Annual Report

HIGHER GROUND

Indiana Legal Services, Inc.
Ensuring Equal Access to Justice

2017
Indiana Legal Services continued our climb in 2017, reaching new levels of growth and marking new milestones. Despite uncertainty around funding, we were able to add innovative new programs and add new members to our team.

Here are a few highlights from the year:

- ILS celebrated our 50th Anniversary with a gala event at the Indiana State Museum. The celebration was attended by more than 250 supporters, employees, and alumni.
- Our centralized intake line allowed us to serve more Hoosiers more efficiently than ever. In 2017, we served more than 11,000 clients statewide.
- We raised more than $270,000 from the public, lawyers, and law firms—enough to fund three lawyer positions at ILS.
- Our lawyers Jamie Andree and Jared Haller were recognized for their outstanding work by The Indiana Lawyer. Angelika Mueller won the David Hamacher Award from the Indiana State Bar Association, and Ida Hayes was Indianapolis Bar Association Paralegal of the Year. Patricia Román Hass was honored as an Influential Woman of Northwest Indiana.
- Our strategic advocacy victories in 2017 included an important court-rule change targeting individuals being sued by debt buyers and appellate victories vindicating tenants’ rights and the privacy rights of transgender individuals.
- Lawyers volunteering their time pro bono continue to augment our work significantly. They volunteer in our Low-Income Tax Clinic and clinics addressing expungements, naturalization, and changing gender markers on birth certificates; and several retired attorneys work pro bono in our South Bend and Indianapolis offices.
- Our medical-legal partnerships, including those addressing the opioid crisis by serving the critical legal needs of those in recovery, continue to get national attention.

Indiana Legal Services has always set our sights high, and 2017 was no different. From helping individuals to advocating for our cause in the national spotlight, we’ve never lost focus on our work: To ensure equal access to justice for all Hoosiers. Your continued support makes that possible.

Jon Laramore,
Executive Director
Through medical-legal partnerships, ILS is working with doctors to help patients.

Good health is about more than treating illness. It’s also about attacking the social factors that can cause or exacerbate health problems in the first place. At Indiana Legal Services, we recognize the role these factors can play, and we’re working to develop innovative new methods to treat them.

“The prevailing model for health care is to attack problems holistically,” said Jay Chaudhary, managing attorney and director of medical-legal partnerships at ILS. “That’s why we’ve formed medical-legal partnerships. It allows medical providers to easily refer patients to us when they have legal needs to be met. That legal assistance then becomes part of the treatment plan, and helps to improve patient outcomes overall.”

A medical-legal partnership (MLP) is an act of collaboration between ILS and our partner healthcare organizations. Through these partnerships, we place legal professionals on-site with hospitals and healthcare agencies who are able to help address the social and legal needs of patients.

These can range widely, from custody issues for parents and guardians to protecting the rights of patients legally able to work to preventing patients from being evicted.

The impact can be tremendous. Take, for example, Indiana Legal Services’ partnership with Eskenazi Health Midtown Community Mental Health. The hospital sees between 15,000 and 17,000 unique patients every year. Every one of these patients is eligible for legal services through this partnership, and ILS has assisted clients with housing, expunging criminal records, custody, and issues of family law. By being present within the hospital, we are able to render assistance to those who might never find help.

“Many of these clients are people who may otherwise never walk through our doors,” said Chaudhary. “They might not know assistance is available. Through these partnerships, we can identify people who need help and do so more effectively.”

The success of MLPs around the country has led more and more healthcare organizations to seek them out. Right now, there are more than 300 such organizations operating medical-legal partnerships, with many more in the planning stage. And while the seed of MLP programs can be found in pediatric practices, they have since grown to support individuals from all walks of life.

Indiana Legal Services is proud of the work we’ve accomplished through our medical-legal partnerships, and we’re actively seeking ways to do more. Together, we can achieve great things for the people who need help most.

“The prevailing model for health care is to attack problems holistically. That’s why we’ve formed medical-legal partnerships.”
TRUTH AND JUSTICE

For his commitment to truth, a former naval service member becomes the victim of retaliation.

After 12 years of naval service, Byron Washington received his General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions and was ready to rejoin civilian life. But before long, Washington realized he was having an unusually difficult time finding work.

Washington finally learned why after applying for a job with the Federal Aviation Administration: Without his knowledge, his discharge characterization had been downgraded to “Other Than Honorable.” The downgrade—and the discrepancy—made him virtually unemployable.

“The FAA thought I was lying on my application,” said Washington. “When I tried to get help from my VA reps, they refused, so I was basically on my own looking for work and trying to figure out what was going on.”

Washington tried to appeal the downgrade, but without any luck. Finally, he reached out to Indiana Legal Services’ Military Assistance Program.

“My attorney at ILS was able to lay out everything for a judge and show that it was retaliation,” said Washington.

Before his discharge, Washington had participated in a survey issued by his ship’s executive officer.

The purpose of the survey was to identify toxic behaviors by the ship’s leadership which were creating an unhealthy climate. Washington gave his full cooperation, responding honestly and signing his name to ensure he’d be easy to contact if the executive officer wanted to follow up on any of his responses.

What the evidence suggests, as laid out in the Military Assistance Program’s brief and request for a discharge upgrade, was that Washington’s downgrade was a direct response to his honesty about the ship’s toxic culture. Upon hearing this evidence, the appeal board restored and upgraded his status.

