



CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF SUPPORTING EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL



2015 ANNUAL REPORT



**NH**CAMPAIGN  
FOR LEGAL SERVICES



## NH CAMPAIGN FOR LEGAL SERVICES

### From the Campaign Leadership Council Chair

Dear friends and fellow Campaign supporters,

I am honored to serve as the Chair of the 2016 Campaign for Legal Services. Thank you for your support this year and every year. It is your gifts to the Campaign that help our civil legal services programs change the lives of their clients for the better every day.

Your gifts to the Campaign support dedicated professionals who advocate for New Hampshire's most vulnerable populations: domestic violence victims seeking safety, families struggling to make ends meet, and seniors needing a voice.

Civil legal aid clients are veterans fighting new battles to access the care and benefits they've earned. They are parents working to get their children the educational supports they need, and they are people with disabilities navigating the complex bureaucracy of federal benefits programs.

The Campaign makes sure those clients don't have to fight alone, by raising private funds for New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) and the Legal Advice & Referral Center (LARC). Their work stabilizes household income, prevents homelessness, provides access to benefits and health care, and educates and empowers clients to advocate for themselves and their families in the future.

In 2016, we celebrate two important anniversaries: the 45th year since NHLA was formed from the merger of two smaller organizations, and the 20th year since the formation of LARC.

Over the years, many things have changed: the majority of LARC clients today apply for services online, for example. What has not changed is the difference legal aid advocates can make in the lives of their clients.

Legal help is most important in times of crisis, when livelihoods, homes, health, and safety are on the line. Civil legal aid programs like NHLA and LARC ensure everyone has equal access to justice in our legal system, not just people who can afford a lawyer.

A donation to the Campaign is a sound investment in our state's well-being. It's a way of saying you believe in our clients, and their ability to contribute to our New Hampshire community once their moment of crisis has passed. Your donations also ripple into the New Hampshire economy, through our programs' work to secure federal benefits and child support as well as through cost-savings to our local communities from averted homelessness and other crises.

If you are one of the more than 400 donors who gave to the Campaign in 2015, thank you for your support. If you have not yet joined us, please read the stories in this report about our programs' work, count up the amazing number of people our programs reach, and think about how you can help ensure equal access to justice for all.

