ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS A REALLY BIG DEAL
LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MISSOURI
2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MISSOURI has improved the lives of those in need through quality legal assistance since 1964. Legal Aid provides free civil (non-criminal) legal assistance to people who need it most and can afford it least. With offices in Kansas City, Joplin, St. Joseph and Warrensburg, Legal Aid serves a 40-county area where 295,000 people live in poverty.

Throughout our report we use pseudonyms and stock photos to protect client confidentiality.

LAWMO.ORG

In 2019, you gave us reason to believe in a better world — a world where everyone has equal access to justice.

(This is huge — thank you!)
You understood that, every day, Missourians are denied access to the basic rights to which they’re entitled, simply because they don’t have legal representation. Equal access to justice doesn’t just make some of the difference for our neighbors in need — it makes all the difference.

(A lot of people don’t get this.)
You understood that if you’re trying to fight an unlawful foreclosure, secure veterans’ benefits which you’ve earned but been denied, or protect your family’s safety from an abusive partner, you need civil legal help.

But not everyone can afford to pay an attorney.
You understood that civil legal aid is a powerful tool — a tool that helps our neighbors build a foundation of stability so they can create a better future for themselves, their families, and our communities.
You understood that Legal Aid staff and volunteers work hard, but we must turn away more than 50% of people who qualify for our free legal services because we don’t have the resources to help them.

* Without civil legal aid, our clients face the justice system empty-handed.
In 2019, you understood how important access to justice is to our underserved and often overlooked neighbors — and communities. We could have never accomplished so much without you.

(Keep reading and see for yourself!)
2019 CLOSED CASE SNAPSHOT

Together, we helped seniors, children, the ill and disabled, veterans, and more! Here’s a brief look at how we did in 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Community Development</td>
<td>1,205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to Health Care</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefits/Income Maintenance</td>
<td>460</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipal Court Cases</td>
<td>6,977*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Law/Domestic Violence</td>
<td>2,109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education/Misc</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer/Taxes</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Municipal cases may have multiple charges.

2019 IMPACT AT A GLANCE

CIVIL CASES CLOSED BY OFFICE

- JOPLIN: 670
- KANSAS CITY - CENTRAL OFFICE: 3,160
- KANSAS CITY - WEST OFFICE: 252
- ST. JOSEPH: 474
- WARRENSBURG: 423
- TOTAL CIVIL CASES CLOSED: 4,979
- TOTAL KCMO MUNICIPAL COURT CASES: 6,977
- TOTAL 2019 CLOSED CASES: 11,956

- Average hours spent on each civil case: 14.2 hours
- Total hours spent on civil cases: 70,892 hours
- Total Municipal Court Defense Charges: 21,945
- Average # of charges per Muni case: 3.1
Tanya, a young mother, lived in a Section 8 housing property with her two children. Because Tanya’s only income was Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), her portion of her rent was zero.

Tanya’s lease came up for renewal and the Housing Authority of Kansas City conducted an annual housing quality inspection. The property failed due to several habitability issues, and Tanya’s landlord was given 30 days to make the repairs. The property failed a second inspection, and the rent payments went into abatement for three months until the landlord fixed the problems.

Tanya contacted Legal Aid’s Justice in the Schools Project after her landlord filed a suit against her demanding back rent for the period of the abatement. Tanya told her Legal Aid attorney that she didn’t have the money to pay her landlord. She was afraid the landlord would evict her, leaving her and her children homeless.

The Justice in the Schools attorney agreed to take Tanya’s case. He assured Tanya that HUD regulations specifically state that Section 8 tenants are not responsible for rent abated by the Housing Authority, and landlords are not eligible for retroactive payment of abated rent.

In the meantime, Tanya was working with her Housing Authority case manager to find a new home. When her landlord learned she was moving, he dismissed the case. Tanya found a temporary housing situation that allowed her children to finish the school year while she worked on finding a permanent home for her family with assistance from the Housing Authority.

**Legal Aid’s Justice in the Schools attorney helped Tanya navigate the public housing system — and keep her rental record eviction-free.**
Walt loves people and loves to make them laugh. Walt also lives in a nursing home and suffers from dementia. The Family Support Division (FSD) denied his application for Medicaid because it concluded that Walt failed to provide documentation regarding the sale of his former home. He sold his home just prior to moving into the nursing home. But, due to his dementia, he didn’t know what he did with the money.

