

A LAW FIRM OF AND FOR THE PEOPLE

2008 ANNUAL REPORT



The Legal Rights Center's mission is to provide the highest quality criminal defense and restorative justice services to low-income people, in particular people of color. Our focus is Hennepin County, our priority is juveniles, and our services are at no cost. Our goals are to provide equal access to justice in the criminal courts, and to uncover the underlying factors that have already led, or could lead, to criminal behavior so as to prevent future criminal offenses.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

This is not an easy time for nonprofits in Minnesota, and many have asked me how Legal Rights Center is holding up. While we have not been hammered with *unallotment*—a word, interestingly enough, that Microsoft Word finds invalid and underlines in red—we still have experienced government funding reductions.

However, a side effect of the poor economy that actually *benefits* us is the greater availability of extremely talented volunteers, including licensed and student attorneys, who enhance the reach and quality of our legal defense program. Having three staff attorneys (out of four) with nearly twenty years of experience each, and Community Advocates who can

effectively bridge cultural barriers and best convey a client's experience of their case, allows Legal Rights Center to serve as an ideal training ground for future defense attorneys.

It is not unusual for cases being prepped for trial at LRC to have a team that includes one staff attorney, one staff Community Advocate/investigator, one second chair volunteer attorney, and two student attorneys—all of whom pour over the evidence and develop strategies and arguments. In TV land, the culmination of such efforts would climax with a jury foreman's resounding NOT GUILTY! In our real world of Hennepin County, our best work will compel prosecutors to dismiss cases on the day of trial, or after a judge has ruled in our favor on a constitutional matter.

Other side effects of budget-stretched government that may promise help for our communities are the emerging trends towards reconsidering prosecution and sentencing policies, and allowing greater opportunities for low level offenders to be diverted to restorative justice programs and problem solving courts. The challenge for communities will be to maintain the use of successful probation and diversion programs even after the government has more funding available for prisons.

I thank those who have inquired about Legal Rights Center's well being. Many individuals, law firms, and foundations, along with the United Way and the public defender system, continue to support our programs as best they can, reflecting our track record of exemplary service to the community that will soon reach forty years.

Thank you,



Michael Friedman
Executive Director



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Individuals and Organizations

\$50,000+

Greater Twin Cities United Way
The B.C. Gamble & P.W. Skogmo Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation
Minnesota State Board of Public Defense
Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP*

\$1,000-4,999

Achieve!Minneapolis
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Twin Cities Christian Foundation
U.S. Bank

\$5,000-14,999

The Dorsey & Whitney Foundation
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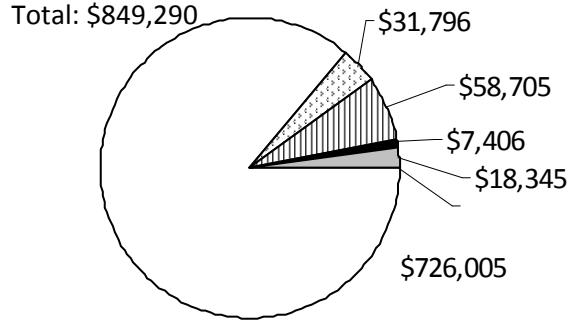
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	Hon. Neil Riley
	Asitha Sandanayake

*Amount includes in-kind donations

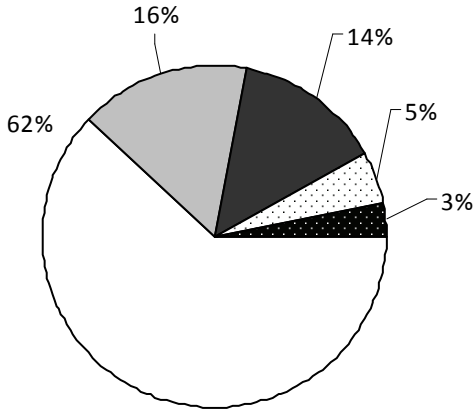
FINANCIAL

Functional Expenses

- Personnel: salary, payroll
- ▨ Office: phone, supplies, postage, insurance, miscellaneous
- ▤ Occupancy: includes depreciation, interest expenses, repairs
- Professional development: meetings, conferences, training, library
- ▩ Program expenses: includes travel, professional fees



