Real Change for Real People

“Justice for all” is the cornerstone of the civil justice system in our nation, yet justice eludes people who do not have the access, the means, or the opportunity to seek legal assistance. Among the most vulnerable are the indigent and working poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the elderly and disabled, children, veterans, battered women, and victims of torture and human trafficking.

Where do the people most in need go for legal help?

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA), the frontline law firm for poor and low-income people in Los Angeles, is committed to equal access to justice for all. LAFLA is the first place to which thousands of people turn when legal problems threaten their homes, health, and livelihoods. Since it was founded in 1929, LAFLA has been a channel for change for the conditions that cause or aggravate poverty for poor and low-income Angelenos, for people who face systemic barriers to equal justice, equal opportunity and, too often, basic human rights.

Help us transform the
Face of Justice
in Los Angeles
Letter from our Campaign Chairmen

The “Building Justice” Campaign for a modern new headquarters building for the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles is a milestone in LAFLA’s 87-year history. Since it was founded in 1929, LAFLA has grown to become one of the largest and finest public interest law firms in the country, providing the best lawyers for those too poor to afford legal representation and making equal access to justice a reality for our most vulnerable neighbors and communities.

Today more than ever, keeping the promise of equal justice is no easy task. Los Angeles County has experienced tremendous population growth and gained a rich diversity in its residents. At the same time, local, state and federal funding cuts have affected our clients’ communities deeply. Despite these daunting challenges, LAFLA’s attorneys, paralegals, social workers, support staff and volunteers continue to share a steadfast belief: that lives are changed by the work LAFLA does.

This new headquarters facility, sorely needed and long overdue, will enhance LAFLA’s capacity to provide high-quality and essential legal services to greater numbers of unrepresented and underserved in Los Angeles for years to come. We are proud to be a part of the “Building Justice” Campaign to secure a viable, permanent home for LAFLA and hope you will join us in this transformative project to further LAFLA’s legacy as a beacon of hope for those who look to us for access to justice.

Place Matters

LAFLA’s presence in the low-income communities we serve is a hallmark of our service delivery model. Place matters for our clients and this transformational new facility will create an empowering and welcoming setting for staff and volunteers to provide high-quality legal assistance to more people who look to us for access to justice.

Located in the heart of one of the poorest, most densely populated and neglected neighborhoods of Los Angeles, LAFLA’s new headquarters will serve to transform not only an urban epicenter, but the futures for children, families, veterans and the most fragile among us.

Sylvia R. Argueta, Executive Director
Working for Justice in our Communities Since 1929

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, the frontline law firm for poor and low-income people in metropolitan Los Angeles, was established in 1929 to ensure that the indigent have access to the civil justice system. With 64 lawyers and 132 total staff, LAFLA is the largest law firm for the poor in California. LAFLA’s mission is to change lives through legal representation, systems change and community education. Our vision is for communities where everyone has access to justice that protects their home, livelihood, health and equality.

LAFLA has more locations in the neighborhoods where low-income people live and work than any other legal services provider in the region. We now have five offices (East Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Long Beach and the consolidated districts of Crenshaw/Koreatown and Pico-Union), three courthouse domestic violence clinics (downtown Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Santa Monica) and four Self-Help Legal Access Centers (in the Inglewood, Long Beach, Torrance, and Santa Monica courthouses).

To reach beyond our individual clients and make a difference for even more people in need, LAFLA actively collaborates with a network of public and private partners – including numerous service providers, community-based organizations, religious groups, government agencies, the judiciary, academic institutions, and state and national groups acting on behalf of low-income people – to expand access to justice, identify emerging needs in the communities we serve, and change laws and policies that adversely affect poor people and communities and undermine their self-sufficiency.

LAFLA’s Impact

LAFLA’s diverse team of attorneys, paralegals, social workers and support staff assist individuals and families to avoid homelessness, escape domestic violence, obtain safety net benefits and health care, defend themselves against consumer fraud and exploitative employment practices, and seek protections available to torture survivors and victims of human trafficking. We also attack poverty at its roots by helping grassroots organizations to develop local jobs, affordable housing units, youth services and other social programs in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In 2014, LAFLA services included:

- Counsel and advice, brief services and extended representation to assist more than 80,000 people, including 13,000 children, in poor and low-income households endangered by domestic violence, slum housing, lack of access to food and medical care, and other deprivations of poverty.

