



LIVING OUR VALUES

NH CAMPAIGN
FOR LEGAL SERVICES
Equal Access to Justice for All

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

LIVING OUR VALUES

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On the Cover: Sita lives with severe disabilities that would have made it almost impossible for her to advocate for herself in divorcing her abusive husband. She received legal aid from New Hampshire Legal Assistance, and translation and interpretation services from area partner agencies. Like most clients featured in this report, she requested that her name be changed.



A fair shake. A level playing field. The chance to be heard, and make your case: Equal standing before the law is one of our fundamental American values. It is one that we must fight to uphold, because, in the words of Alexander Hamilton,

"the first duty of society is justice."

As they do every year, the dedicated staff at New Hampshire Legal Assistance and the Legal Advice & Referral Center spent 2017 protecting the rights of the most vulnerable people in our state including veterans, the elderly, at-risk youth, and single moms. Without civil legal aid, our clients faced daunting barriers to securing safety, shelter, and economic stability for their families.

Our two programs helped more than 16,000 people across New Hampshire last year, balancing the scales and ensuring fairness for our neighbors who are most in need.

We were successful because of our strong partnerships with other service providers, advocates and agencies around the state. We were successful because our clients have incredible resilience in the face of challenges, and with our intervention are able to move beyond the crises in their lives. We were successful because of the generosity of our supporters like you, who see it as your business to see that justice is done.

In this report, we highlight just a few examples of how legal aid upholds our shared values: the right to safety, the right to live with dignity, the power of information and the importance of a healthy start for our next generation.

But despite these great achievements and tremendous success stories, a significant gap persists between the American value of equal access to justice for all, and the reality of our legal system. Far too often, people are left to navigate civil legal problems without help, because our programs simply can't meet the need for services. When we don't provide people the legal aid they need to help them protect their rights, we're holding back our entire community.

You know that as well as I do, and that's why you give to the Campaign for Legal Services. Thank you for being part of our generous, engaged, and supportive community.

Because you know that equal access to justice is a value we must strive to live every day. It's our duty.