Jack Sanders, Jr., Chair  
Pierce Atwood

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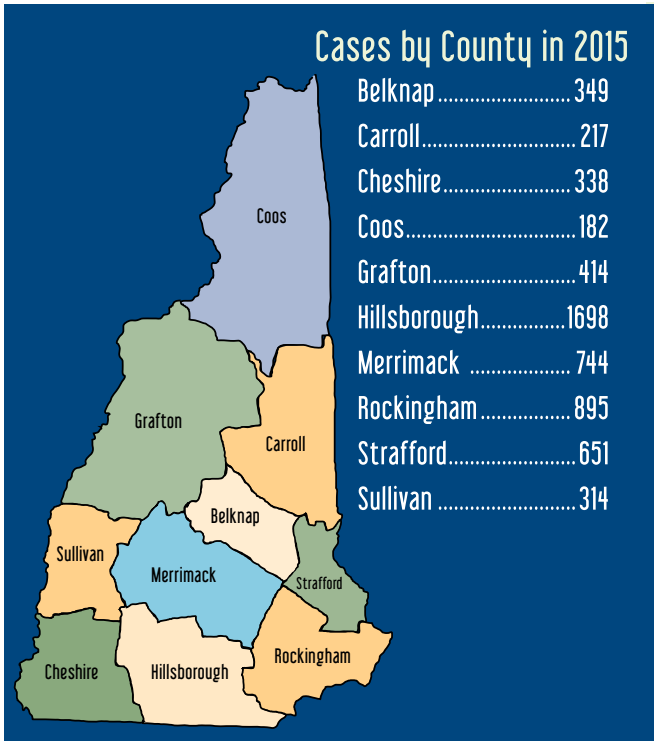
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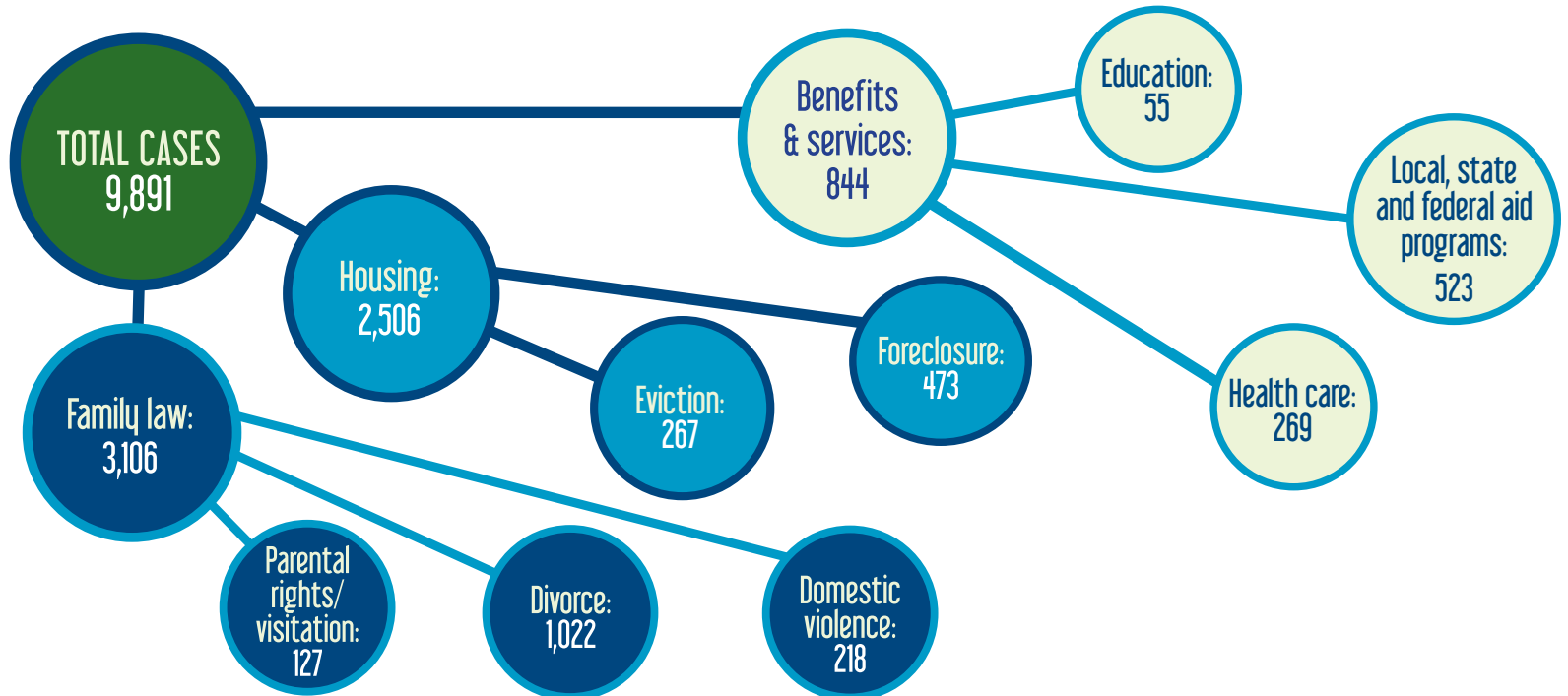


# NH CAMPAIGN FOR LEGAL SERVICES

Working together, NHLA and LARC helped

- 24,371 ..... people, including
- 5,946 ..... Children
- 1,562 ..... People with disabilities
- 809 ..... Seniors
- 488 ..... Veterans

Most of NHLA and LARC's clients seek legal services to prevent becoming homeless, to access benefits and services or to resolve family law issues.