“I only needed another seven years of service to be eligible for retirement,” said Washington. “If my discharge hadn’t been restored, I wouldn’t be allowed to reenlist. It would have been the kiss of death, not just to my military career but to any job with the federal government.”

For Washington, the help he received from Indiana Legal Services was invaluable, especially as he exhausted every other resource he could think of.

“I remember I went to a couple recruiters for help, and as soon as I walked in the door they were like, ‘no, we can’t do anything for you.’ I hadn’t even told them the situation yet, but people knew who I was and wouldn’t help me,” said Washington. “That’s why I have no problem recommending Indiana Legal Services. They go after the truth.”
Hilda left Florida to escape a hurricane. But the damage done by her daughter was even worse.

As it did for so many elderly seniors living in Florida, Hurricane Irma forced Hilda (not her real name) to make a difficult choice. With the storm growing more powerful over the Atlantic, Hilda had to decide whether to risk staying put or evacuate, leaving her home behind.

Fortunately, Hilda's daughter in Indiana was willing to take her in. But what began as a refuge quickly turned into a cage. Hilda's daughter took her car keys, credit cards, personal checks, and address book before locking her indoors for two months. Hilda knew no one, and no one knew her; if she didn't figure out a way to get help, she knew that no one would come looking.

As time passed, Hilda was eventually able to sneak out of the home while her daughter was away. Although she was unfamiliar with the neighborhood, her exploration eventually led her to a law office where an attorney connected her with Indiana Legal Services’ Legal Assistance for Victimized Adults program.

“LAVA steps in when these individuals are harmed or threatened by abuse or neglect. But in many of these cases, it can be difficult for the client to even realize at first that they are being harmed—especially when they’re being victimized by a trusted family member or loved one.

When Hilda came to the LAVA program, her daughter had just begun the process of filing paperwork for guardianship of her mother. At that point, the daughter had already spent thousands of dollars on Hilda’s credit card, using her mother’s money to remodel her kitchen. That’s when LAVA froze Hilda’s accounts and reported the fraud to authorities.

LAVA got Hilda into a shelter where she had access to mail and a phone and was connected to a social worker. LAVA also represented Hilda in her daughter’s guardianship case. The guardianship claims were dismissed in court, and Hilda’s stolen property was recovered.

“LAVA offers civil representation that empowers victims and remedies the effects of the crimes against them,” said Everett. “In a civil case, we can pursue what the victim wants as far as they’re comfortable with. Since many of these cases involve family and loved ones, victims may not want to put them in jail, but they do want to undo the damage. We give them our counsel and allow them to decide how they want to proceed. Civil legal representation puts the client back in control.”

Hilda has since moved home to Florida, where she remains safely beyond her daughter’s grasp. With the assistance of LAVA, Hilda has resumed life on her own terms—our goal for all vulnerable adults in Indiana.
RECOVERY AND RESTORATION

After working hard to get sober, one veteran still struggled to find his way home.

When Doug Lucas served in the Air Force, he spent his days working munitions and his nights out with friends. At first, it was all in good fun—but the evening parties quickly became a serious problem.

“I ended up an alcoholic at 18 years old,” Lucas said. “And that was just the start of it.”

By the time he was out of the service, Lucas had both a drinking problem and debilitating back issues, including six rods and pins in his spine. After numerous DUIs, Lucas had his driver’s license revoked for life—not once, but three times, by two different judges.

Eventually he ended up living in Cincinnati—homeless, disabled, and far from family. That’s where he found shelter at Joseph House: an assisted living facility for veterans that gave him the support he needed to get sober again.

Yet throughout his recovery, what Lucas wanted most was the chance to return to his family in Brookville, Indiana. His sister offered to take him in, but Lucas quickly realized he would still need a way to get around.

“She lives in a pretty rural area, so you have to drive to get anywhere,” Lucas said. “That’s when I called Indiana Legal Services. I’d been sober for years, and did everything I could to straighten myself out, but I needed help getting my license restored.”

That’s when Lucas was connected with Polli Pollem, military assistance project director at ILS. Right away, he felt understood.

“Polli is ex-military, too,” said Lucas. “We were both in the Air Force, both about the same age, so she really understood where I was coming from and what kind of experiences I had.”

Pollem was able to help Lucas receive specialized driving privileges, which allow him to drive after passing a car breathalyzer test. But for Lucas, that has meant something even more important than his independence.

“Being able to drive meant I got to spend time with my mom before she passed,” Lucas said. “My dad is still in a nursing home, and I’m able to visit with him, too. I’m so grateful to Indiana Legal Services for that. I know I’ve been given a second chance. I feel like I’ve got a lease on life again, and it’s all thanks to them.”

“Being able to drive meant I got to spend time with my mom before she passed.”
Faegre Baker Daniels congratulates Indiana Legal Services on 50 years of providing dedicated, caring and effective legal services to persons of limited means. We are proud to support ILS in furthering its mission.
When you support Indiana Legal Services, great things happen. Here’s what you made possible:

**Snapshot of YOUR GENEROSITY**

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Of the 120 ILS employees, more than 50% are lawyers. They work at 8 offices in Indiana.

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**$270,000**

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Our advocacy led to monetary gains in public benefits, child support, court judgments, etc., totaling more than **$1,881,644** and helped our clients avoid **$7,076,626** in obligations that were claimed to be due.

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