Erica Bodwell

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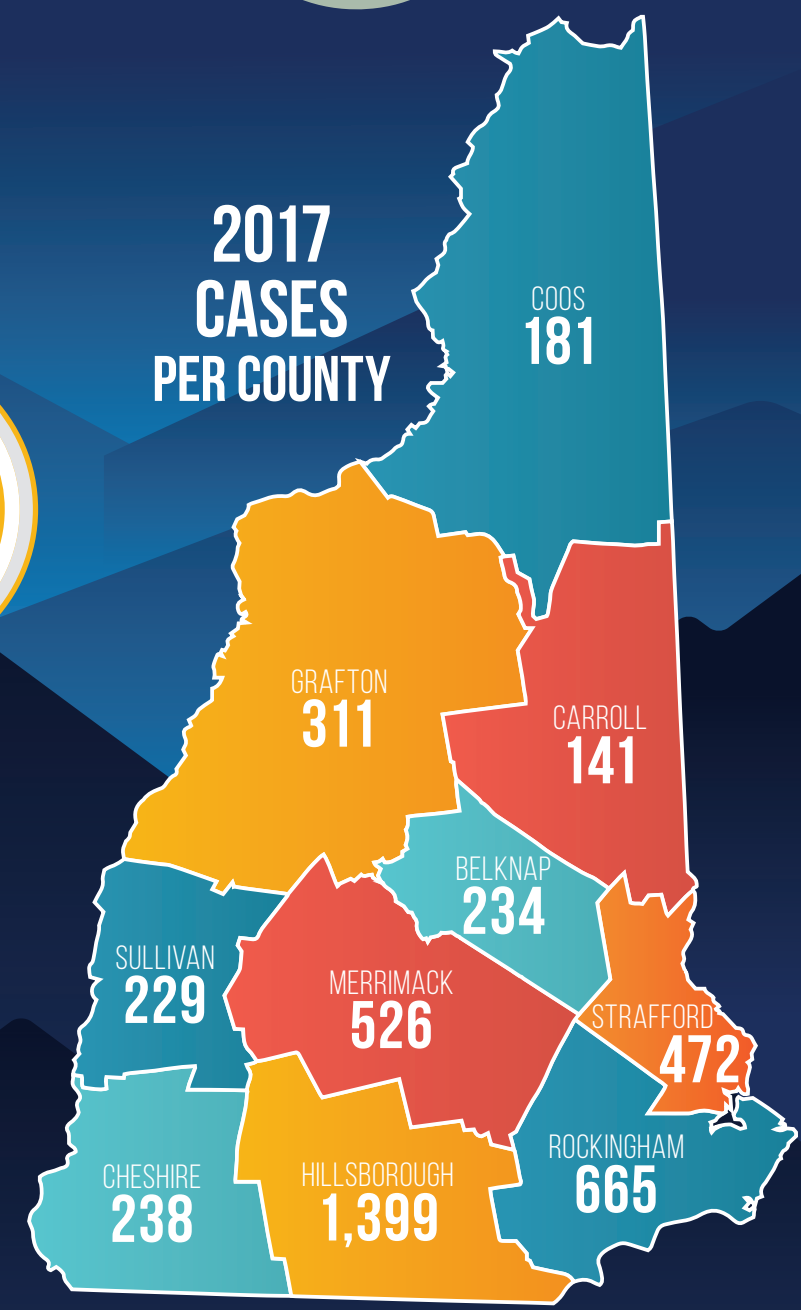
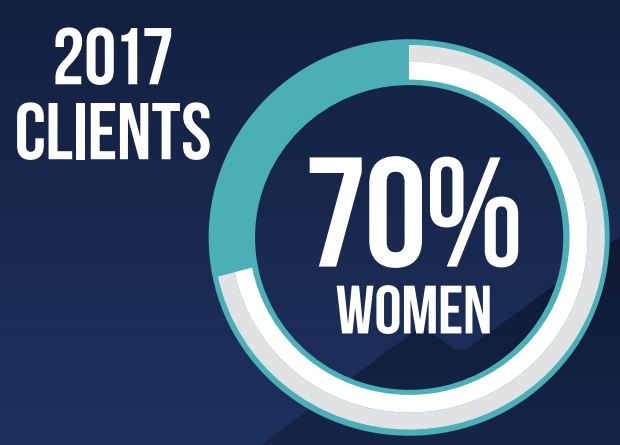
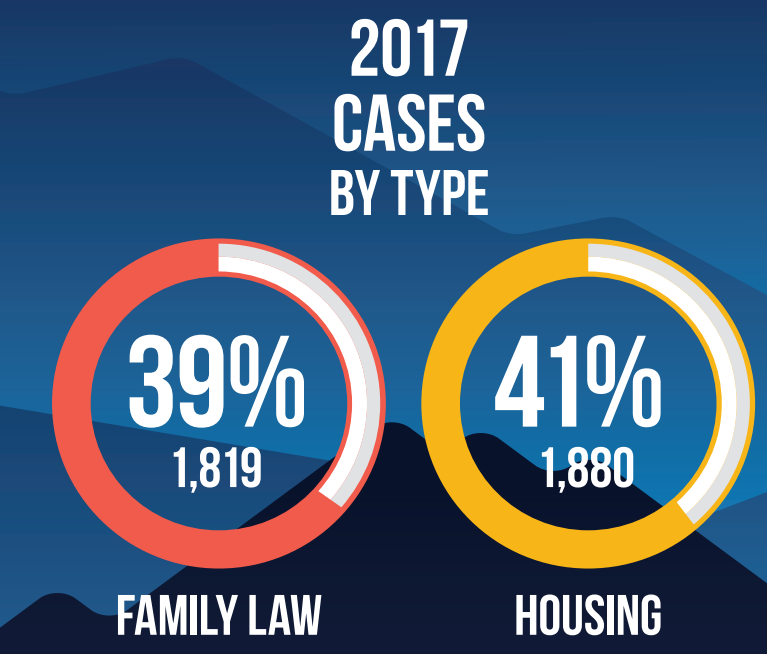
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Join us. Help fulfill the American promise of justice for all.

LEGAL AID IN NEW HAMPSHIRE



SAFETY

“TOGETHER, WE FOUGHT THE TIDE OF CULTURAL STIGMA AGAINST DIVORCE AND AGAINST REPORTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND DEFENDED SITA’S RIGHTS TO SAFETY AND BODILY AUTONOMY.”

When she was a teenager in Nepal, “Sita” married “Yuddha.” Not long after their wedding, he began insulting her and verbally abusing her. The abuse became much worse after they immigrated to New Hampshire as refugees.

Sita is deaf, and could not always understand what Yuddha said, but she knew when he was yelling and she knew when he was angry. He often yelled when he spent the night drinking.

His abuse became more violent as his drinking grew worse. He isolated her, refused to let her access their household money, and broke her cell phone, which was her only lifeline to the

world. He hit her, assaulted her and constantly accused her of infidelity.

One night after Yuddha hit her, Sita used a video phone to call 9-1-1. After miming running a knife across her throat, in full view of the 9-1-1 video call operator, Yuddha disconnected the call, broke the phone again and hid the pieces. Sita fled.

With help from a crisis center for domestic violence victims, Sita secured a protective order that banned Yuddha from their apartment complex. She decided to divorce him so she could begin building a safe home for her children.

To help Sita leave her abusive husband and build a life for herself and her two children, NHLA advocates Stephanie Bray and Poppi Ritacco collaborated with a number of community partners to help Sita be a fully-empowered participant in her case, including The Disability Rights Center, a community mental health center, and Ascentria Care Alliance.