One of Legal Aid’s community partners referred his case to our Mental Healthcare Access Project. The Legal Aid attorney investigated Walt’s assets and discovered Walt had used the money to pay off the mortgage and his other bills. The attorney negotiated with the FSD and, prior to the hearing, the FSD reversed its denial of Walt’s application for benefits.

Walt is now on Medicaid and receives regular medical care.

Good News!

Quick action by Legal Aid’s Mental Healthcare Access Project attorney saved Walt’s Medicaid.
Michael was living his dream working a job he loved that provided for his family — until he was in a car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. The injury resulted in significant cognitive impairment and seizures.

Because of these lasting effects, Michael lost his job. Soon after this, his wife left him and took their children with her. Without an income or anyone to help care for him as he healed from his injuries and completed rehabilitation, Michael decided to move in with his mother, who offered to provide the care he needed.

To help cover the medical expenses he now faced, Michael applied for Social Security disability benefits. His request was denied.

Michael turned to Legal Aid for help with his appeal. A caseworker from our Federal Rights Unit took his case and agreed to represent him at the administrative hearing. After collecting and presenting all of Michael’s medical records as evidence, Legal Aid was able to get a favorable judgement that resulted in Michael receiving several thousand dollars in back pay.

Before Legal Aid stepped in, Michael felt hopeless; he had lost his job, his family, his health, and his case for Social Security benefits. Legal Aid helped to turn Michael’s life around by assisting him in getting these benefits that will help him get back on track and overcome the obstacles in his path.

Michael is working hard to overcome his traumatic brain injury. He had Legal Aid on his side to help him get the benefits he needs to move forward.
“I was always treated with dignity, respect, and understanding. Today my life is infinitely better. You are all a true blessing and I thank you.”

- NOREEN

The theme for this 2019 Annual Report is “Access to Justice,” and fittingly so! Our dedicated and talented staff continues to amaze me; not only do they expertly perform the work they already are assigned, but despite working long hours and having full plates, they also exhibit initiative by proposing new ways to reach out to the community and provide more opportunities for easier access to justice for those who face certain barriers that may prevent them from reaching us otherwise.

Through the leadership, vision and dedication of our Volunteer Attorney Project Director, Latricia Scott-Adams, in 2019 we started a new outreach project in conjunction with the UMKC School of Law. For four hours per day, two days each week, Latricia’s volunteer attorneys host a free, walk-in legal help clinic at the law school that is open to the public.

Our Housing Unit Supervisor, Jane Worley, recently started the Justice in the Halls project in her “spare time.” Every week, she brings a crew of Legal Aid attorneys with her to the eviction docket at the Jackson County Courthouse. They wait in the hall just outside the courtroom to offer advice, counsel and, when necessary, representation to unrepresented low-income renters facing eviction from their homes that very day. These folks do not have to come to our office to access justice because this project brings it directly to them.

And our Deputy Director Alicia Johnson, in her “spare time,” with the financial support of several community partners, started up our Justice in the Schools project. Legal Aid staffs the project, and volunteer attorneys visit five Kansas City public schools and Hickman Mills High School each week to provide advice, counsel and, if needed, representation to students’ families in civil cases that affect their stability. These folks do not have to come to our office to access justice because this project, too, brings it directly to them.

Our entire staff of professionals work tirelessly to provide access to justice to those who need us. The stories of just some of the people whose lives we have touched are found throughout this report. We could not do any of this without the generosity of our supporters. Thank you, all of you.

Joseph P. Dandurand
Executive Director
Family Law/Domestic Violence Protection:
For more than 30 years, Legal Aid’s largest practice area has been domestic violence intervention. Legal Aid’s experienced Family Law advocates help ensure lasting safety for survivors of domestic violence and their children.

We provide legal representation to low-income survivors of abuse and secure protective orders, establish paternity, obtain divorces and establish child custody and child support orders. Due to our limited resources, our Family Law attorneys are only able to accept cases that involve domestic violence, and priority is given to those in which children are at risk.

Effective legal representation, combined with our ability to refer clients to other community resources for assistance with non-legal matters, has proven to be one of the most effective means of enabling our clients and their children to escape abusive relationships.

