



Eviction Prevention Program Report

Since 2009, tenants facing eviction in Clark County have been able to obtain legal information, forms, and assistance from the Civil Law Self-Help Center at the Regional Justice Center. The Self-Help Center, operated by Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada in partnership with the Las Vegas Justice Court, Eighth Judicial District Court and other Clark County Justice Courts, functions as a legal emergency room, providing 40,000-50,000 people a year with the basic resources they need to defend themselves and navigate a confusing and intimidating court process. In addition to this critical help, the Center offers a widely used website, with an astonishing 1,000,000 total users each year. The website which has more than 300 user friendly court forms is widely viewed as the go-to place to get information and forms, by pro se litigants, attorneys, and even judicial law clerks.

Frequently, however, tenants need assistance beyond what the Self-Help Center can provide. Those tenants might need someone to negotiate on their behalf, write a letter, make a phone call, or perhaps even appear with them in eviction court to articulate a complicated argument for the judge. For those tenants, help in Clark County is extremely scarce and far outstripped by demand. While landlords routinely have attorneys to represent them in eviction court, an attorney appearing with a tenant in eviction court is a rare sight indeed.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. As the economy sank and unemployment rose, estimates warned that between 118,000 to 181,000 households in Nevada would face eviction in the absence of federal, state, and local protections.¹

To help curb that potential tsunami of evictions, Clark County generously awarded \$406,075 to Legal Aid Center to create a new Eviction Prevention Program. We started building the program in July 2020 by reassigning two talented and committed Legal Aid Center attorneys to the effort. We then began recruiting and were fortunate to hire two new legal advocates with proven track records (one, a former law clerk who had just taken the bar and would soon be admitted; the other, a former Legal Aid Center employee).

With that small (but mighty) team in place, we prioritized three objectives and focused our energy on those tasks.

First, we created an access point where tenants could easily obtain help and accurate, up-to-date information.

- We created a telephone hotline dedicated exclusively to eviction prevention. Tenants could call the hotline and speak with a legal advocate live to obtain up-to-date

¹ Memo from Nancy Brune of Guinn Center to Nevada Supreme Court, Sept. 22, 2020.

information about rental assistance programs, eviction moratoriums, and other federal, state, or local protections, among other things. If a tenant was potentially facing eviction, the advocate could explain the eviction process, provide legal forms and resources when necessary, and triage the situation for possible attorney assistance. And if the tenant wasn't facing eviction but was struggling with some other issue, such as food insecurity or unemployment, the advocate could refer the tenant to the appropriate community resources for help.

- Recognizing that hotline calls would quickly exceed resources, we also hired and trained a number of law students from UNLV who, under the supervision of our team, could also staff the hotline to provide assistance.

Second, we launched a campaign to increase the flow of accurate, up-to-date information to tenants, landlords, and the community more broadly.

- We put on some twenty-two individual trainings and outreach events related to eviction prevention. These trainings ranged from fairly unstructured Facebook Live events, where an attorney might give a short presentation then answer questions from participants, to more formal webinars, where an attorney would train the employees of a community nonprofit on eviction prevention, sometimes forty or fifty employees at a time, so those employees could, in turn, spread that information to their clients and contacts.
- We were interviewed some twenty-five times by local media outlets on various topics related to evictions and eviction prevention.
- We created a series of flyers and informational handouts that could be easily emailed to tenants and made available on Legal Aid Center's website. As eviction moratoriums and various protections and programs changed, the flyers and handouts were revised and updated.
- We maintained and updated the housing sections of Legal Aid Center's Legal & Financial Toolkit, a one-stop directory for COVID-related information and resources available on Legal Aid Center's website, ensuring that tenants had the most accurate information possible.

Third, we provided direct legal assistance to tenants in need.