- Legal self-help assistance to over 55,000 litigants with landlord-tenant, consumer, family, immigration, civil harassment and other matters.

- Legal education and community outreach to more than 2,000 community residents.

- Referrals to other resources to more than 26,000 callers and walk-ins seeking legal assistance.

- More than 4,188 hours devoted to impact litigation on behalf of indigent Medi-Cal and General Relief recipients, U- and T-Visa holders, tenants displaced by gentrification, and thousands of other low-income individuals and families adversely impacted by unfair and unconstitutional statutes and policies.

- Collaboration with more than 1,400 pro bono attorneys, paralegals and law students who donated over 31,000 hours to provide access to justice to even more people in need.
The Impetus for Change

L.A. County has one of the largest poverty populations in the nation: 1.5 million people live in poverty and another 2.1 million are low-income. L.A. is also home to one of the most diverse populations in the world: more than one in every three residents is foreign-born and more than 50 percent speak a language other than English at home.

With the Great Recession and the lingering effects of the economic downturn, the sheer number and diversity of people seeking LAFLA’s services is straining our capacity. We have outgrown our Central Office at 8th & Union and the antiquated structure, which we own, is in dire need of expensive deferred maintenance, accessibility improvements, earthquake retrofitting and mold abatement. At the same time, our leased Administration/West Office facility is being sold and the eventual loss of our advantageous long-term, below-market-rate lease places us in imminent jeopardy of a service delivery disruption.

The “Building Justice” Campaign is providing the resources to construct a transformative new facility consolidating these two service locations into a modern, efficient and client-friendly headquarters. The new facility will greatly enhance our capacity to provide high-quality legal services to poor and low-income people through long-overdue and much-needed infrastructure and technology upgrades, and will be ideally located for services to Los Angeles’ Pico-Union community (one of the poorest, most densely populated and most neglected neighborhoods in Los Angeles) and Koreatown (where many also live in poverty and cultural isolation).

The Historical Precedence, Experience and Success:
South Los Angeles

THE ISSUE: Deteriorating infrastructure, lack of private space for clients, unwelcoming waiting areas, inadequate work spaces, limited access for persons with disabilities

THE SOLUTION: New 7,500 sq. ft. community office with vastly improved client reception area, elevator, private rooms for confidential client screening, 21 offices, work stations for volunteers and interns, and two community meeting rooms. Since our new South LA facility opened in September 2009, we have seen a 19.25% increase in the number of people receiving assistance at the office.

Historical Precedence, Experience and Success:
Long Beach

THE ISSUE: Expensive leased space in a commercial office building, difficult for clients to find and access, expensive parking

THE SOLUTION: New 7,500 sq. ft community office with street-level entrance, easily accessible by public transportation, ample affordable parking nearby, elevator, wheelchair-accessible restrooms, 18 offices and workstations, and a community meeting room. Since our new Long Beach facility opened in December 2009, we have seen an 11% increase in the number of people receiving assistance at the office.
The “Building Justice” Campaign: A Vision of Transformation

LAFLA’s new headquarters at 8th & Union will enable our dedicated poverty law experts to provide more of the high quality legal assistance we are known for in a modern, client-friendly, community-empowering environment that better reflects our commitment to a brighter future for every person we serve.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:** Inadequate reception areas and limited privacy; no safe space for children while parents are meeting with advocates; offices above the ground floor are inaccessible to the disabled

**THE IMPACT:** The cramped lobby overflows with clients during peak hours. The lack of privacy makes it difficult for clients to talk about sensitive situations and personal matters. Children are exposed to the intimate and often violent details of their parents’ cases. Disabled clients and advocates face barriers to the provision of services.

**THE TRANSFORMATION:** Provide a bright, vibrant space for clients awaiting service. Afford clients’ greater privacy through dedicated interview rooms and noise reduction technology. Offer a safe space for children to play while their parents receive services. Ensure barrier-free equal access for clients and staff with disabilities.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:** Meeting and work spaces inadequate for pro bono and community needs

**THE IMPACT:** Collaboration with private attorneys, law students, bar associations, community organizations and other partners is restricted by space limitations.

**THE TRANSFORMATION:** Offer versatile meeting spaces with flexible, movable walls that readily accommodate small group meetings as well as large conferences and trainings, clinics and community events. Provide computers, wireless access, plug-ins for laptops and audiovisual technology for presentations and clinics.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:** Community lacks access to legal resources and materials

**THE IMPACT:** People must wait for answers that they could discover on their own if they had access to the information. Client empowerment is impacted.