With Legal Aid’s assistance, domestic violence survivors are able to achieve physical safety and financial security. As a result, survivors are more likely to permanently leave their abusers and have the personal and financial capacity to establish a life free from abuse.

Health Care/State Benefits: Legal Aid represents people who experience problems with state-administered public assistance programs. These programs include MO HealthNet for the Aged, Blind and Disabled (Medicaid); Medicaid Spend Down; Qualified Medicare Beneficiary; Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary; Temporary Assistance; SNAP (food stamps); childcare assistance; Blind Pension; Supplemental Aid to the Blind and home and community-based services, among others.

We represent clients at the administrative hearing level and since October 2018 it has become virtually impossible to win an administrative hearing so we now have a significant number of cases in Circuit Court challenging the unfavorable hearing decisions.

Legal Aid also provides assistance to families, children and pregnant women to obtain and maintain Medicaid coverage. We provide representation to individual clients at administrative hearings and in negotiations with state agencies. We provide advice and counsel to clients regarding eligibility requirements for public benefits programs.

We also do extensive outreach to educate the community about public benefits. This outreach improves the quality of our clients’ lives through increased access to healthcare, food assistance and income support programs.

Federal Benefits: Legal Aid provides assistance to clients with federal benefit claims. Staff represent clients in administrative hearings and in court to ensure they receive the public benefits to which they are entitled. Typical claims involve benefits such as Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and Medicare.

Housing Assistance: Housing advocates focus on public and other federally subsidized housing. Legal Aid is the attorney for the Public Housing Resident Council of the Housing Authority of Kansas City which provides housing subsidies for about 10,000 families. This housing is critical to families with extremely low income. Families are able to find work and even purchase homes after a few years in stable public housing.

We prioritize representing people who have accessibility challenges due to a disability by fighting for fair treatment so they may live in housing with non-disabled tenants. Some need help with disputes over eligibility for these valuable benefits.

We regularly provide advice or representation to help our clients avoid wrongful evictions, recover wrongfully withheld security deposits and make sure subsidized rent is correctly calculated. We help residents when there is a widespread problem in a housing development to make sure the problem is corrected for all the tenants, not just one individual or family.

The Housing Team leads an eviction self-help clinic at the Jackson County Courthouse to reach out to renters who are being evicted. Staff and volunteers are available for consultation and advice in the halls outside the courtrooms before, during, and after the Landlord/Tenant dockets.

Consumer: Legal Aid advises and represents low-income clients, particularly seniors living on Social Security, in a variety of consumer issues. These include cases involving income tax controversy, utility shutoffs, predatory loans, home repair, warranty claims, illegal and unfair debt collection practices and other debtor-creditor issues.

Human Rights Protection Team: The Human Rights Protection Team is comprised of the Anti-Human Trafficking Project, the Immigration Project and the Migrant Farmworkers Project. Legal Aid staff provides high-quality, trauma-informed representation to refugees, asylees, lawful permanent residents, and indigent survivors of violent crimes, sex and labor trafficking and domestic violence.

Comprehensive legal services are provided in the following practice areas: domestic relations, employment, housing, immigration, public benefits, and victim advocacy.

Economic Development: Legal Aid’s Economic Development Unit represents nonprofit community organizations in neighborhood improvement activities, including the creation and preservation of low-income housing in Kansas City. Attorneys provide legal assistance to neighborhood associations seeking to remedy vacant and blighted homes, to nonprofit social service providers helping low-income residents and to community development corporations seeking to rehabilitate and develop residential units in their neighborhoods. Legal services include property acquisition, financing, real estate closing and syndication, tax abatement, zoning, and contracts with service providers.

Foreclosure Prevention: Saving the homes of low-income, elderly and disabled homeowners from foreclosure is a Legal Aid priority. Through litigation in state and federal courts, we challenge deficiencies in the foreclosure process and frequently are able to stop foreclosure sales or set aside legally invalid sales.

Legal Aid also negotiates directly with loan servicers to pursue loss mitigation options, including loan modifications to reduce interest rates and payments.
WHERE WE WORK

Joplin: The Joplin office provides services to six counties along Missouri’s southwest border. The staff consists of five attorneys, three paralegals and one legal secretary. The cases handled by the Joplin office involve survivors of domestic abuse seeking orders of protection, marriage dissolution, paternity, custody, visitation and child support orders. In addition, the staff handles cases involving consumer law, landlord/tenant law, guardianship cases, social security cases, and public benefits.

