



The  
Legal Aid Society  
of Cleveland  
*Since 1905*

# The Presence of Justice in Northeast Ohio

*Navigating our course toward justice*



**2010 Annual Report**



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*Since 1905*

## Dear Friends & Supporters,

In 2006, as we embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process for the organization, we could not have imagined that we were on the cusp of the worst global economic downturn since the Great Depression. By severely increasing the need for our services, that recession stretched our capacity as never before.

Thankfully, that same strategic plan called for building additional organizational capacity through more efficient operations, better leveraging of resources, and additional fund raising. That plan helped us maintain our equilibrium despite rising need from an expanded pool of clients. Even in the face of funding decreases, we are proud to have been able to retain our entire staff, thanks to the devoted support of you – our friends and supporters.

Our strategic plan reinforced that we are wholly dedicated to impact rather than just quantity. We do this work not simply to win cases, but to improve the lives of our clients. In this report you will read about how we have improved our clients' lives. For example, in 2010, operating in a region at the epicenter of the home foreclosure crisis, we prevented foreclosure in 68% of our cases and prevented evictions in 97% of cases. Those clients are not merely numbers, but families whose housing was preserved, and neighborhoods kept strong.

In the last year, we have also made significant strides in raising the organization's profile in the wider community. Our newly-launched website played a key role in that profile-raising, telling our story in greater depth than ever before. It better empowered our clients with the information they need to avoid and resolve problems, or to seek us out when they could do neither on their own.

A fundamental part of our mission is to reach isolated groups. All of our clients are isolated by poverty, but many are also isolated because of disability, language or geography. Our outreach efforts in the last year have helped us become ever more engaged with these clients and enabled us to provide them with more responsive services.

So on behalf of our entire board and staff, a big thank you is in order to all of our volunteers and funding partners. Our work involves helping clients push back against the exploitation and indignities of poverty and neglect. Without your tremendous support in the last year – and indeed over many years – we could not provide this high-quality legal assistance while also working for systemic change.

Sincerely,



*Colleen M. Cotter*

Colleen M. Cotter, Esq.  
The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland  
Executive Director



*Richard D. Panza*

Richard D. Panza, Esq.  
Partner, Wickens, Herzer, Panza, Cook and Batista Co.  
Legal Aid Board President, 2010



*Ilah M. Adkins*

Ilah M. Adkins, Esq.  
Vice President & General Counsel, Charter One Bank  
Legal Aid Board President, 2011

# 2010 Data and Finances

## Revenue and Other Support

	2010	2009
Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation (OLAF)	\$3,314,439	\$3,681,072
Legal Services Corporation (LSC)	\$2,441,094	\$2,260,819
Donations and Private Grants	\$819,815	\$628,276
Donated Services	\$1,348,436	\$1,081,791
United Way	\$241,528	\$245,657
Partner Agencies (Contracts for Legal Services)	\$299,404	\$440,973
Other Government Grants	\$235,879	\$243,835
Other Income	\$500,788	\$361,472
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$9,201,383</b>	<b>\$8,943,895</b>

## Expenses

	2010	2009
Program Services	\$8,309,303	\$7,915,245
Support Services (Administration & Development)	\$1,449,383	\$1,285,591
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$9,758,686</b>	<b>\$9,200,836</b>

Excess of Revenue over Expenditures	- \$557,303	- \$256,941
Opening Net Assets	\$8,020,042	\$8,276,983

<b>Net Assets as of 12/31/2010</b>	<b>\$7,462,739</b>	<b>\$8,020,042</b>
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### Breakdown of Net Assets

- Undesignated	\$269,471	\$96,174
- Net Investment in Plant	\$2,806,029	\$2,867,763
- Board Designated Endowment	\$10,523	0
- Board Designated Reserve Fund	\$4,176,678	\$4,690,524
	<b>\$7,262,701</b>	<b>\$7,654,461</b>
- Temporarily Restricted	\$146,588	\$363,881
- Permanently Restricted	\$53,450	\$1,700
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$7,462,739</b>	<b>\$8,020,042</b>

## Total People Helped by our cases handled

28,585

## Total Cases Handled in 2010

11,048

Cases Handled and Closed	8,288
Cases Continued into Next Year	2,760

## Volunteer Lawyers Program [VLP] Clinics

Cases Handled at VLP Clinics	1,228
Total Neighborhood Clinics	66

## Personnel

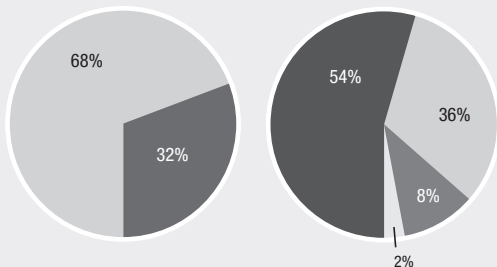
2010

Staff Attorneys	55
Other Staff	36
Pro Bono Attorneys	1,774
Law Student Volunteers	228
In-House Volunteers	85