Expense Breakdown

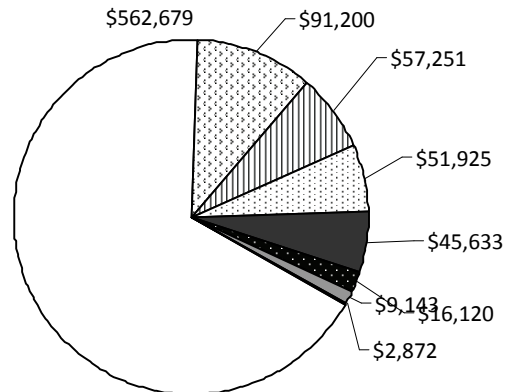


- Legal Defense Program
- ▩ Administration/Management
- Community Conflict Resolution Program
- ▨ Legal Education Program
- ▤ Fundraising

Revenue

- Government fees & grants
- ▨ Corporations & foundations
- ▤ United Way
- ▩ Law firms & attorneys
- In-kind donations
- ▤ Rental
- ▩ Individual contributions
- Other income

Total: 836,823



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Restorative justice is most often practiced as an alternative to a criminal or juvenile court process. But can the same principles be adapted for delinquency *prevention*? The LRC sought to find out.

Perhaps the best known risk factor for delinquency and adult criminal behavior is lack of school success—which in turn can be influenced by lack of school stability and days lost to suspensions. The NAACP has gone so far as to term these problems *the school-to-prison pipeline*.

In partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), a project was developed for the 2008-2009 year to work with students whose actions place them at risk for expulsion for reasons established by state law, and who do not challenge the grounds for such expulsions. In Minneapolis, such students are placed in a contract alternative school when one is available, or else transferred within the district.

Prior to the project, problems identified included: poor motivation for the student once expelled; distrust between family and school district on the heels of an expulsion; and a good chance that the underlying issues had not been solved and the student might get expelled from the next school. (19% of all expulsions were of students who had already been expelled elsewhere.)

Last school year, upon a student's registration in the alternative school, our staff met with the student, family (broadly defined), and school representatives. After determining underlying issues through this screening process, and investigating potential supports and community resources, we arranged for all parties to attend a restorative conference. Each conference began with a discussion of the student's strengths and family assets in order to provide a foundation of positivity from which to address challenges. Our facilitator then helped the group create a plan for the student. If the goals were met, the student could choose to return to their original school with good standing restored, or remain succeeding at the alternative school.

The project proved to be enormously successful in its first year. Ninety-two percent of participating students both had no behavioral referrals *and* passed more classes after their conference, and *no participants were expelled a second time*.



Simone Abel, director of LRC's Conflict Resolution program, receives an award from the Hennepin County Family Group Conferencing Unit.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Reviews from school administrators:

“Builds on strengths; positive; includes everyone’s voice; sets up a good connection with the school.”

“I like the focus on student and family strength.”

“Meeting and working with the parents has been good.”

“Really got an understanding of what the student’s needs are and what the barriers to students obtaining/meeting educational goals are.”

“We’re all in this together, staff (both MPS and alternative), students, parents, etc... to support the student.”

“The follow-up helped the students see how far they have come and how well they did.”

“Having a group supportive process there for the students helped them stay on track both educationally and behaviorally.”

“There is a really positive connection between the staff and students and their families.”

“Really works.”

“Really hope it can continue in the future.”

Reviews from friends and family:

“Helped me understand the process and support being offered to my child.”

“Very good, because the plan is individualized.”

And reviews from students:

“It encouraged me to do very well in school.”

“It helped me do better and not get kicked out of school.”

Survey results:

From our surveys collected, we learned that 100% of responding students, family and friends, and school personnel agreed or strongly agreed that they:

- Felt comfortable sharing their story or experience
- Felt the plan was helpful
- Felt treated with respect
- Understood the plan
- Felt the plan was fair and reasonable
- Were satisfied with the program

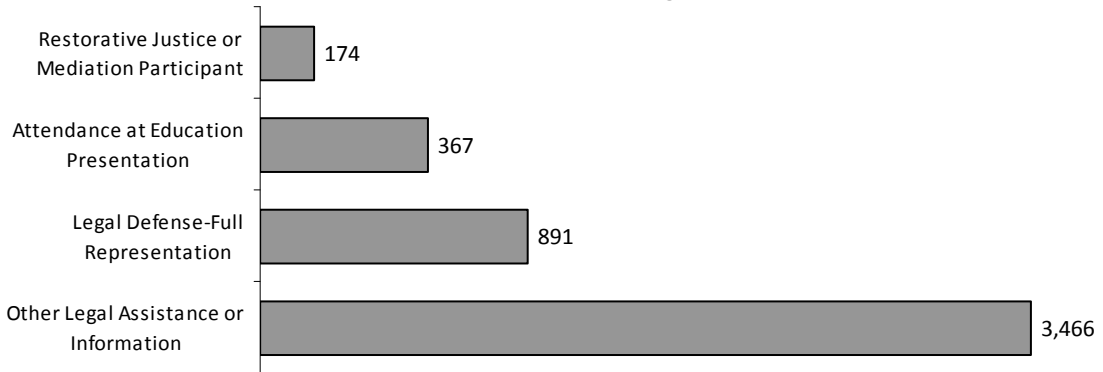
FACTS AND FIGURES

Legal Rights Center Staff

Community Advocates	3
Attorneys	4
Restorative Justice Facilitators/Mediators	2
Support Staff	2.5
Management	2