Many clients have problems beyond the immediate legal issues that brought them to a Legal Aid office. Staff members are active in various organizations that focus on specific issues affecting clients, including domestic violence, homelessness and financial stability. Close partnerships with community agencies enable Legal Aid to help clients address these issues.

Kansas City - Central Office: The staff consists of 43 attorneys, 18 paralegals, 15 administrative staff, three intake specialists, six legal secretaries and three Volunteer Attorney Project staff members. The Central office houses the administrative offices, including the executive office, accounting, human resources, development, and marketing.

Legal Aid’s Municipal Court Defense Unit is funded by a contract with the City of Kansas City, Missouri and provides representation to low-income clients charged with jailable offenses in the City’s municipal courts.

Kansas City - West Office: The Westside community — and many other inner-city Kansas City neighborhoods — are served by Legal Aid’s bilingual staff located in the office on Southwest Boulevard. The staff includes five attorneys, two paralegals, one legal secretary and several volunteers.

For the past 42 years, this dedicated Legal Aid team has specialized in providing counsel and representation on issues of [immigration, economic and community development and housing. Two Adopt-A-Neighborhood staff work offsite at an Eastside Kansas City location.

St. Joseph: St. Joseph’s staff of eight includes four attorneys and three paralegals serving an 18-county area in northwest Missouri. The office represents a mix of both rural and urban clients. Many of the cases involve family law, including marriage dissolution, custody, guardianships and orders of protection.

In addition, staff handle cases involving consumer issues, landlord/tenant law, social security cases, unemployment benefit denials, utility shut-offs and other civil matters.

Warrensburg: The Warrensburg office serves thirteen rural counties in west central Missouri. The staff consists of four attorneys, three paralegals and one secretary. The Warrensburg staff handle cases involving consumer law, housing, domestic violence, landlord/tenant matters and public benefits issues.

The staff maintain a strong presence in the community and work directly with local agencies in several counties. Staff members also make outreach presentations to local groups.

OUR SERVICE AREA

Legal Aid serves a 40-county area where 295,000 people live in poverty.
Our low-income neighbors experience 1-3 civil legal problems each year. And these legal problems create huge barriers to life's necessities — necessities like housing, health care, food, and freedom from violence.
The Volunteer Attorney Project (VAP) places eligible clients with private attorneys who agree to provide free legal representation to those who otherwise could not afford it. The private attorneys who volunteer their time through VAP believe in the principle of equal access to the legal system, of making “justice for all” more than just a promise. These attorneys are convinced that our legal system must work for all its citizens. They donate their time and considerable talents to make that ideal a reality.

During 2019, VAP attorneys closed 421 cases representing approximately 5,995 hours of legal representation and $1,199,000 worth of legal services. The following attorneys accepted new VAP cases in 2019.

KANSAS CITY

KOREENA ABERNATHY
ROBERT ABERNATHY
TODD ABLANALP
JOHN AISENBREY
KRISTIN, JACOBS ALEXANDER
LIKE ALSBROOK
JASON AMERINE
CONRAD AMIKOF
CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON
TERESA ANDERSON
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CHRISTOPHER CUSACK
ERIN DAVIS
GARDNER DAVIS
PAUL DAVIS
ROBERT DAVIS
DAVID DEAN
GILBERT “MICKEY” DEAN
MARGARET DEAN
ASHLEY DILLON
JONATHAN DILLY
CYNTHIA DODGE
JACOB DOLESHAI
JENNIFER DOUGAN
PRESTON DROBECK
MICHAEL DUBIE
MONKIN DUKE
ANTONETTE DUJURE
COLEMAN ELLIS
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KENT ERSICKSON
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POLLIE KEPPLER
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LISA MAHICAO
BILL MADDEN
KAY MADDEN
MICHAEL MADY
LINDSAY MATHIES

“My attorney was perfect. She fought for the protection order and made a terrible situation a lot easier on me.”

– SHAUNA
Nancy’s volunteer attorney used quick, decisive actions to achieve great results.