# WHAT DOES JUST



A just society is one where all people have access to quality legal advice and representation when and where they need it, regardless of circumstances and ability to pay. Anything short of that fails our people, their dignity and the integrity of our judicial system. The Campaign for Legal Services helps bring this vision to life.

**Barbara Couch**  
President, Hypertherm HOPE Foundation



A just society is one where no one lives on the margins, where a next meal, a place to rest one's head and an abiding sense of dignity are certain, and where access to justice bears no relation to money or birth.

**Lawrence Edelman**  
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A fair and just society, with equal justice under law, is fundamental to our nation's vision. Such a society remains within our grasp, if each of us reaches for it. Generously supporting the Campaign is one way to reach for it, and to contribute to the fulfillment of that vision.

**Mark C. Rouvalis**  
Director  
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New Hampshire Legal Assistance was founded in 1971 through the merger of two smaller non-profit legal aid organizations. Since then, NHLA has grown into a nationally recognized legal aid program with five branch law offices and almost 30 staff members.

NHLA attorneys and paralegals provide advice and counsel and represent low-income and elderly clients in all levels of state and federal court, and in front of many government agencies, helping them with civil legal cases dealing with housing, benefits, family law and employment security.

NHLA also advocates for changes to policies and practices that adversely affect large numbers of low-income or elderly New Hampshire residents through class action law suits and non-partisan policy advocacy.

NHLA also provides extensive outreach and training to the low-income community, social service providers, and the private bar.



# ICE LOOK LIKE?

Justice is the elderly couple who saved their home from foreclosure, the widow who was given advice to spare herself from elder abuse, and the young parent who needed help with child support and custody. While the justice system routinely provides free legal services to defend a criminal matter, a just society knows that civil legal aid in support of the family, the home, and the health of our underserved is equally important.

Patricia Gardner  
LARC Foreclosure Relief Project attorney

Benjamin Franklin said, "Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are." The Campaign for Legal Services is a critical tool that not only helps address the imbalance of justice, but also brings awareness of that imbalance to members of the New Hampshire community.

Hannah Sullivan  
Vice President, Associate General Counsel  
Fidelity Management and Research Company



A just world not only is committed to the rule of law, it is one where the legal community makes the rule of law available to everyone, regardless of their circumstances.

William L. Chapman  
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LEGAL ADVICE &  
REFERRAL CENTER

In 1996, the federal government implemented new restrictions on organizations funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Rather than abandon systemic advocacy and other efforts now restricted, New Hampshire's legal aid community created the Legal Advice & Referral Center (LARC), which serves residents within the federal guidelines.

LARC provides toll-free telephone access to information, legal advice, and assistance in both English and Spanish for litigants who will represent themselves in court and in front of state and federal agencies.

In addition to the call center, LARC also maintains a comprehensive website with self-help guides and materials in many areas of the law, and produces and distributes pamphlets on various topics. Through these efforts, LARC works to educate pro se litigants representing themselves in court of the process and their rights.



*"It gave me back a sense of empowerment to know I could do this myself, with them by my side."*

**Kathy**

Kathy worked as a case manager for a local resource program, connecting people in need with agencies that could help them, including the Legal Advice and Referral Center. She never planned on needing legal help herself, but says "I'm so grateful LARC was there when I needed them."

After years in her high-pressure role helping people in need, health issues made it impossible for Kathy to continue working. While out of work, she drained her 401k account, and then fell behind on her mortgage.

"I didn't want to admit I could be disabled. I wanted to return to work so I was in denial about the foreclosure," she said. "When the auction happened on the front lawn, I was inside the condo just mortified. I couldn't believe it."

Kathy eventually received federal disability benefits and moved to affordable rental housing. But the lender sued her for the balance on the loan after the foreclosure sale. With no money to hire a lawyer, Kathy turned to LARC.