- From the program's outset, it was apparent that tenant need had already exceeded the Eviction Prevention Team's capacity. Out of necessity, and to assist as many tenants as possible, cases were triaged so that a tenant's particular situation and needs informed the level of assistance, which might range from a brief consultation to address a simple question all the way to attorney representation at a hearing or on appeal. A monthly breakdown of tenants assisted is provided below. In 2020, **7,689** tenants were assisted.
- Working with the Boyd School of Law, we created a new community service program that allows law students to volunteer their time to help tenants complete eviction court

forms online utilizing a new program developed by the Civil Law Self-Help Center. While undoubtedly innovative, the new online program was proving difficult for some tenants to navigate, especially seniors and low-income tenants who lacked the required technology, forcing those tenants to make a trip to the courthouse to file. After reaching out to the law school, we now have fifteen law student volunteers ready to help. We are currently utilizing two law clerks on the program, which we started late December, and have already completed some 52 online interview programs for tenants.

Number of Tenants Assisted by Month

July 2020

- Open/Active Cases – **800**
- Closed Cases – **580**
- Cases active at the end of the month: **220**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **290**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **60**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **206**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **24**

August 2020

- Open/Active Cases – **1,021**
- Closed Cases – **843**
- Active at the end of the month: **178**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **443**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **142**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **234**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **24**

September 2020

- Open/Active Cases – **1,216**
- Closed Cases – **979**
- Active at the end of the month: **237**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **694**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **94**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **165**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **26**

October 2020:

- Open/Active Cases – **1,592**
- Closed Cases – **1,312**
- Active at the end of the month: **276**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **907**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **191**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **201**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **17**

November 2020:

- Open/Active Cases – **1,458**
- Closed Cases – **1,200**
- Active at the end of the month: **258**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **745**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **213**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **214**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **28**

December 2020

- Open/Active Cases – **1,602**
- Closed Cases – **1,452**
- Active at the end of the month: **128**

- **Client outcomes:**
 - Counsel and advice: **872**
 - Brief service, litigation, or mediation: **289**
 - Referred after legal assessment: **279**
 - Withdrew/lost contact: **34**

Client Stories

John

John was laid off of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, exhausted his savings, and fell behind on his rent. John had heard in the news that there was an eviction ban that would protect hardworking people like himself who had lost their job through no fault of their own. John had worked hard his entire adult life and didn't know how to continue to shelter himself now that he could no longer afford his rent. Fortunately, John's neighbor referred John to Legal Aid Center to discuss John's legal options. Legal Aid Center discussed both the federal and statewide

eviction moratoria, informing John that although there were protections for hardworking people like him, those protections needed to be invoked by completing and serving a tenant declaration. John's legal aid advocate assisted John with the tenant declaration and gave him instructions to serve the landlord. John's advocate also assisted John in completing an application for CHAP, which provides rental assistance to Clark County residents who have suffered substantial financial hardship and now lack sufficient income or resources to pay their rental housing costs and utilities because of the COVID-19 pandemic. After a short while, John was approved for CHAP rental assistance that cured his back rent. Now, John sleeps well with peace of mind that he had the guidance and legal information from Legal Aid Center that allowed him to keep his home while he gets back on his feet.

Penny and Robert

Penny and Robert, a married couple with a newborn baby, faced imminent eviction when Robert, the sole earner for the family, was laid off when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Not knowing where to turn, Penny contacted Clark County Social Service (CCSS) to ask for help. CCSS referred Penny to Legal Aid Center to obtain legal information and guidance. Legal Aid Center staff assisted Penny with eviction defense court forms, a tenant declaration to invoke the protections of the state and federal governments' eviction moratoria, and guidance in filing the forms with the court and serving the landlord. Legal Aid Center also agreed to represent Penny and Robert at an eviction mediation before the eviction hearing. At mediation, Penny's and Robert's Legal Aid Center attorney informed the landlord that he had assisted the young family in completing a CHAP rental assistance application that could cure the back rent, if the landlord could allow Penny and Robert some additional time before evicting. Robert and Penny also offered to make partial payments with Robert's unemployment income until the CHAP application was processed or Robert found work. The landlord was satisfied with the good-faith attempts of the young family to repay the rent and agreed to postpone the eviction until the CHAP application was processed. Fortunately, Penny and Robert were quickly approved for rental assistance and CHAP paid the entirety of Penny's and Robert's back rent. Robert subsequently found work and he and his young family are no longer in threat of becoming homeless.