Without the aid of her volunteer attorney, Nancy would not have been able to negotiate a release. The volunteer attorney’s efforts to find an expedient way out of the situation, and his willingness to take an aggressive approach helped Nancy obtain a good outcome.

The Missouri Supreme Court adopted a Pro Bono Waiver of Annual Enrollment Fee rule. Retired and other inactive Missouri lawyers in good standing will be able to request a waiver of the Missouri annual enrollment fee if the lawyer’s sole practice is providing pro bono legal services through an approved legal services organization.
“Your knowledge and attention to so many details taught me quite a lot — and saved my home, of course. You guys were wonderful! ”

– ROBERT
GIFTS & PLEDGES (CONTINUED)

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SUE MADEN

IN MEMORY OF
JACK CAMPBELL BY
ROBERT ALLAN LIEBERMAN
PATRICK O'BRIEN BY
ROBERT P. O'BRIEN
JOHN OWEN
THOMAS BOYD
ALBERT REDERER BY
HON. SANDRA MIDKIFF
JACKIE RILEY BY
LEANNE DESHONG
JAMES O. SWANEY JR. BY
LATRICIA SCOTT ADAMS
IN HONOR OF
MICHELLE A. CONE & VANESSA HARPER BY
DANIEL P. BAKER
BRUCE BETTINGER
MIRA MDIVANI
JOHN & LEE MILLER
ESTATE OF P. JOHN OWEN

IN HONOR OF
MICHELLE A. CONE & VANESSA HARPER BY
DANIEL P. BAKER
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PATRICK O'BRIEN
ROBERT P. O'BRIEN
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ALBERT REDERER
HON. SANDRA MIDKIFF
JACKIE RILEY
LEANNE DESHONG
JAMES O. SWANEY JR.
LATRICIA SCOTT ADAMS

Each year, we receive heartfelt gifts in memory of loved ones and in honor of family, friends, or special occasions.

2019 TRIBUTE GIFTS

The following individuals made direct gifts to the Legal Aid of Western Missouri Endowment in 2019. Established in 2008 to ensure the long-time financial health of Legal Aid, the Endowment currently contains pledges and gifts from over 180 donors.

JACK & JEANNE BANGERT
BRUCE BETTINGER
BURNETTORSKIL
CHILDREN OF BETH & EDD SMITH
SEAN COLLIGAN
HON. BETH PHILLIPS
MIRA MDIVANI
HON. OWENS LEE HULL JR.
DAVID JOHNSON
DAVIN JOHNSON
JOANNE M. KANE & DON MCFARLAND
WILLIAM H. KELLY
JOHN & LEE MILLER
ESTATE OF P. JOHN OWEN

2019 ENDOWMENT GIFTS

HEROES OF JUSTICE

Legal Aid’s Heroes of Justice is a special group of supporters that make convenient, safe, automated monthly gifts.

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PETER JAROSEWYCZ
MARY R. DEVINE
WILLIAM QURK
RICHARD & DEBRA LOMBARDO
RORY MCDERMOTT
DAN & RITA TRIPP

LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MISSOURI
LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MISSOURI
Marion contacted Legal Aid for help with a custody matter after the father of her child, Steve, filed a petition for sole legal and sole physical custody of their daughter, Emily.

Months prior, Marion and Steve had separated, and Steve moved out. Throughout their time together, Steve physically abused Marion. During one abusive episode, Steve hurt Marion to the point where she required surgery. After the separation, Emily remained with her mother.

Immediately before filing suit, Steve, without any notice to Marion, picked up Emily from school early one day and hid her with his relatives. When Marion arrived at school that day to pick up her child, she was horrified to discover that Steve had taken their daughter without her knowledge.

When Marion came to the Legal Aid office for help, the priority was locating Emily and returning her to Marion. Legal Aid staff immediately filed an emergency Motion for Temporary Custody and sent a letter to Steve’s attorney advising him that his client would face serious consequences if Emily was not returned immediately. Emily was returned at once through one of Steve’s relatives.

At the final hearing, the Court awarded Marion sole legal and sole physical custody of Emily, with no right of visitation awarded to Steve.

Marion is happy she will be able to make all the decisions affecting Emily without having to interact with her abuser. She and Emily are now free from Steve’s violent and controlling behavior.
ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS A REALLY BIG DEAL