



Free services statewide, free call from everywhere:

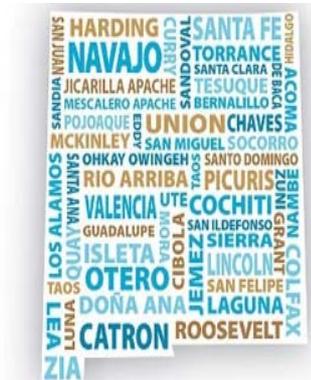
833-LGL-HELP

(833-545-4357)

Or access the Together for Justice portal 24/7:

<https://tinyurl.com/NMLGL-HELP>

2017-18 Community Impact Report



Together for Justice

*Ensuring Fairness and Opportunity
for all New Mexicans*

CORNERSTONE PROGRAMS

New Mexico Legal Aid has four cornerstone programs reflecting the services clients need most:



Family Law, including inter-personal violence assistance



Economic Stability, including accessing public benefits and insurances, debt and tax relief



Housing, including evictions and foreclosures



Consumer Protection, including auto repossession, mobile home replevin, payday loan schemes, and predatory lending



New Mexico Legal Aid, headquartered in the iconic Occidental Life Building on Gold Avenue in Albuquerque, has 11 offices in strategic locations around the state.

**New Mexico's
statewide
civil legal services
provider since 2003**

Dear Friend of NMLA,

“Justice for All” is a core American value, no matter which end of the political spectrum you embrace. In the opening sentence of the U.S. Constitution, “establish Justice” comes even before “provide for the common defense.” But if access to the court system requires payment of attorney fees far more expensive than most can afford, then Justice for All becomes an elusive ideal, available only to those fortunate enough to be able to afford expert help.

Many people are shocked to know that in the United States, a drunk driver facing time in jail is entitled to a free attorney, but a young mother and her children facing homelessness after being victims of domestic violence are not. In the words of St. Augustine more than 1,500 years ago, “Charity is no substitute for justice withheld.” The consequences of not resolving civil legal problems such as access to housing, education, health care, food assistance and child support can be devastating for New Mexico’s low-income families.



Ed Marks

We are grateful for all you are doing in support of our efforts as we strive to help every New Mexican access the civil justice solutions they deserve.

Civil legal aid programs such as New Mexico Legal Aid improve everyone's access to justice. Plus, our work makes good financial sense: For every \$1 spent on civil legal services in New Mexico, more than \$3.50 is returned to the community in cash benefits for our clients as well as reduced costs for social services.

Thank you for your partnership and generous financial support to help New Mexico Legal Aid make Justice for All for New Mexicans more than an empty promise. We can't do it without you.



Ed Marks, Executive Director

NMLA Board

as of June 2018

Maria Garcia Geer,
Esq., Chair

Carlos Marentes, Vice
Chair

Paul Abrams, Esq.,
Treasurer

Samuel Cordova,
Secretary

Naomi Barnes, Esq.
Stuart Bluestone, Esq.
Cathrynn N. Brown, Esq.
Fernando Garcia
Amy Glasser, Esq.
David Hernandez, Esq.
Oma Jones
Naava Koenigsberg
James C. Martin, Esq.
Kim McGinnis, Ph.D, Esq.
Bernard Metzgar, Esq.
Mekko Miller, Esq.
Lazaro Ruiz, Jr.
Juliette White

PROJECT FOCUS: *PARTNERING FOR NATIVE HEALTH*

David struggled to make ends meet and was at risk of being evicted from his apartment. He met NMLA attorney Katy Almond at First Nations Community HealthSource, Albuquerque's urban Indian health center where he was a patient. His doctor referred him for a civil legal consultation as part of his holistic medical care. David is a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient. His benefits were decreased from \$930 to \$430 a month and he did not understand why. Together, David and Katy made a call to the Social Security Administration (SSA). The SSA staff member explained David had unreported income for a period of time that needed to be accounted for in their assessment of whether he had to pay back some benefits he had received in the past. However, given all his circumstances, SSA agreed to increase his monthly benefits by \$300.

David was also facing an eviction. Although he paid his rent as soon as he received his SSI benefits, under his lease agreement he was supposed to pay the landlord earlier in the month. Katy was able to negotiate with the landlord to allow David to make three payments each month to pay off the past debt and helped him sign a new lease to adjust the due date so his payments would not be late. With Katy's help, David now has stable housing and extra income.