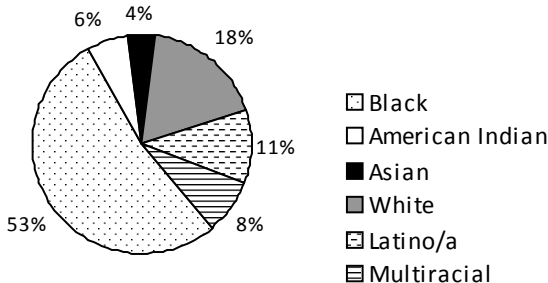
**Total volunteer
hours: 3,179.4**

Clients Receiving Services



Community Conflict Resolution Program

Racial Makeup of Program Participants



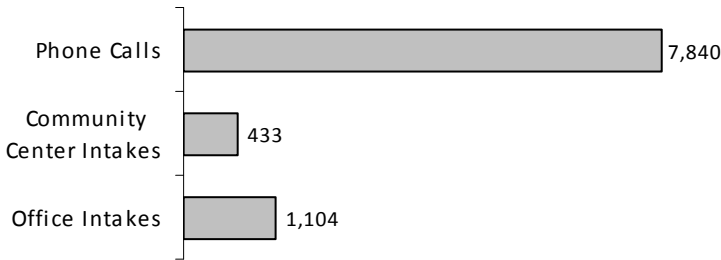
Schools Program Outcomes:

LRC staff facilitated 45 Family Group Conferences. 37 of these cases closed with plans of action in place; the other 8 could not arrange participation.

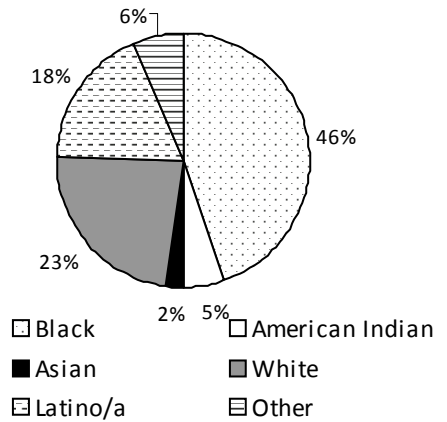
FACTS AND FIGURES

Legal Defense Program

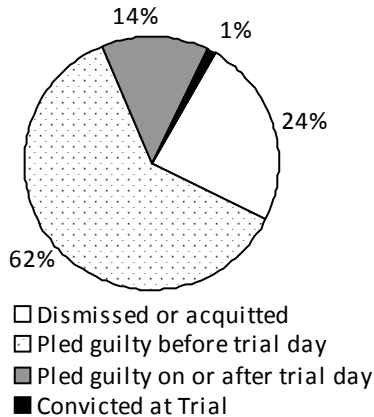
Client Access



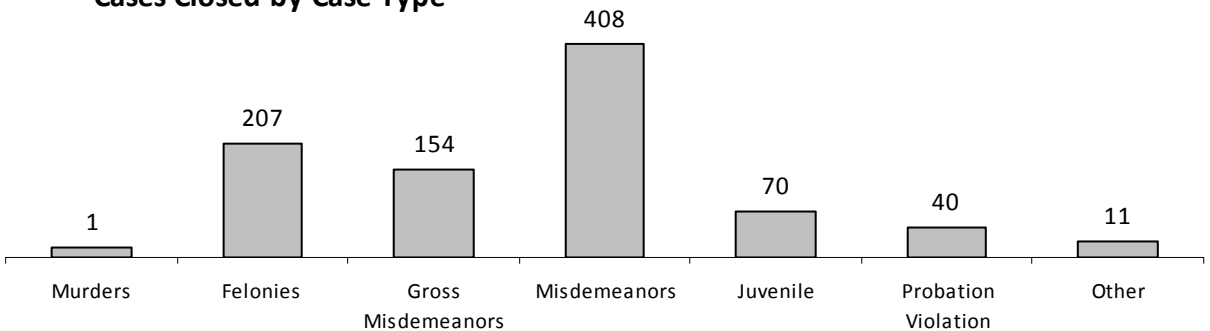
Racial Makeup of Defense Clients



Defense Outcomes



Cases Closed by Case Type



REVIEWS

Attorneys

“The Legal Rights Center is wonderful and very beneficial to those in need. I just hope that the program will continue to excel and be outstanding for others. Thank you very much!!!”