An advocate counseled Kathy about her rights and options regarding the lawsuit and how to address her other debts. Her advocate also helped her draft pleadings to defend herself.

"LARC walked me through the papers, not talking down to me but explaining what everything means so I can understand it," Kathy said. "They've helped me know I'm capable, I'm intelligent, even though I'm disabled. I don't know what I would have done without LARC. I'd just be floundering."

LARC also connected Kathy to pro bono bankruptcy counsel. With this help, Kathy will soon emerge from her crushing financial situation free of debts she could never hope to pay.

Because of LARC's legal assistance, Kathy says, she felt empowered to address and resolve her situation, and for the first time in a long time she did not feel alone in her battle.



*"The whole time, my focus was, this isn't just about me, I need to do what was best for the kids."*

**Abby**

Abby got married when she was just 24, to a man more than 10 years older.

"I think our relationship was good for quite a number of years, and I've gone over and over in my head why did things go bad," she says. "I thought that if we ran into problems, as many couples do, we would seek counseling and figure things out."

But things did go bad: After almost 20 years of marriage, Abby's husband began physically and verbally abusing her and two of their four children.

After one night when "he totally flipped," Abby filed for a restraining order and requested supervised visitation. She thought some time apart might serve as a wake-up call for how his abuse had hurt the family.

Her ex-husband retaliated by cashing out his 401k, hiring an attorney and filing for divorce.

At their first hearing, Abby represented herself.

The judge ruled that Abby was entitled to only \$50 per month in child support, despite being able to work only part-time to care for all four children.

"I just didn't have the language, I didn't know the laws, and his lawyer just mopped the floor with me," she said. "After it was over, I sat and cried for three hours."

Her counselor at the local domestic violence center referred Abby to New Hampshire Legal Assistance. With legal help, Abby was able to increase the amount of child support she receives each month to a more reasonable level.

"I never would have been able to get through the divorce on my own. Having someone knowledgeable and capable, it was a huge relief."

"No one expects this to happen to them, but it's so wonderful to have someone that knows what they're doing and can say, 'Here's what we're going to do.'"



*"My PTSD wouldn't be such a problem if everyone treated me the way legal services did. It's so important that legal services is available to tell tenants about their rights. Dealing with legal services gave me the ability to feel confident that somebody has my back."*

**Mike**

Mike called the Legal Advice & Referral Center about a week before Christmas for help to stop an imminent eviction. The disabled single dad of two had an eviction hearing for nonpayment of rent the next morning.

Mike said he was actually caught up on his rent, but his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder would make it impossible for him to explain this to a judge.

Mike and his kids had lost their housing for about 18 months a few years ago. He was determined they wouldn't have to go through that again.

"I was ashamed, I was scared. I thought I put my family in a bad position, and I didn't know how I was going to fix it."

Mike's advocate told him the judge needed to hear his side of the story tomorrow, especially the fact that he had paid his back rent and every month since.

But Mike was convinced his disabilities would ruin his chances: "You send me in court by myself and I'll just shut down and panic. Talking to somebody with authority, somebody who can change my life? I just knew I wouldn't be able to do it."

His advocate crafted a written motion to dismiss and told him how to submit it. Mike, as he had predicted, froze and could barely utter a word in front of the judge. But the judge studied the written motion and scheduled another hearing to give the landlord a chance to respond.

Mike faxed the judge's decision to LARC when it arrived a couple weeks after the final hearing. The judge agreed with Mike's motion and dismissed the landlord's case.



Sabrina called the New Hampshire Legal Assistance Youth Law Project when she heard about it from her post-adoption case worker.

Her adopted daughter, Molly, was having trouble at school, and Sabrina felt overwhelmed trying to advocate for her.

Molly, 11, has a diagnosis of autism. She entered the foster care system when she was an infant, arriving with her new family four days before Christmas when she was just 8 months old.