Because there is
no guaranteed
right to counsel
in civil cases,
legal aid is the
ONLY alternative
for those who
cannot afford a
lawyer and
struggle to
represent
themselves

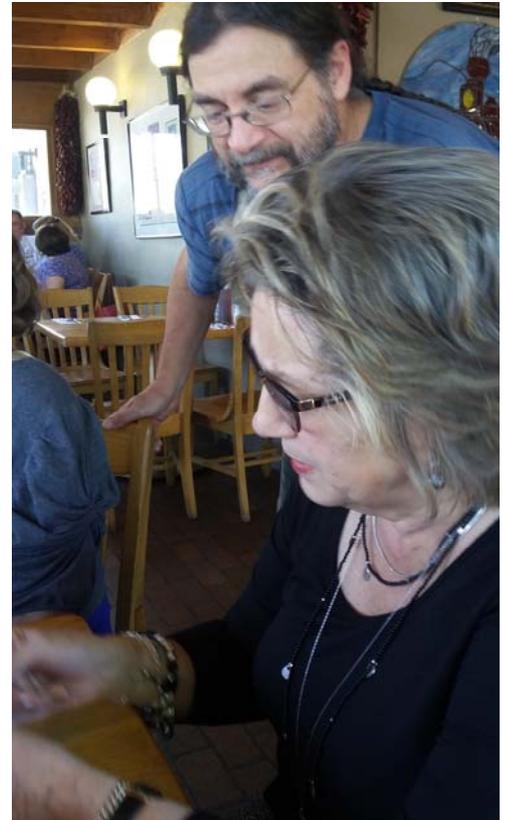
PROGRAM FOCUS: *LAND & WATER RIGHTS DEFENSE*

New Mexico's long Spanish and Mexican legal roots still make the news today, tapping the expertise of our Land & Water Rights Program.

Disputes continue over the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo's grant of land to the Merced de Los Pueblos de Tierra Amarilla.

New Mexico Legal Aid, along with the New Mexico Land Grant Council and UNM School of Law Natural Resources and Environmental Law Clinic, are working collaboratively with the New Mexico Office of the Attorney General. The AG's Office recently filed a complaint in state District Court to void a 2003 transfer of more than 200 Tierra Amarilla acres to a Colorado nonprofit, Al Frente de Lucha.

The suit argues that the transfer was executed by persons without the lawful authority to act on behalf of the Merced board. AG Hector Balderas, acting to preserve the history and culture of land grants, has called for the immediate return of the Tierra Amarilla land to Merced de Los Pueblos, to be held in trust for that community.



David Benavides, Land & Water Rights Manager

PROGRAM FOCUS: *LOW INCOME TAXPAYER CLINIC*

With support in part from the Internal Revenue Service's Taxpayer Advocate Service, New Mexico Legal Aid runs a Low Income Taxpayer Clinic to assist low income individuals who have a dispute with the IRS concerning their personal income taxes. Frequently the issues relate to a family claiming an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): An annual refund, the EITC is typically a family's single largest annual financial transaction. A \$67 billion program nationwide, EITC alleviates financial stress, funds pressing needs, and improves a family's overall financial position.

However, the IRS audit rate for EITC recipients is high. Without counsel assisting them, audited taxpayers are not likely to prevail. Similarly desperate are people who already have significant outstanding IRS tax liabilities. IRS liens can ruin a taxpayer's credit and ability to find a job. The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic attorneys help clients mitigate or eliminate debt and counsel on "fresh start" programs freeing families from untenable financial situations. From January 2017—June 2018, the program helped clients get \$37,490 in refunds and \$275,422 of debt relieved.



*Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Director
Grace Allison*

2017 New Mexico Legal
Aid by the Numbers:

2,941 cases handled,
helping 8,031 New
Mexicans and their
families

215 volunteer attorneys
handled 412 cases, and
618 volunteer attorneys
provided advice to
2,128 people at legal
fairs and clinics

Frank and Charlene, a Native American couple, are grandparents raising their grandchildren. They received a refund from the IRS of \$6,459 from their Earned Income Tax Credit and their Child Tax Credit — but then were audited. The IRS claimed they had to return the \$6,459 as the Service doubted that the grandparents were actually legally responsible for the grandchildren. The couple came to New Mexico Legal Aid for help.