Despite the severity of the abuse she had suffered, and her determination to free herself from the marriage, Sita faced persistent pressure from the community to take Yuddha back.

“Sita’s case was one of the most inspiring I’ve worked on here,” said Stephanie Bray. “Together, we fought the tide of cultural stigma against divorce and against reporting domestic violence, and defended Sita’s rights to safety and bodily autonomy.”

“Through it all, I’ve been consistently inspired by Sita’s spirit. She has an incredible sense of humor -- she regularly makes jokes that translate even after going through multiple levels of interpretation. And she hasn’t let any of the obstacles she faces dull the sparkle of her personality.”

Heather is 46 years old and currently lives in the Salem area with her husband and two teenage daughters.

She worked as a licensed certified occupational therapy assistant for more than 15 years. But throughout her life, Heather dealt with increasingly painful menstrual periods. Her pain became so severe her physician recommended a total hysterectomy—but that was not the end of Heather's struggles.

After the operation, Heather developed post-operative bleeding and other life-threatening complications. She underwent multiple nerve block injections, months of physical therapy and additional surgical procedures without relief. As a result, she now suffers from severe pain, increased with any form of physical activity.

After she exhausted her medical leave, Heather's employer fired her. It wasn't long before she and her husband, who works as a security guard, fell behind on the mortgage.

"I couldn't do anything. I was watching the girls learn to cook, to clean, to be in charge of the house because my husband was picking up extra shifts, and I couldn't do anything to help. It was a horrible feeling, that helplessness," Heather says.

Heather applied for Social Security Disability benefits in 2015, but her application was denied.

"It's a shameful feeling, to go from working and supporting your family to asking for help. I didn't want to do it, but there's no way I could do this on my own. We were drowning," she said.

NHLA paralegal Megan Dillon represented Heather at her appeal hearing in 2017, and presented new and compelling physician opinions to support Heather's own testimony about her pain and symptoms. Later that month, almost three years after losing her job, Heather was approved for disability benefits.

"It was a hard, hard day. I was so nervous, it made my pain so much worse. And I'm someone who, when I'm hurting, I don't want anyone to know. But it was good, really, for the judge to see how bad it is. I was red, I was sweating. It's horrible, this pain, all the time, but I was so scared, so worried about what might happen if I was denied again, it was worse than usual" she said.

With NHLA's help, Heather was granted on-going disability support and awarded a retroactive lump sum of more than \$48,000, which she used to pay off the overdue mortgage payments just a few months before the foreclosure auction.

"It's the only real home my girls have known, and I can't imagine them losing this, and us losing every bit of equity we had built up and having to start over somewhere," Heather said. "I just can't imagine where we'd be without legal aid."

"IT'S A SHAMEFUL FEELING, TO GO FROM WORKING AND SUPPORTING YOUR FAMILY TO ASKING FOR HELP. I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT, BUT THERE'S NO WAY I COULD DO THIS ON MY OWN. WE WERE DROWNING."

DIGNITY & SECURITY

A couple years ago, Laura and her daughter Hayley both suffered cuts in pay and began to struggle staying current with their rent.

“I was working three different jobs, but nowhere wanted to pay for full time,” Laura said. “And the bills keep adding up. There’s the rent and then there’s the electricity and the gas, and it was like, which one can we pay right now? We weren’t even able to have a Christmas that year.”

When she scored a stable position last fall with great pay, Laura called her landlord immediately to give him this good news and

promised she’d be on time with rent from now on.

In fact, she told him she’d add an extra \$500 to her monthly rent checks until the debt was paid. For months, the landlord cashed the checks, including the extra \$500. So Laura was completely shocked to get an eviction notice a few months later.

“We had no savings. If we had to move, to come up with first month’s and a security deposit? We’d have been in a hotel. Who knows how long that could last,” Laura said. LARC paralegal Steve McGilvary helped

Laura draft a motion laying out her defense, and coached her on how to tell the judge her story in a clear and straightforward manner: the agreement reached with her landlord; her adherence to the payment schedule; the landlord’s acceptance of all her rent payments; and Laura’s confusion as to why they were now in eviction court for nonpayment of rent.

At the hearing, Laura represented herself, telling the judge the only thing she wanted was to stay in her apartment and continue paying off her debt.

“She was so amazing,” Hayley said. “I call her my little pitbull. I was so proud of her. Because of her, we got to keep our house.”

Laura says it’s all because of LARC: “If I didn’t have Steve, I don’t know what I would have said. Probably every wrong thing.”

The judge granted Laura’s motion to dismiss that day.

“WE’RE FIGHTERS, AND WE WOULDN’T HAVE BEEN KNOCKED OUT,” LAURA SAID. “BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A LOT HARDER TO BE KNOCKED ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE BOTTOM AND HAVE TO CLIMB OUR WAY BACK UP.”