“It was such a relief to know you would be there for me and that you have continued to fight for my rights and my freedom. I’m returning to treatment again on my own... I hope and strive to be one of your successes!”

“I [don’t know] where I would be if somebody else had taken my case, because... if I was in your place I would have given up, but you did not, you did the opposite and kept pressing on. I could have been sentenced to jail for 86 months, but the hard work paid off. They gave me a second chance and put me on EJJ.”

“You saved me. You were with me and my family 100% of the way. My mother and father are so happy that I am getting help.”

“My lawyer seemed like he cared about me. He was very wonderful to work with and had a great attitude. I still tell everyone how great he was.”

“I take this opportunity to appreciate and thank you for a commendable service you are doing to the community. I got the best assistance and offer possible from you as I could not have imagined... all I can say is that you guys serve all the Community on the grounds of a common humanity.”



Juvenile defense attorney Sarah Ali presenting to students

Presentations

“This information is very useful and helpful for people in my situation. Thank you and keep up the good work!”

“Your presentation to my students... was amazing. I was surprised at how much information you shared with my students that was actually useful and relevant to their everyday lives... My students really learned a lot and I would like to think that it helped prevent future legal problems.”

“The students felt comfortable asking their questions and found the discussion very informative. I think the students were able to take away some valuable information and I also feel that I will be better able to answer student questions regarding these issues in the future.”

REVIEWS

General

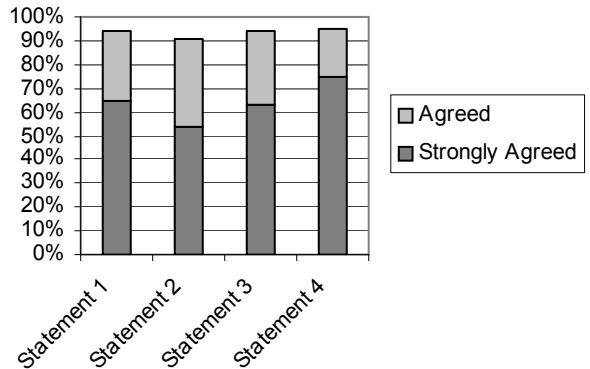
“At the time I was in your office, I had nowhere else to turn to, and I want to extend my deepest thanks for listening to me... this is not a matter I will ever forget, and I thank you for being a bulwark of hope for me in a moment when I had none.”



Step-Up Intern Long Yang

Volunteering

“I have learned more in the 2 months as a volunteer attorney with LRC than I learned in approximately 1.5 years of private practice. The LRC staff - community advocates and attorneys - are all incredible people.”



In a survey of client satisfaction with their attorneys, we received stellar reviews. The chart above illustrates the results.

- 1: 29% agreed and 65% strongly agreed with the statement, “The LRC provided me with quality legal representation.”
- 2: 37% agreed and 54% strongly agreed with the statement, “I was empowered to make the key decisions in my case.”
- 3: 31% agreed and 63% strongly agreed with the statement, “I trusted my attorney to seek a fair and just outcome in my case.”
- 4: Most telling of all, 20% agreed and 75% strongly agreed with the statement, “I would recommend the LRC to others.”

REPORTS

A young Minnesotan woman was in jail in Atlanta for driving after suspension, and her mother and aunt came to the LRC seeking help. They said that the woman had reinstated her driver's license and had her renewal papers, but when the police pulled her over in Georgia and ran her information, it had come up as still suspended.

A Community Advocate contacted the DMV in St. Paul, faxed them the woman's renewal papers, and discovered that they had given her the papers without asking her for the \$20 fee—without which the renewal could not actually go through.

The DMV staff were very concerned, and sent the Community Advocate a letter explaining that there had been a mistake, and a statement saying that they had reinstated the client's driver's license; she forwarded it to the police in Georgia. When they received the information, the woman was released.

In a case of blatant abuse of authority, an LRC client was charged with disorderly conduct and obstruction of the legal process. This man had been at a downtown Minneapolis arcade, asking some other patrons if they wanted to play a game with him or if they had change for the machines.

Police charged that he had been causing problems, and that they had had to wrestle him all the way out the door in order to get him under control. His attorney obtained surveillance footage of him walking out of the building completely voluntarily, with no police in sight; he walked down the sidewalk and around the corner—where the police jumped on him. The case was dismissed.