"This is my kid. I'll do whatever it takes," Sabrina said. "She's gotten the shaft since she was born. Her parents were teenagers. We think she was exposed to drugs and alcohol. We think she was abused, maybe shaken. She certainly wasn't nurtured the way a baby should be. I'll do whatever I can for her."

Sabrina works full time to support her family, which includes her husband, who has health-related disabilities, and their adopted teenage daughter. She had to take dozens of hours off work each month to attend meetings at Molly's school, adding financial worries to the emotional stress of Molly's difficulties at school.

"I'm an educated person," Sabrina said. "I've even worked in schools. But walking into those IEP meetings was utterly overwhelming. Things were happening in a language I couldn't understand.

"Our lawyer made sure I knew exactly what Molly is owed by the education system — a free and appropriate public education — and how I need to write things, how to word it all to get us there. She was our voice when we didn't know what to say," she said.

Molly used to experience anxiety on Sunday nights about returning to school. Now, "she jumps up and down excited about school," Sabrina said. "She is learning. She is happy to come home and tell me what she learned. I have a happy kid now. There are possibilities, now, for her future."



*"To have someone be that voice for us, it meant the world."*

Sabrina



*"When you're trying to stand up for your child and you're alone and you're scared, you need people there to help you do the best thing. Having information is so important when you're trying to make sure your child has the best future possible."*

Jessie

Jessie is a single mother on the Seacoast, studying to be a surgical technician. She's trying to build a future for herself and her daughter, Jocelin and she's determined it will be "the best future possible."

But she wasn't always so optimistic. Shortly after Jessie gave birth, Jocelin's father kicked her and the baby out of his home. Though she filed for child support, he refused to provide for them, and left Jessie struggling to make ends meet on her own.

"Basically, he just vanished," Jessie said.

Months later, facing the likelihood the court would order him to pay child support, baby Jocelin's father filed his own petition, requesting custody for four days each week.

"I knew nothing about the whole process or what was going to happen, or anything at all," Jessie said. "All of this time has gone by, and he's still not being a parent to this baby in any way. It was terrifying to me. What if the judge says I'm expected to give my baby to someone she doesn't even know?"

She panicked. But then she called LARC.

A LARC advocate advised Jessie to explain to the judge how her ex had so far ignored all opportunities to see his daughter. Her advocate told Jessie she could request supervised visitation instead of custody, to reduce the chance Jocelin might suffer separation anxiety and trauma.

Jessie followed LARC's advice, and the judge agreed with her, awarding her primary custody and child support, and requiring the father to arrange supervised visitation at a nearby center.



*"It meant a lot to me to have (my advocate) fighting for me. He was with me every step of the way."*

Teri and Rex

Teri and her wife Sandy had lived in their public housing apartment in Keene for 23 years, accompanied for the past several years by Rex, a service dog who helps Teri manage her multiple sclerosis.

After Sandy died in 2013, Rex became very protective of Teri.

One day last year, a man leaned in to pet Rex too quickly, and the dog lunged at him. The man complained to the public housing managers, who told Teri that Rex was too dangerous to stay in the apartment complex. They demanded that she give him up for a new service dog, but Teri couldn't fathom living without him.

"I could never give him up. He's my best friend, my confidante, my only family now," she said. "I had lost my wife; I couldn't lose Rex, too."

When Teri refused to give Rex away, the housing complex initiated an eviction against her. She called New Hampshire

Legal Assistance.

Over the course of several months, Teri's advocate negotiated with the housing authority to secure a voucher for Section 8 housing assistance that Teri could use to move into new, appropriate and affordable housing.

Finally, this summer, Teri and Rex moved to a new apartment where they are very happy.



We especially thank the attorneys at our Pacesetter firms who gave at least \$500 per attorney.

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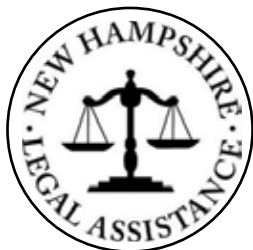
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