and make people aware that they’re not alone and that information and resources are available.”

In September, Legal Aid’s St. Cloud office started an ongoing series: *Because Your Health Matters: The Expected, the Unexpected, and Everything in Between*, in English, Spanish, and Somali. Topics covered so far have included *Coverage for COVID-19*, *Affordable Care Coverage*, and *MNSure Open Enrollment*.

In October, Minnesota Disability Law Center Attorney Justin Page provided voting information in a FB Live session called *Voting Rights for Individuals with Disabilities*. December brought a FB Live introduction to presentations from the Willmar office focused on senior law topics such as *Medicare* and *Power of Attorney*.

In 2021, Servaty will be hosting a new LITC series in time for tax season. The goal is to equip taxpayers with the necessary information to advocate for themselves and ensure their tax returns are prepared correctly.

“Live, virtual streaming gives taxpayers an opportunity to bring questions and get answers,” Servaty says. “People can also watch the videos later and still get the information. In some ways it’s actually better than traditional in-person education and outreach because it eliminates barriers such as time, location, and language. We want to make sure Minnesotans know the LITC exists and is able to help them.”

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INTAKE AND PHONE CALLS DURING THE PANDEMIC WHEN THE PHYSICAL OFFICE WAS CLOSED

APRIL THROUGH DECEMBER

58,961

A 50% increase year over year.

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