2008 Summer Clerks

A seventeen-year-old with no prior record was charged with third degree burglary. He was about to graduate from high school, had good grades, and was

all ready to go into the Marines; but, he told his attorney, he'd just done something stupid one day, stealing money out of a vending machine with a few other kids. Under his original deal he was set to go on probation. This would disqualify him from the Marines and bar him from reapplying until three months after his probation ended. His attorney argued that her client wasn't going to offend again and was ready to pay restitution right there; the judge accepted his plea and adjudicated delinquency without placing him on probation.

REPORTS

An African American man was out taking a walk at 2:30 AM on a hot summer night. Suddenly, a stranger ran up to him and yelled, “That’s the guy!” Several police officers tackled him and arrested him. He had no idea what was going on.

A few days later, the man came to LRC with a charge of armed robbery. He had no prior record. His Community Advocate assisted with the investigation, and discovered a flaw in the evidence against him.

Two men had taken the victim’s wallet, and as he chased after them, he made a 911 call. He identified one of the perpetrators as an African American man wearing a yellow baseball hat. He wrote later in a statement for the police that the men never left his sight.

The Community Advocate listened to the recording of the 911 call to verify that the victim had been chasing his offenders. She could hear him breathing heavily during the phone call, but at one point he said to the operator, “Wait a minute, where’d they go?... There he is!” He had lost sight of the offenders, but then saw—he thought—the offender with the baseball hat. The Community Advocate then noticed in the arrest inventory that our client had been wearing a *red* baseball hat when he was apprehended. These discrepancies helped our attorney get an innocent man’s case dismissed.

A team of LRC attorneys, aided by law students, worked on a criminal sexual conduct juvenile case that looked bad from the beginning: newspaper coverage made the incident sound awful.

Evidence involved surveillance footage from two different levels of a high school staircase with large time segments missing. The student attorneys set up simultaneous projection to show the gaps in the recording, which was consistent with contradictions in witness statements discovered by the team. A careful reconstruction of evidence painted a very different portrait than the damning stories reported in the newspapers.

One of our legal co-directors considered this the best-prepared case he’d had in his career. Fully expecting to win at trial, the attorneys were informed by the prosecution the day prior that it would be dismissing the case.

One juvenile client was charged with eight felonies, including aggravated robbery.

The attorneys and assisting law students came to understand that the whole identification process had been wrong. The client and his cousin were apprehended in a different apartment in the building where the robbery took place half an hour after the incident had been reported. The police hadn’t yet cordoned off the area.

One of our attorneys wrote a

REPORTS

memorandum of law presenting a motion to suppress the identification as flawed. After the Rasmussen hearing, the judge said to the attorney, “That’s the best memorandum of law I’ve ever seen.” The judge has since suggested to other county attorneys that “you should get a copy of this and learn something.”



Volunteer attorney Carmen O'Halloran

A tall man in a pink shirt left a bar in downtown Minneapolis at closing time. Somewhat intoxicated, he was minding his own business when two women and a man across the street began taunting him about his pink shirt. He crossed the street and

yelled back at them—and then all three of them attacked him. In fighting the trio off, he pushed one of the women away from him, and she landed on her rear on the sidewalk.

When a police officer arrived, the woman said that the man in the pink shirt had pushed her for no reason. The police took him to jail for the night. Soon after, he was facing charges of assault. In court, the “victim” arrived with her male friend. The man told the prosecutor that our client had threatened to hit him, and the prosecutor tabbed three additional charges of assault.

Our client told his attorney that he had been drunk, but he didn’t remember hitting anyone. LRC investigators were able to locate surveillance footage of the incident, and the video clearly showed the accusing woman pushing our client three times before anything else happened. Then the three people jumped on our client, and he pushed back. The prosecutor dropped the case.

In June of 2009, the Star Tribune featured an article profiling Ambrose Achua, an ambitious young man graduating from high school after spending a fair amount of his time as a secondary student homeless. Ambrose went through the Legal Rights Center’s restorative program for public schools in the fall of 2008, and is now going on to post-secondary education.
Congratulations Ambrose!

YOUR SUPPORT

I am enclosing the following amount in support of the activities of the Legal Rights Center:

\$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$75 \$50 \$_____

I would like my gift to go to the following program:

- Unrestricted (wherever it is needed) Community Conflict Resolution
 Legal Defense and Advocacy Legal Education

Name(s) _____

Print your name as you would like it to appear in our publications.

I would like to remain anonymous.

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This gift is:

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