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OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

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## From the President

Dear Friends,

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County has been a time to celebrate the accomplishments of an exemplary organization and a time to be confronted by the stark realization that more people need Legal Aid's services today than ever before.

In March, we gathered to celebrate five decades of providing high quality legal services to vulnerable low-income people at the gala And Justice for All Annual Awards Luncheon at the Four Seasons Silicon Valley at East Palo Alto. We honored the Silicon Valley office of DLA Piper LLP US, Tom Vacar, Consumer Editor KTVU, and Jay White, Esq; and were delighted by the remarks of Congresswoman Jackie Speier, a compelling keynote speaker who reminded us that Legal Aid achieves results that reflect our core values. Our community is stronger when we ensure our most vulnerable members have access to the most basic of human needs: shelter, safety, food and health care.



All year long, the general economic downturn has led to an increased demand for Safety Net services as the ranks of the "newly" low-income have continued to swell. Legal Aid is the last resort for those who are denied government food and subsistence income benefits.

Legal Aid's eviction prevention program has also seen explosive growth in the past year, spurred in part by the foreclosure crisis. Legal Aid's three housing clinics have seen a 91% increase in the number of clients since July of last year. Sadly, there is no sign of this trend slowing.

This fall, Legal Aid received word from Executive Director M. Stacey Hawver that she will be stepping down at the end of the year to pursue other interests. Stacey has been at Legal Aid since 1990, soon after her graduation from Stanford Law School, first as a staff attorney, then as Directing Attorney and starting in 2002, as Executive Director. Stacey has been an integral member of the Legal Aid family, and we will miss her contributions greatly. We wish her every success in this next chapter of her life. In the meantime, the Board of Directors is in the midst of a national search for a dynamic new Executive Director who will lead the organization into its next half century of helping vulnerable low-income people improve their lives through equal access to justice.

Despite the difficult economy, the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County continues to operate in a fiscally prudent manner. We continue to seek funding from new and existing sources and hope to do everything possible to avoid cut backs in program services. This year Legal Aid was fortunate enough to receive a challenge grant from the Sobrato Family Foundation, who will match every dollar donated up to \$50,000. So please, make your stretch gift knowing it will be twice as effective this year. Donate now at [www.legalaidsmc.org](http://www.legalaidsmc.org) or use the enclosed remit envelope.

Legal Aid's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary has provided us with a great occasion to reflect on and celebrate the hundreds of people who have aided us in our mission. Community supporters, attorneys, judges, local officials, volunteers and our board of directors and staff have all dedicated their time and support to ensure that Legal Aid was there for thousands of children, families and seniors in our community who had nowhere else to turn. Thank you for being part of our family. Please join me with your continuing support of the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County today and ensure that we will continue to be there for those who need us the most.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Esselstein'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lynne Esselstein  
President

P.S. Don't forget that Legal Aid has received a generous challenge grant from the Sobrato Family Foundation. Your donation will be twice as effective this year.

## Accomplishments

In today's difficult times low-income people come to Legal Aid to get help accessing the basics of life. Some never thought they would need to come. They ask: Will I have a place to live tomorrow? — How will I feed my children? — or — My spouse is so angry. Can my children and I be free from abuse? With an urgency responsive to the overwhelming need, Legal Aid attorneys are working tirelessly to provide answers to low-income individuals in need, to ensure equal access to justice becomes a reality for all.



### Children: Improving Lives for Kids with Disabilities

Pedro has spastic diplegia, cerebral palsy, numerous health concerns and developmental delays. He is only ten years old and spends most of his time in a wheelchair. Pedro had an extremely limited ability to communicate and his mother was having difficulty getting him the services he needed so he could progress at his school. Pedro's mother felt that the school staff had simply given up on Pedro. She was sure that with the services he needed he would be able to do better so she came to Legal Aid for help.

An attorney from the Kids in Crisis program represented Pedro at numerous Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and worked with the school district to get the speech and language therapy Pedro needs. Now that the school recognizes Pedro's potential, he has academic goals written into his IEP plan, and is learning to read words and do simple arithmetic. In addition, the attorney worked with California Children's Services to help Pedro get a brand new electric wheelchair; now he can move more freely on the playground. When you ask Pedro if he likes school now, he'll give you a big grin and a "thumbs up". Pedro's mother knows that there is still much work to do to ensure that her son is able to reach his full potential, but the smiles on Pedro's face these days tell her that he's on his way.