NMLA's Low Income Taxpayer Clinic lawyers did extensive work collecting letters from the children's schools, the family pastor, and other documents that demonstrated Frank and Charlene were, in fact, responsible. The couple was able to keep the \$6,459 and received an additional \$550 in other refunds they had not originally claimed.

We gratefully acknowledge the private, corporate and government funding that made our work in 2017-2018 possible.



Combined Federal Campaigns

U.S. Department of Justice, Native American Rights Fund
U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women
U.S. Department of the Treasury, Taxpayer Advocate Service
Corporation for National & Community Service, AmeriCorps
New Mexico Acequia Association
New Mexico Civil Legal Services Commission
New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Dept.
New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission
New Mexico Commission for the Blind
New Mexico Land Grant Council
New Mexico Supreme Court's Commission on Access to Justice

To help make the future safer and more secure for New Mexico's most vulnerable, please mail a check to NMLA today, or donate online at www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org

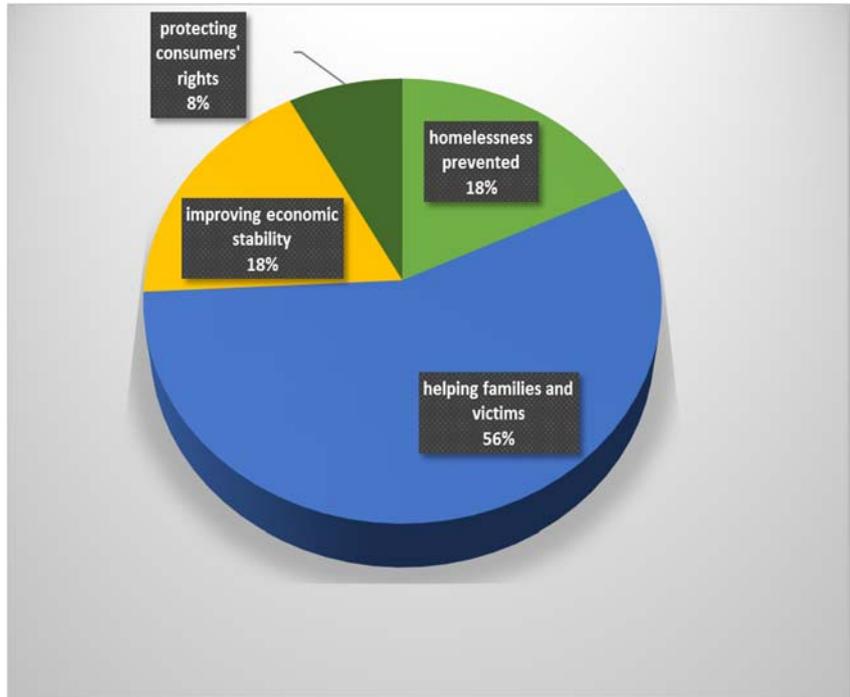
Acequia Nortenas
Albuquerque Friends Meeting
Corinne Wolfe Fellowship
Cow Creek Basin Acequia
Equal Access to Justice
J.F. Maddox Foundation
Goodwill
McCune Foundation
Nusenda CU Foundation
PB&J Family Services
Sandia Foundation
Santa Fe Community Foundation
Taos Community Foundation
United Ways
Veterans Integration Center

And many generous individuals and firms

THANK YOU

[From the Audit:]

2017	
Unrestricted Revenue	3,166,044
<u>Temp. Restricted</u>	<u>3,568,632</u>
Total Revenue	6,734,676
Program Expenses	5,791,697
<u>Management</u>	<u>701,960</u>
Total Expenses	6,493,657
Change in net assets	241,019
<u>Net assets begin yr</u>	<u>434,742</u>
Net assets year-end	675,761



New Mexico's Statewide Civil Legal Services Provider

The mission of New Mexico Legal Aid, Inc. is to be the voice, defender and advocate for poor people who are seeking justice in all forums, particularly in the communities in which they live. New Mexico Legal Aid is committed to helping poor people in their struggle to access food, shelter, security, and to preserve their unique cultural heritages.

Statewide Toll-free Intake : 833-LGL-HELP (833-545-4357)

www.NewMexicoLegalAid.org

P.O. Box 25486

Albuquerque, NM 87125-5486



LSC | America's Partner
for Equal Justice

LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION