Community Legal Services’ mission is to provide transformative legal services that enable diverse communities in East Palo Alto and beyond to achieve a secure and thriving future. With the help of our many pro bono attorneys from firms and companies, private attorneys, law students, undergraduates, interpreters, and administrative assistants, we are closer to making that happen. This is a snapshot of some of the things we have accomplished together in 2015, and also our way of saying “thank you.”
PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

In most Bay Area communities, families have few options when their monthly rents are suddenly increased hundreds or thousands of dollars. Pro bono attorneys have been integral to keeping families in our community. Teresa, a single mom and immigrant from Ethiopia, was terrified of losing the affordable apartment that she and her teenage son shared. If forced to move, she would have found it impossible to find a similar place. Fortunately, a pro bono attorney was able to negotiate a settlement with the landlord allowing her and her son to stay in their home.

Countless other tenants have been helped by pro bono attorneys through our weekly clinic at San Mateo County Courthouse, where tenants facing eviction receive negotiation assistance at mandatory settlement conferences. Many face language barriers and are not aware of their legal rights. Pro bono attorneys help these tenants develop a better understanding of the eviction process and most importantly, are often able to help them stay in their homes or to find new housing.

“Helping Teresa was really empowering because it allowed me to use my legal skills to positively impact someone’s life. Our push back against the landlord, who was really treating Teresa poorly, as well as the excellent assistance by Community Legal Services, is what allowed us to ultimately come to a very favorable settlement for her.”

- Michael Sobolev, Associate, Fish & Richardson

“CLSEPA has been a great partner in our firm’s pro bono legal work. I have personally worked with their housing clinic and have found the experience moving and fulfilling. The mix of litigators, IP attorneys and corporate attorneys who participate in this clinic enjoy the experience.”

- James Jensen, Partner, Perkins Coie LLP

“Without the attorney and Community Legal Services’ help today at the clinic, I would not have been able to defend myself in my case. I’m grateful something like this exists.”

- Blanca

-Blanca Espinoza, assisted by pro bono attorney, Nicole Buck, formerly at Kaye Scholer LLP, at the weekly housing clinic.
Growing up in a crime-ridden neighborhood, Antoine knew he wanted to get out. He joined the Army after high school and even started a small information technology business. While serving in Iraq, for 7 years, the company fell apart. In July 2015, Antoine came to a Small Business Clinic sponsored by Community Legal Services to receive free legal advice. The one hour session helped him focus on the steps Antoine needed to take, and he has since visited the clinic again to report on his progress and get further advice. He is now feeling positive about the future and taking steps to secure his business.

Community Legal Services’ Small Business Program provides workshops on business law basics and free legal clinics to low-income, small business owners throughout the Peninsula who need assistance with the legal challenges they face. We partner with numerous law firms and in-house counsel who use their legal expertise to improve the long-term economic prospects of clients and their families. In 2015, pro bono attorneys provided assistance to over a hundred clients.

“It’s fulfilling to use the skills and knowledge you acquire representing large successful businesses to help low-income small businesses or emerging entrepreneurs, who otherwise could not afford a lawyer.”

– Amna Latif, Lead Corporate Counsel, WhatsApp

“Without the legal advice of the Small Business Clinics, I would not have been able to move forward with my business as quickly. The pro bono attorneys really guide you on what you need to do next.”

– Antoine
As a young adult, James was convicted of a minor, alcohol-related crime. At the time, James was going through the pain of seeing his single mother battle cancer, a fight she later lost. James now has two daughters to take care of and felt that this conviction, which occurred during a difficult period in his life, was holding him back from getting a job and supporting his family.

People like James, many with minor offenses dating back many years, have a harder time getting a job, getting loans, furthering their education or buying a car. Their chances of becoming economically self-sufficient become infinitely smaller.

Through an innovative partnership between Community Legal Services, DLA Piper LLP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise and the San Mateo Private Defender Panel, we are now able to help support James and others like him file their record dismissal petitions. Our legal clinic boasts a 100% success rate for filed petitions as well as a high volunteer retention rate. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, adults, who could not get help because of inadequate resources or lack of awareness, are now able to transform their lives through quality legal assistance.

“I am extremely grateful to be able to assist these clients in such a direct and meaningful way. They have gone through difficult periods in their lives, and those periods (even when in the distant past) continue to haunt them and negatively impact their lives in terms of employment and other opportunities. I consider it one of the best uses of my legal training.”

- Gina Signorello, Deputy General Counsel, Hewlett Packard Enterprise
EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Thousands of young people across the country have applied for and been granted "deferred action." These "DREAMers," many of whom arrived to the US as infants and toddlers, were for the first time eligible to work, get social security numbers and allowed to remain in the country. Many went on to further their education and become leaders in their communities.