### Teens: Advocating for Teens in Need

Andrea, age 17, and her two children, ages 3 and 1, had nowhere safe to live. For months they had been living with the children's father in a garage, but the place wasn't safe for Andrea and her boyfriend, much less the children. There were too many people in the house, no electricity and no water, and the owner was sending eviction notices. At night, rats ate any food that wasn't secured and made Andrea afraid for her kids. Andrea stayed because she was too young to rent an apartment and her mother, with five kids of her own, couldn't give her a place to live.

When Andrea came to Legal Aid, a Teen Parent program attorney advised her that she was eligible for child care assistance because her mother had received welfare benefits for Andrea and her older child in the past. The attorney helped Andrea enroll in the post-welfare child care assistance program, and referred her to GED and ROP classes. With child care, Andrea was able to enroll in school and find a part-time job, enabling her to apply to become legally emancipated. As an emancipated minor, she qualified for homeless assistance programs and was able to move to a shelter with her children. She and her boyfriend then found a room to rent near her mother's home, and thanks to the Legal Aid attorney, were able to feel secure and safe.



### Families: Helping Make Homes Habitable

A local school referred a family with two young children to Legal Aid when their ten year old child came to class with cockroaches crawling out of his backpack. One of the Legal Aid HomeSavers attorneys and a city code inspector went to the dwelling for an inspection, and found an extreme cockroach infestation, sewage in the driveway and other infractions of the habitability law. In order to put pressure on the landlord to make necessary repairs, the attorney wrote a strongly-worded letter, citing the Code violations and asking the landlord to make appropriate remedies. Conditions in the apartment were so horrendous that the family stayed in a motel until repairs could be made. The landlord began making repairs and waived rent to compensate the family for the hardship they endured. Thanks to Legal Aid's advocacy, this family will no longer live in squalor.



### Adults with Disabilities: Stopping Homelessness

Deirdre, a disabled mother with three small children, applied for disability benefits when she could no longer work. Her sister Sari helped as much as she could by loaning money to Deirdre while she waited for Social Security to process her application. But when Deirdre was found disabled by the Social Security Administration, she was told that she was not eligible for benefits because they believed the money her sister had given her was a gift rather than a loan. Deirdre attempted to appeal her denial, but was told that an appeal was unnecessary. Social Security told her to simply reapply for benefits.

Deirdre and her sister, frustrated and confused, came to Legal Aid for help. The Clients' Rights Advocate attorney filed an appeal with Social Security on Deirdre's behalf. Deirdre's application was denied again on appeal, forcing the attorney

to request a hearing with an Administrative Law Judge. The attorney recommended that Deirdre file a new application for benefits, which was approved, and Deirdre began to receive benefits in April 2008. Without income in the meantime, Deirdre and her children had become homeless. The attorney represented Deirdre at her hearing, and won Deirdre retroactive benefits from the time of her original application. Now, thanks to Legal Aid's representation Deirdre and her children will be able to afford housing.

## Seniors: Sheltering Abuse Victims

Kathryn was scared for her safety in her own home. Several years ago, the 83-year-old let her daughter, Laura, and Laura's two children move in with her. They never paid rent. Laura began to verbally, physically and financially abuse Kathryn. Laura gave her son Kathryn's Social Security Number so he could get credit cards. He also forged checks on Kathryn's bank account. They stole thousands of dollars from Kathryn before she found out. Kathryn even had to keep her groceries locked in her car because Laura and her sons would eat her food. When one of Laura's angry rages frightened Kathryn, she tried to call 911, but Laura grabbed the phone from her and pushed her. Kathryn was extremely fearful for her safety from that point on.

After the death of one of Laura's sons, Laura became even more frightening. With the help of concerned family members, Kathryn got a temporary restraining order, but she wasn't sure what to do next. Someone told Kathryn about Legal Aid and she called to make an appointment. An attorney from the Senior Advocates program met with Kathryn and advised her about her options. Legal Aid asked an attorney from Cooley Godward Kronish to represent Kathryn at the hearing for the permanent restraining order. At the hearing, the judge granted Kathryn a 5-year permanent restraining order. Thanks to the advocacy of Legal Aid and the efforts of her pro bono attorney, Kathryn is now able to live in peace in her home.



## Legal Aid Volunteers

Legal Aid is deeply grateful to the exceptional attorneys, paralegals, pro bono coordinators and other volunteers who donate their time, energy, and expertise to our pro bono programs, and lead our committees.

