

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

Thanks for celebrating with us

by Erika Langford, office manager; Takenya Linsdey, paralegal; Jodi Roberts, communications manager; and Maria Duvuvuei, communications and development director

Throughout the month of February, we've been sharing stories with you through our Amplifying Black Voices project. We've brought you the experiences, trials, and triumphs of our African American colleagues, friends, and leaders.

This project took 11 months of planning and over 60 hours of combined work to conduct interviews, edit video and essays, and publish. And that's on top of the time our gracious interviewees spent preparing and interviewing with us.

So, why did we do this?

We often hear in the legal field that the job of lawyers is to give their clients a voice in the justice system, that an attorney's role is to make sure their client's wishes are heard. You would be hard pressed to find a law firm as passionate about this concept as those of us at Legal Aid.

When someone can't afford an attorney, it legally silences them. When we step in, we don't just offer legal advice to people. We ask them what they want to see happen. We listen to their wishes. And then we fight to make sure the courts hear their wishes and take their perspectives into account. We raise up their voices in a system where they otherwise would be silenced.

The same can be said for the Black experience in America. For generations, our country's (and our people's) history has been told from largely one perspective. And it's with that foundation that our laws were created and our government and legal systems developed.

Our vision at Legal Aid is a future where all of us -- regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic standing, or other identifier -- have the opportunities to control, improve, and enrich our lives and the communities in which we live. The first step on that path isn't advocacy. It's listening. It's hearing someone's story and honoring them by holding sacred that space.

This is why our Amplifying Black Voices project was important to us. It isn't just about meeting the moment or putting together obligatory Black History Month marketing content. It's core to who we are -- as individual advocates, and as an organization.

As we enter the final week of Black History Month 2022, it's important to remember that these stories don't just stop on March 1st. The continuous struggle for equity presses on, and it's our responsibility -- all of us -- to continue lifting up voices that haven't historically been heard.

Thanks for celebrating with us. We hope this project has inspired you to open up your own circle and hear the stories of those around you. And we look forward to continuing the conversation in the months and years ahead.

This article is part of Legal Aid's "Big Ideas" series.

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