a letter from the executive director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

For this year’s annual report, we decided to spotlight some of the people who inspire us and to whom we are most grateful – our clients and our supporters. The strength and courage of our clients motivate us to work harder, and their victories are our greatest reward. The volunteers, the generous donors, and the supporting organizations who invest in these victories are essential to our effectiveness as an organization.

Our clients and our supporters share an important quality: a commitment to justice. Clients come to us because they lack the resources to correct certain injustices. We receive no federal funding to help us fight battles on their behalf, so we depend on the generosity, goodwill, and sense of fairness of people like you to provide us with the resources to represent the interests of those in poverty.

This is a thank you letter to all of you – our clients, our supporters, and our friends in Virginia and beyond. You are our heroes.

Mary Bauer
Jonathan, Katie, and baby Eliza are just a few of the 5,000 people that the Legal Aid Justice Center helped in 2014. Lynne Conboy is one of 723 donors who made equal justice possible for many in our communities last year. Together, they understand that many problems require an attorney to solve and that no one should be denied justice because they cannot afford to pay for it.

The Legal Aid Justice Center’s mission is to seek equal justice for all by solving clients’ legal problems, strengthening the voices of low-income communities, and rooting out the inequities that keep people in poverty. Every day our attorneys and community organizers fight to protect the rights of people like Jonathan, Katie, and baby Eliza. Because of our help, they have health insurance for the first time.

We help families to navigate the bureaucracy of public benefits. We protect our communities’ access to affordable housing. We pry open doors of opportunity and fight for every single child’s right to a safe and appropriate education. We aggressively combat those who seek to profit in any way from the abuse or exploitation of Virginians. Life is very rarely fair for those with few resources, but we can make it more just in ways that give people real hope for their future.

Nothing we do would be possible without donors like Lynne Conboy, who refuses to ignore the incredible injustices around her. Instead, she adds her passionate voice to ours and in so doing amplifies the demand for justice for all.

The Legal Aid Justice Center is something that we always wished existed, and it does! It makes you feel less crazy when you are navigating these bureaucratic systems to have an expert to guide you through the process. –Katie and Jonathan Dickinson
Ramiro Vazquez was one of seven courageous immigrant students the Legal Aid Justice Center represented in an effort to gain in-state tuition eligibility – not just for themselves but for thousands of Virginia recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). These students grew up in Virginia and graduated from Virginia high schools, and their DACA status meant that they were authorized to work in the United States and to obtain a Virginia driver’s license. But the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia had found that they were ineligible for in-state tuition rates at Virginia’s public colleges and universities. This made college unaffordable for many students.

In a lawsuit filed by the Legal Aid Justice Center in 2013, the students argued that they were in fact eligible to apply for in-state tuition under existing Virginia law, and on April 29, 2014, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring announced that his office agreed: They are eligible under the current law. With Herring’s announcement, the goal of the suit had been accomplished and DACA recipients in Virginia were recognized as the Virginians they are.

Gaining in-state tuition offers me an opportunity to continue my education now. – Ramiro Vazquez

Ramiro Vazquez & Lou Hart
Ted Howard spent six years, donated thousands of hours of his time, and changed the lives of 1,200 women at the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women.

HEALTHCARE

The Legal Aid Justice Center began representing the women at the Fluvanna Correctional Center in 2008. Some of them had been diagnosed with serious illnesses, including cancer, but were never treated. Most were suffering from long-term medical neglect. We needed pro bono assistance and recruited Ted Howard to join the team.

After many years, and thousands of hours of work from the attorneys at the Legal Aid Justice Center, the Washington Lawyers’ Committee, and Ted Howard and his team, we reached a settlement in December of 2014 that provides a framework for significant reforms of medical care at the facility and statewide. The agreement will finally grant dignity to 1,200 women who have only asked for fair treatment and access to the quality medical care they so desperately needed.

The conditions under which people are incarcerated generally are abysmal. A thing as fundamental as not being able to resolve health problems exponentially worsens those conditions. It can feel like hell. There were all these women with all these issues and nobody to care for them. It just seemed like something really important that needed to be done. –Ted Howard
Working in conjunction with William B. Reichhardt and with attorneys from Crowell & Moring, the Legal Aid Justice Center filed a complaint that led to a U.S. Department of Education investigation of two public special education schools in Prince William County. The complaint centered on the schools’ overuse of seclusion and restraint as a default behavioral intervention – more than 40% of the students at one school were disciplined in this manner, during the 2011–12 school year.

Investigators discovered that Maria’s son was placed in a seclusion room for hours at a time on multiple occasions and subjected to floor-facing extreme restraint on six occasions. This included four instances where police were involved, even though his behavior did not indicate any danger to himself or others.