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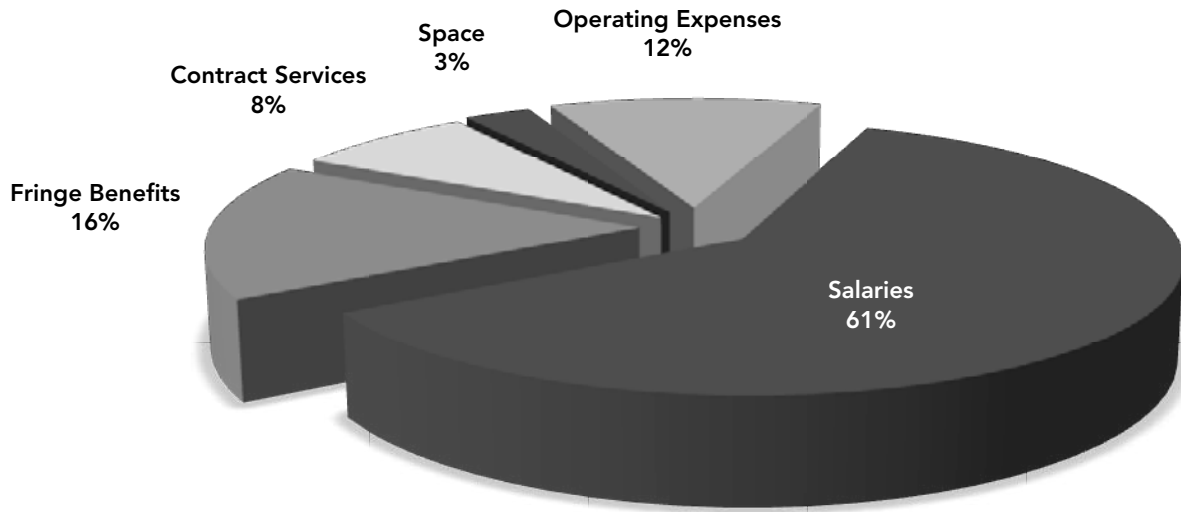
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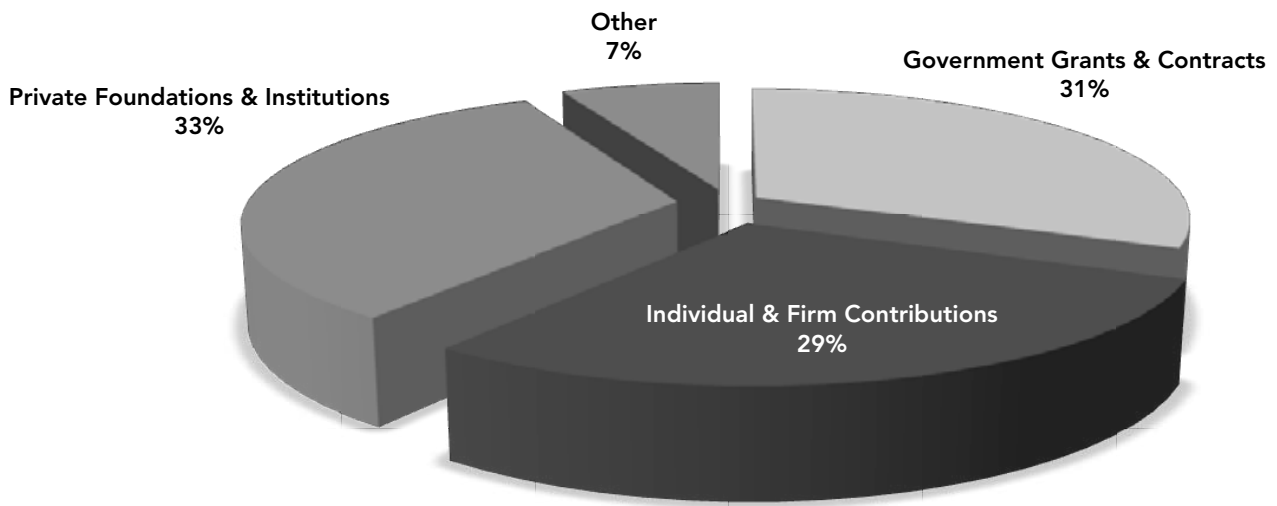
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**Expenses**

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