Laura recently got a promotion at work and is now making a decent salary. She and Hayley met their LARC advocate, Steve, for lunch to celebrate.

EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT



As important as each individual legal aid case is for the client or family involved, often the best way to help struggling families is by ensuring they have a level playing field.

NHLA maintains a consistent presence at the State House and before administrative rulemaking agencies, focusing on policy areas that impact the basic needs of vulnerable residents including housing, education, health care, energy/utilities and safety from domestic violence.

Last year, NHLA was a crucial leader in the coalition that secured passage of SB 247, which Gov. Chris Sununu called a “bipartisan, common sense bill...to allow every child in New Hampshire proper and prompt access to lead testing.”

“Preventing or quickly treating lead poisoning is a wise community investment.”

NHLA also worked with state officials to promote awareness of the importance of testing, demonstrated here by Dr. Betsy Cramer, showing her daughter Evelyn, 3, the steps of taking blood for the lead test for an article and photo spread in the Concord Monitor on October 24.

Expanding blood lead level testing to all toddlers ages 1 and 2 will allow medical providers to catch lead poisoning at a critical stage, when children are most at risk for exposure, and when that exposure is most dangerous to their growing brains.

Preventing or quickly treating lead poisoning is a wise community investment. Childhood lead poisoning can cause life-long cognitive and behavioral difficulties. The Pew Charitable Trust estimates that every \$1 spent to reduce lead hazards yields \$17 in health benefits, increased IQ, higher lifetime earnings and tax revenues, lower special education costs and reduced crime.

In 2018, NHLA’s lead project team will organize community and stakeholder events to raise awareness of lead poisoning in New Hampshire, and of state laws, including tenants’ rights, and the new childhood testing requirements.

The lead project will place a special focus on those most at risk, including residents in Manchester, Claremont and refugee families. When applicable, NHLA will provide legal representation to low-income families whose children have been poisoned by lead in their homes.

Photo courtesy of Geoff Forester, Concord Monitor

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Every year, a growing community of law firms, businesses, private foundations, attorneys, and concerned individuals and families show their support for civil legal aid in New Hampshire.

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In 2017, we raised almost \$303,000

to help people in need of access to justice.

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In 2017, the Campaign launched the Centurion Society to recognize law firms in New Hampshire that reach 100% attorney participation in our annual drive to support civil legal aid.

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For 15 years, the Campaign has recognized law firms in New Hampshire who "set the pace" with a charitable gift of \$500 per New Hampshire attorney.

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Sustainer Circle members from the McLane Middleton firm include Bill Glahn, Cathy Schmidt, Dave DePuy and Tom Hildreth



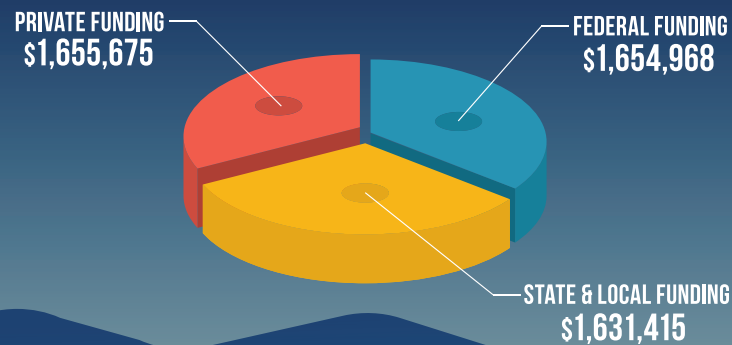
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\$4,942,058
TOTAL 2017 REVENUE
FOR LARC AND NHLA

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The Executive Committee of the Overlapping Boards of NHLA and LARC:
front row, Kile Adumene, Samantha Elliott, Anne Phillips;
second row, co-chairs Deborah Kane Rein and G. Dana Bisbee.
(not pictured: Quinn Kelley).

Other members:
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NH Campaign for Legal Services
117 North State Street
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NH CAMPAIGN
FOR LEGAL SERVICES
Equal Access to Justice for All

LIVING OUR VALUES

Other ways you can support equal access to justice

- ▶ Double the impact of your employees' generous gifts through matching-gift programs.
- ▶ Support IOLTA Leadership Banks: Civil legal aid programs benefit from the compilation of small amounts of interest earned when lawyers pool the escrow funds they hold for their clients. To maximize IOLTA income for civil legal aid, encourage your firm to place trust account funds with a Leadership Bank, which provides a higher interest rate. Contact the New Hampshire Bar Foundation to locate the Leadership Banks in your community.
- ▶ Sponsor Campaign events in your area: Help us spread the word about how legal aid benefits everyone. To arrange an event featuring representatives of the campaign, call Campaign Director Sarah Palermo at 603-369-6650.