## Languages Spoken by Legal Aid Clients [other than English]

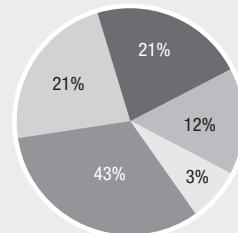
Arabic	Cantonese	French	Somali
Spanish	Russian	Vietnamese	

## Client Demographics 2010



Females	68%	African-American	54%
Males	32%	Hispanic	8%
		Other	2%
		White	36%

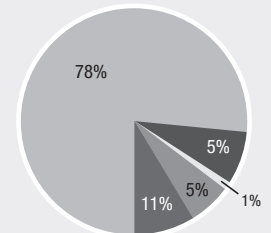
## Types of Cases Closed 2010



## Yearly Comparisons of Cases Closed

	2008	2009	*2010
*2010 CASES CLOSED GRAPH % ABOVE			
Consumer (including foreclosure)	34%	40%	43%
Family	22%	22%	21%
Health-Education-Work-Income-Immigration	20%	22%	21%
Housing	17%	12%	12%
Other	7%	4%	3%

## Cases by County 2010



Ashtabula	5%
Cuyahoga	78%
Geauga	1%
Lake	5%
Lorain	11%



## 2010 Points of Interest



Legal Aid hosts another successful Citizenship Day on April 17, 2010 – thanks to the efforts of The C. Lyonel Jones *Pro Bono* Immigration Committee and local members of The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). The clinic provides legal assistance to lawful permanent residents eligible for naturalization. The volunteer attorneys also combined forces with Catholic Charities, organizing specific clinics to assist refugees with the sometimes daunting process of status adjustment.

**In 2010, 1,774 *pro bono* attorneys were active in Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program.**



Lakewood resident Nahida Farunia finds freedom from an abusive marriage in April 2010. After decades of physical and mental abuse, Ms. Farunia says she “was like a cup that finally spilled over.” She came to Legal Aid, where attorney Alexandria Ruden helped her file for divorce. The process took four long years. Ms. Farunia is grateful that Ms. Ruden was there each step of the way: “I still call her to check on her. I feel like [Alexandria and I] are friends more than she’s my lawyer.”

**In 2010, Legal Aid secured or retained safety for 95% of clients in family law cases.**



A new truck sits in Douglas Walls’ East Cleveland driveway. Mr. Walls, a big rig driver, was stunned when his company terminated his employment – along with a lease-to-own agreement for his own vehicle. Additionally, the company kept \$5,000 which Mr. Walls had already paid toward the truck. Legal Aid attorneys Stephanie Jackson and Julie Cortes sued the company for breach of contract and unjust enrichment, and arrived at a settlement: The remaining cost of the truck was slashed in half, and Mr. Walls was given several months to pay. Ms. Jackson says, “We did not simply provide Mr. Walls with a fish, but obtained the tools Mr. Walls needed to fish for a lifetime.”

**In 2010, for clients with work and income issues, Legal Aid increased monthly income by more than \$162,000.**



Lorain resident Kristin Seljan’s electricity bill was almost double the usual amount because her landlord was allowing other tenants in the two-family home to run a cord from her residence; she was paying both families’ electricity costs. After Ms. Seljan complained, the landlord turned off her electricity. Ms. Seljan was extremely concerned for her asthmatic toddler, who needed breathing treatments from a machine. She came to Legal Aid for help, and staff attorney Amanda Davis worked to ensure the electricity was restored the next day.

**In 2010, Legal Aid prevented 97% of evictions for its housing law clients.**





Legal Aid attorney Jennifer Becker works to launch an initiative to assist low-income veterans. She helps Vietnam War veteran Douglas Weisman navigate the year-long process of reinstating his benefits after they were unjustly suspended. Mr. Weisman also faced a \$39,000 overpayment charge that was subsequently dismissed. He says, "I wouldn't have been able to handle waiting if I didn't know someone was working for me."

**In 2010, in addition to helping veterans with benefits issues, Legal Aid secured health insurance benefits in 92% of cases through family law and public benefits work.**



Common pleas courts in Lake and Geauga counties work closely with Legal Aid to establish foreclosure mediation programs. Legal Aid attorney Marley Eiger notes that the foreclosure process is often bewildering: "[Homeowners are] panicking. If they didn't have this program, they would be stuck with dealing with things on their own... The mediation program affects the community and the soundness of the economy."