Community Legal Services, with the support of numerous law firms and companies in the Bay Area, has provided legal assistance to hundreds of young people since the start of the program in 2012. Pro bono attorneys take on challenging cases for full representation, in addition to helping 140 young people at clinics held throughout the year. Several firms and companies, such as Salesforce, Goodwin Procter, LinkedIn and Google have hosted clinics in their offices. In an effort to inspire young people to pursue careers they might not have otherwise considered, they have organized their own talented staff of lawyers, engineers, project managers, and marketing teams to share with clients their personal and professional histories prior to the legal clinics. Community Legal Services also partners with OneJustice to supervise Justice Bus clinics in Half Moon Bay and Lake Tahoe.

"To have DACA now is to have a taste of freedom. I now have the opportunity to provide for my whole family and strive to achieve all of my dreams. It is the key to a door that will allow my hopes and dreams of giving back to my community come true."

– Christian, who was assisted by pro bono attorney Mitchell Zimmerman at Fenwick & West LLP

"From the training to the actual clinic, our team had such a positive experience. Community Legal Services was able to pack so much relevant info into a concise training session and it was inspiring to help a young, hard working girl stay in America so she could achieve her dream of going to college."

– Robin Andruss, Sr. Manager, Global Privacy and Policy, Yahoo Inc.

LinkedIn panelists speaking to DACA clients at a clinic sponsored by LinkedIn and Fenwick & West LLP: (l-r) Magali Molina (CLSEPA), Christian Ramos, Lauren Vesty, Luis Angel Jimenez, Mariol Greco

Christian, with his son, who he says "represents all the hard work and struggle my family has had to overcome. My son is my life."
Community Legal Services’ Immigration Program has expanded considerably, and yet the need continues to overwhelm. Fortunately, pro bono attorneys in the Bay Area have provided thousands of hours of free legal assistance to secure the dignity and the futures of many immigrants seeking a better life.

In 2015, our pro bono attorneys and paralegals have worked on U visas, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and Ninth Circuit cases. They have appeared in Immigration Court on behalf of children who have fled their home countries because of threats to their lives; they have supported survivors of domestic violence; and they have advocated for the interests of those diagnosed with severe mental illness. Our immigration team has also partnered with pro bono attorneys, Centro Legal de la Raza, OneJustice, and the San Francisco Immigrant Legal Defense Collaborative to assist immigrants in the Central Valley with their asylum applications.

“I can finally live in peace with my brother and my family here in the United States. I am currently going to school and learning English. My favorite subject in school is English and Social Studies. I can’t wait to graduate from high school and hopefully one day, go to college. Without help, I do not think I would be where I am today.”

- Juan

“Receiving my U-Visa changed my life. I have been given the chance to provide for my daughters and hope to give them a better life with better opportunities than what I had. I can now have a legal stable job and won’t have to live in fear. The U-Visa gave me the chance to drastically improve my life.”

- Josephina

“The opportunity to help these young clients has expanded our skills as lawyers, but also our understanding of the community in which we live, and how we can use our legal skills to help those who have gone through so much just to be here.”

- Michael Ng, Partner, Kobre & Kim LLP, whose team assisted Juan with his SIJS case
PRO BONO ADVISORY COUNCIL

Community Legal Services’ Pro Bono Advisory Council is comprised of attorneys at firms and companies focused on developing the strategic direction of the Pro Bono Program.

Amandine Gagniere, Google Inc.
Kat McGowan, LinkedIn
Brian Lahti, Fenwick & West LLP
Jon Frohmayer, DLA Piper LLP
Chris Tirrell, Hewlett Packard Enterprise
Rachel Burns, Latham & Watkins LLP

Tijana Brien, Cooley LLP
Andrew Yaphe, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP
Michele Gauger, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
Luke Liss, Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich & Rosati LLP
Ash Nagdev, Sidley Austin LLP
Sonia Elizabeth Valdez, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP

VOLUNTEER INTERPRETER PANEL

Our Volunteer Interpreter Panel expands our capacity to serve clients in need by volunteering their interpreting and translation services to our pro bono attorneys.

Marley Arechiga
Elena Ayala
Albert Azagra
Jose Luis Barrionuevo
Laura Boykin
Sergio Broholm
Rangel Candaleria
Marco Castanos
Cindy Castillo
Carlos Castro
Allen Chan
Angelica Chiluca
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Johann Strauss
Sandra Valmana
Francisco Velasco
Margarita Ventura
Jackie Wolff-Calderon
Si Yongjian
Claudia Zimmerman

“Angelica has been a great Spanish interpreter! She has been there for every one of our client meetings. We are very grateful for her contributions.”

– Georgina Suzuki, Associate, Ropes & Gray LLP, who is currently working on a U visa application
Community Legal Services thanks the many private attorneys, law students, undergraduates, and administrative volunteers who have helped our organization in 2015.

OUR IN-HOUSE VOLUNTEERS

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