

Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



www.communitylegalaid.org

New report cites long-term benefits of legal aid for Ohioans

The Center for Community Solutions released *Securing Stability: Legal Aid's Lasting Impact*, a first-of-its-kind study tracking the impact legal aid has on low-income Americans over time.

The study includes survey responses from more than 1,250 clients who had worked with Community Legal Aid Services and the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland between one to 15 years ago. The study had several key findings, including:

- Fifty-four percent of clients who responded to the survey reported an improvement in at least one area of stability across six categories: financial, family, health, housing, education and civic involvement;
- That stability generally increases over time, with more than half of clients whose interaction with Legal Aid was more than a decade ago attributing changes in at least one stability area to civil legal aid assistance;
- When seeking help specifically for a housing legal problem, such as discrimination, public housing and landlord/tenant relationships, 40 percent of people reported an increase in housing stability and 14 percent reported an increase in financial stability;
- One out of every four clients surveyed reported an increase in financial stability, including better jobs, higher wages or the ability to make ends meet.

“This study really shows that there is a ripple effect to the work we do,” said Colleen Cotter, executive director of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. “By resolving a legal problem, our clients see positive improvements in their family lives, in their finances, in their health and more – and ultimately, they become more engaged citizens.”

Together, Community Legal Aid Services and the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland provide free legal assistance to 13 counties in northeast Ohio. These counties include the cities of Akron, Canton, Cleveland and Youngstown, as well as hundreds of smaller urban, metro and rural municipalities. The organizations engaged Community Solutions to examine whether civil legal assistance has a lasting impact on people’s lives.

“This is groundbreaking research that adds to our understanding of how to help people in poverty,” shared Emily Campbell, associate director with The Center for Community Solutions.

“The fact that so many people attributed improvements in their lives to legal aid assistance, even years later and in areas that had nothing to do with their original legal problem, shows that certain solutions can have broad and unexpected impact.”

Legal issues related to civil law often impact low-income individuals and families negatively and contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. For civil cases, as opposed to criminal cases, individuals and families are not guaranteed the help of an attorney and can face avoidable severe consequences when navigating the legal system alone. And losing one case often leads to additional legal problems and other challenges in life. Civil legal assistance, like that provided by legal aid nonprofits in the United States, is meant to address these problems.

“We all assume that the work we do every day has a lasting impact, but until now, we had no empirical data showing that,” said Steven McGarrity, executive director of Community Legal Aid Services. “Our goal for this study was to have an independent, third-party look into it and tell us what type of impact we are having over time. This report shows legal aid dramatically improves the stability of low-income families.”

For more information and full report details, visit www.LegalAidImpact.org.

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