As a result of the investigation, the Department of Education entered an agreement with Prince William County Public Schools to take steps to resolve all of the issues raised in the complaint. The decision has received national attention, and the impact goes well beyond just one student, or even one school system. Schools across the country are on notice that such practices cannot be the default behavioral intervention.

Maria Cueva-Cruz wants the best possible education and care for her child, maybe more so because of his emotional disabilities. William Reichhardt has devoted his professional and personal life to advocating on behalf of students, especially those with disabilities.

Together, they took on a system that needed to be fixed.

When parents put their children on a school bus, they shouldn’t have to worry whether today is the day their children might be taken down to the floor or locked in a padded room for acting out in class.

–William Reichhardt

stopping the use of SECLUSION & RESTRAINT
Eva Johnson thinks that a dispute over $10 a month is a ridiculous reason to pack up and move her family. Elizabeth Birdsall knows that a legal aid attorney can be the best friend of a tenant in such a predicament.

Together, they ensured that more than 30 families were treated fairly and kept their homes.

When they told me to move, my first thought was, ‘I’m not going anywhere, but I’m going to need some help.’ – Eva Johnson

Eva Johnson’s apartment complex increased her subsidized rent by $10 a month and instructed her that it was her responsibility to get approval for the increase. The housing authority denied the increase, saying it was the landlord’s responsibility to seek approval. Eva was also informed that if she paid the extra rent herself, her voucher would be terminated for violating the terms of her agreement. About 30 of Eva’s neighbors were facing similar circumstances.

Eva and her attorneys studied the housing voucher policies and regulations, and it turned out that the housing authority’s actions violated their federal contract. So Legal Aid Justice Center sent a letter demanding approval of the reasonable rent increase and requesting to keep the vouchers intact.

For more than a decade, Elizabeth Birdsall has supported the Legal Aid Justice Center’s efforts to keep people like Eva in their homes. Because Eva recognized a broken system and spoke up, and because people like Elizabeth support affordable housing, we did not have to file a lawsuit. We received notice that all parties had agreed that the residents of the complex would be able to remain in their homes with their vouchers intact.
putting a stop to
TENANT DISCRIMINATION

Susan Hallett and the Community Foundation Serving Richmond & Central Virginia strive every day to promote inclusiveness and respect for others in the community. Beato Hernandez works all day with his wife in their tortilleria to provide for themselves and their children.

Together, they value safe and secure living conditions for their neighbors, and they are not afraid to step up when someone needs help.

When we learned that Beato and the other Latino tenants of a mobile home park in Chesterfield County were being discriminated against by the park manager, we filed a fair housing lawsuit in federal court. The park manager used ethnic slurs, imposed arbitrary fines, invented park rules and enforced them only against Latino residents, destroyed their personal property, repeatedly questioned their immigration status, and conducted intrusive surveillance.

In May of 2104, we reached a settlement that included hiring a new, Spanish-speaking manager, written annual leases for park tenants, and new park rules that our legal team was able to review and approve. The courage of people like Beato and the leadership of people like Susan at the Community Foundation ensure that this community is a far better and safer place to live.

“
I’m very grateful that there are people like the Community Foundation that support the work Legal Aid Justice Center does to help the Latino community. It’s nice to know they care about us, because before we felt like we were all alone. –Beato Hernandez

“
legal aid justice center

2014 FINANCIAL DATA

**REVENUES**
- Donated Services: $3,630,734
- Government: $2,115,582
- Donations: $894,280
- Foundations: $524,906
- Other: $330,316

**PROGRAM EXPENSES**
- Civil Advocacy Program: $4,286,366
- Immigrant Advocacy Program: $1,660,938
- Just Children Program: $1,799,608

**EXPENSES**
- Fundraising: $300,628
- Management & General: $253,162
- Direct: $7,193,122

**EXPENSES BY LOCATION**
- Charlottesville: $3,333,618
- Falls Church: $840,251
- Petersburg: $1,920,231
- Richmond: $1,652,813

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- Richmond: $1,652,813
The Legal Aid Justice Center not only keeps serious issues front and center, they facilitate conversations about these issues and, that makes our whole community better. – Lynne Conboy
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Because of their awareness and understanding of the needs of immigrant families, the Legal Aid Justice Center is the organization best able to help those families. –Lou Hart

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As a mother, I am happy knowing that other children will not have to go through what we did. –Maria Cueva-Cruz

It’s frustrating that the current state of our social safety net is a brutal combination of bullying and bureaucratic ineptitude that undermines the system. I support Legal Aid because I know they will always step in and make sure our system keeps its promises.

–Elizabeth Birdsell