**THE TRANSFORMATION:** Create a Resource Center with computers for members of the public to apply online for services, find answers to less complicated legal issues, and get referrals to other service providers and agencies in one central location.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES:** Existing infrastructure too outdated to accommodate new technology; limited translation services for clients with hearing/sight impairments or with limited English proficiency

**THE IMPACT:** Advocates are unable to utilize video-conferencing and other technology to facilitate internal collaboration or provide easier access for more clients throughout our vast service area. Communication barriers impede access and add to the isolation and stress faced by LEP clients and the hearing- and sight-impaired.

**THE TRANSFORMATION:** Upgrade infrastructure capacity to accommodate video-conferencing, Skype and other state-of-the-art technology for inter-office meetings as well as client intake and services. Feature new, coordinated interpretation services for disabled and LEP clients.
Today’s Reality

(photograph above)

• Outdated and deteriorating infrastructure
• Inadequate office and meeting space
• Limited access for persons with disabilities

Tomorrow’s Vision

A functional, accessible and empowering headquarters facility designed with client needs in mind, including:

• A bright and inviting reception area
• Privacy-affording client intake rooms with adjacent secure viewing areas where children can play while their parents meet with advocates
• Integrated interpretation services for clients with hearing/sight impairments or limited English ability
• Barrier-free access to all three floors for clients, staff and visitors with disabilities
• A self-help Resource Center in the lobby with internet-based legal resources, materials, one-stop referrals and access to social service agencies
• Versatile meeting spaces including a flexible-use training/board/community room
• Upgraded infrastructure for video-conferencing and other technology to facilitate service delivery across our heavily-populated and congested service area.
Passion and Commitment to Social Advocacy

Knowledgable and experienced poverty law advocates are essential to the success of LAFLA. LAFLA’s dedicated lawyers, paralegals and support staff are the “frontline” emergency room for poor and low-income people seeking access to our justice system. Their commitment to their work is inspiring, and many of them have given up lucrative careers because of their passion for social justice and desire to help people transform their lives. The dedication and zeal they bring to their work are amazing assets for their clients.

“We are living through one of the most economically challenging times our country has faced since the Great Depression. In just a matter of a few years, we have seen an increasing number of families slip into poverty and the evisceration of countless opportunities formerly available to help them. We have also seen the tremendous gap in justice between those who can afford legal representation, and those who cannot, grow ever wider. LAFLA works to narrow the justice gap by solving complex legal problems on behalf of one person, one family and even one neighborhood at a time, and that’s why I’m proud to work here.”

Fernando Gaytan, Managing Attorney, Housing & Communities Work Group

“Growing up poor in Los Angeles, where my father struggled to provide for my brother and me on a poolman’s wages, I know from personal experience the challenges that our clients confront every day. That’s why I love working at LAFLA: by providing access to justice to veterans and their families, I am helping others to have a chance for a better life. It’s a privilege to have an opportunity to give back and work with those in need.”

Nicole Perez, Directing Attorney, LAFLA Veterans Justice Center
Build Justice in Los Angeles County

The success of the “Building Justice” Campaign requires the generous financial support of concerned individuals, community leaders, corporations and foundations who believe in LAFLA’s mission to provide equal access to justice for people living in poverty in L.A.

We are raising funds for this campaign through major gifts, grants, corporate philanthropy, and individual donations. Your generous gift will help push this project forward, creating new capacity and a new future for LAFLA.

Please make a gift of cash or a pledge (allowing you to give a larger gift over 2-5 years that may allow for additional tax savings) or a gift of cash or securities.

Contributions to the “Building Justice” Campaign are tax-deductible to the fullest extent by law. Tax ID# 95-1684067.

For more information about the campaign or to discuss structuring your gift, please contact Lynn Etkins, Chief Development and Marketing Director, at 323.801.7929 or letkins@lafla.org.

Thank you for helping build justice for all people in Los Angeles County!

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles is a charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We are funded by the Legal Services Corporation, the State Bar of California, other public and private grants, and the generous voluntary support of lawyers and law firms, corporations, foundations and the public. All donations to the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles will be expended in accordance with the Legal Services Corporation Act and 45 CFR Part 1610.
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