**In 2010, Legal Aid prevented foreclosure in 68% of cases.**



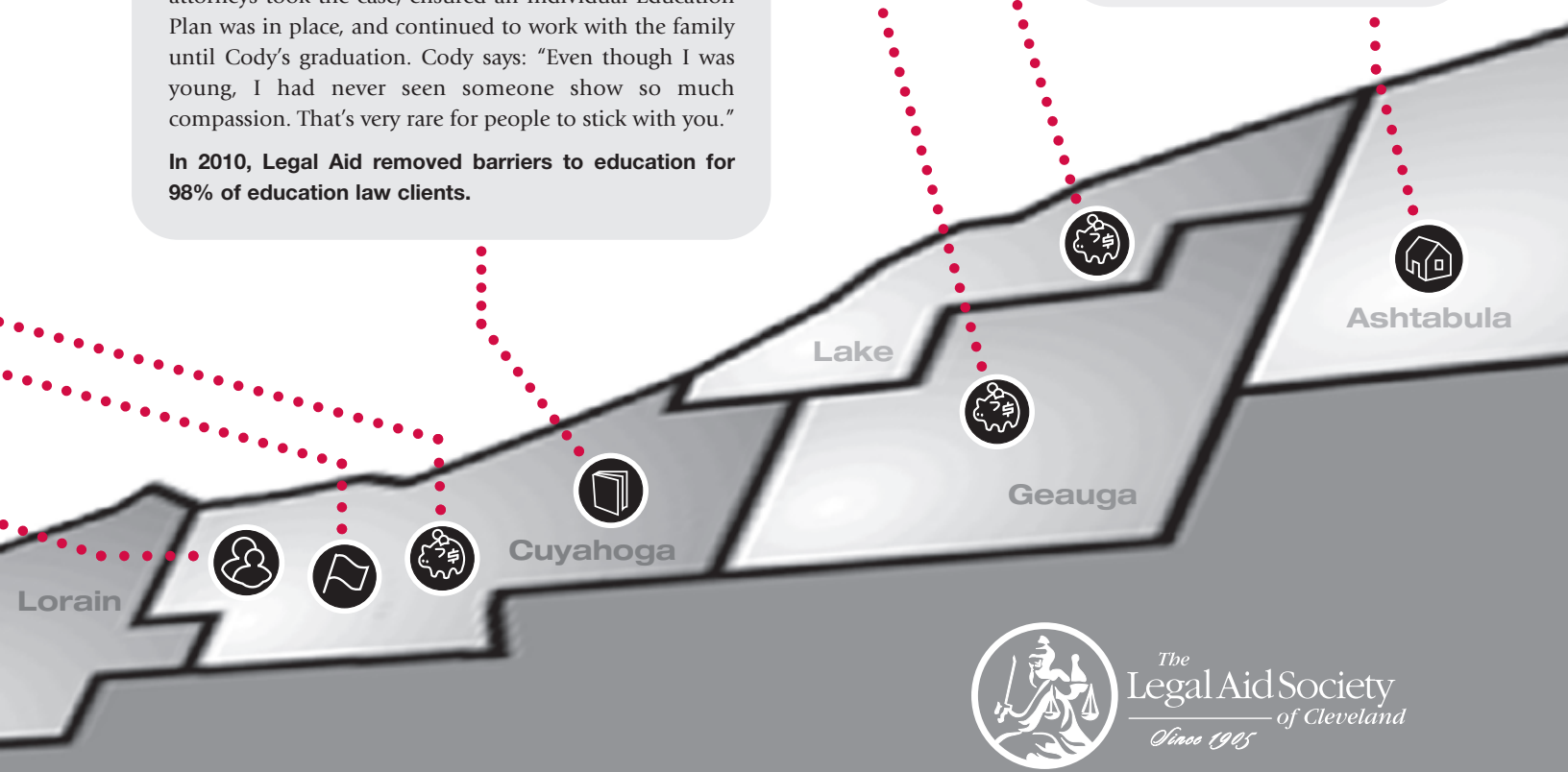
Ashtabula County is home to approximately 21,000 low-income residents who are eligible for free legal assistance with civil legal matters affecting basic necessities of life. The county boasts 92 volunteer attorneys who work with Legal Aid to remove legal barriers to shelter, health, safety, income and education.

**In 2010, prevention of homelessness is the focus of many pro bono cases. Additionally, Legal Aid staff attorneys protected participation in subsidized housing programs in 95% of cases.**



In June 2010, Cody Gwinn walks the stage to accept his Shaker Heights High School diploma. When Cody was in seventh grade, and in the care of his aunt Ava Viera, he began to have trouble at school and was expelled. Ms. Viera wanted to ensure her nephew had a "fair shake" at an education and contacted Legal Aid. Legal Aid education attorneys took the case, ensured an Individual Education Plan was in place, and continued to work with the family until Cody's graduation. Cody says: "Even though I was young, I had never seen someone show so much compassion. That's very rare for people to stick with you."

**In 2010, Legal Aid removed barriers to education for 98% of education law clients.**



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Since 1905

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In 2007, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pledged a four-year, \$500,000 grant to support Legal Aid's medical-legal partnership with The MetroHealth System. The grant was awarded through the foundation's Local Initiative Funding Partners in which local foundations and corporations agree to match the \$500,000 gift.

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*In 2010, Legal Aid eliminated or reduced risk to children in 95% of family law cases.*

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