

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 55 Years of Impact 1
- Message from the Executive Director 2
- Message from the Foundation President 2
- Pro Bono Success Story, Opportunities & Celebration 3
- 12th Annual HeART of Giving Celebration 4-5
- Leadership Circle Donors 6
- Julie Azuaje Fellowship 7
- Community Benefits Agreements for GRACE 7
- Virtual Alumni Panel Discussion 8
- Give Miami Day 8
- Young Professionals Council 8

Today, Legal Services of Greater Miami is considered a model program both in the state and the nation, even earning the Most Effective Public Interest Attorneys award in 2011, 2012, and 2014. We are a pillar of justice in this community.

Through everything – hurricanes, social unrest, economic downturns, and now, a global pandemic, **we remain committed to building a community of equal justice.** We have a strong history and together we will build an even stronger future.

Our work is possible because of the community of passionate advocates, bold volunteer leaders, and unwavering donors. **We thank you for standing by our side for 55 years!**

October 2021

1969

Successfully sued the State of Florida and the City of Miami Police Department to challenge a law that criminalized community members experiencing homelessness and joblessness.



Miami Attorney Howard Dixon At Hearing

Miami attorney Howard Dixon appears before the John committee investigating the NAACP. With Mr. Dixon is his legal counsel, Tobias

Simon, left. The attorney denied he was a member of the Communist Party, he also said at one time he was attorney for the NAACP.

Howard Dixon, Executive Director Economic Opportunity Legal Services Program, Inc.

1972

Won a landmark case in the U.S. Supreme Court: **Fuentes v. Shevin**. With only \$200 remaining to pay on her appliances, Ms. Fuentes suddenly found herself in court with the store taking back her appliances without any due process. We challenged the constitutionality of the law and won – providing additional due process protections nationwide.



1980s

Created the Aids Legal Advocacy Project. At a time when those with the disease were ostracized, we advocated for greater access to healthcare and housing and fought discrimination.



1992

Established a disaster response unit to handle legal matters as a result of Hurricane Andrew's widespread devastation to South Dade. Among many other tragic cases, we represented two infants who lost their parents in the Hurricane, ensuring they received survivor benefits. We stayed the course representing hundreds of survivors in legal matters for more than a decade and ensuring the community a better opportunity to rebuild.



2010

Represented six (6) nonprofit developers and a local municipality in applying for and receiving \$89 million in grant funds to create and renovate 1,255 affordable housing units, while we provided ongoing legal assistance to the nonprofit developers.



2012

Successfully advocated for 8,000 children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to gain access to a critical behavior therapy improving their opportunities at achieving their developmental and educational potential.



2016

Challenged state law that disqualified disabled veterans from receiving food stamps if they did not comply with work requirements. The result was a new policy exempting veterans receiving VA disability benefits from the strict work requirements and thus expanding access to benefits for those who served our country.



2020

Represented thousands during COVID-19 pandemic to ensure access to vital government benefits, safe and affordable housing, and provided small, minority owned businesses with critical legal assistance during the crisis.





From the Executive Director Monica Vignes-Pitan

For 55 years, Legal Services of Greater Miami has been a powerful advocate for equal justice in our community. We opened our doors in 1966 with a small team of trailblazing attorneys who built a strong foundation upon which our organization stands today. Their initial advocacy for economic, social and racial justice was met with hostility from much of the legal community as well as some community leaders. Their collective, brave, and tireless efforts **shaped and enabled us to work towards ensuring justice and economic opportunity for all.** Their success also demonstrated the efficacy of our advocacy model and garnered the support of both the legal and civic leaders. **Today's challenges are just as complex, and, with your continued support, our legal advocacy continues to achieve transformational change for our clients and community.**

To further support our transformational efforts, **Jacqueline Allee Smith left a generous bequest of more than \$3 million dollars.** Jackie was a pioneer and leader in the legal community. Her gift **showcases her passion to use the law to better the lives of those who could not afford legal representation** and continues her legacy of leadership and service. It will support current advocacy as well as allow us to plan to meet the increasing and changing legal needs of our community. As our country and community work to recover from the pandemic, **these funds will support advocacy to ensure that the economic recovery extends to all members of our community.** We are extremely grateful for her leadership and gift supporting access to justice. Her legacy will help Build a Community of Equal Justice.

How You Can Help

Lamenting Miami-Dade's notoriously high poverty rate does nothing to ease the burdens of those trapped within it. That job falls to non-profit organizations like Legal Services who shoulder these burdens by dedicating themselves to providing much-needed services to help our low-income community. **Legal Services serves Miami-Dade and Monroe County residents by helping those in need navigate challenging legal obstacles inherent in bureaucracies or erected by those with more power and money.**

It also falls to those of us who can contribute less directly, but no less importantly, through donations of time and money. Those contributions have enabled Legal Services through the Legal Services of Greater Miami Foundation, established in 2015, to assure the community that it will persist in its mission into the future.

The Foundation's substantial endowment ensures that Legal Services, even in the leanest of years, will have the resources it needs to maintain its service to the community. All Foundation gifts are professionally managed by advisors to preserve and grow the endowment. Legal Services' highly qualified attorneys and staff have for decades sacrificed other career opportunities to provide for those most in need in our community. The Foundation was created and exists so that their expression of love and compassion for the community's most disadvantaged can continue for decades to come.

Click [HERE](#) to make a gift today.



Kevin P. Jacobs

Managing Partner, Homer Bonner Jacobs Ortiz



From the Foundation Board President Kevin P. Jacobs

Pro Bono Service Leads to Economic Stability



Karen Lapekas, Esq.
Lapekas Law

Legal Services Board Treasurer, Karen Lapekas leads the committee whose main goal is to assist with spearheading pro bono events to help our low-income community. Karen was instrumental in the launch of our Claims of Exemption Justice Project. Approximately 7% of employees in the U.S. have their wages garnished annually. The pro bono Claims of Exemption Justice Project provides low-income clients access to attorneys to provide effective representation to prevent the garnishment of wages or property specifically exempted from seizure under the law.

When hearing about our new pro bono initiative funded by The Florida Bar Foundation, Karen immediately committed to the Projects' success. In full leadership mode, she utilized social media to educate and recruit potential pro bono attorneys to assist with the Project.

Thanks to Karen's efforts our first inaugural training was held, and her active role facilitated the recruitment of pro bono attorneys to be on board to assist clients who are facing improper garnishment of their bank accounts.

Karen is a true pro bono leader, and she helped the very first Project client and subsequently took a second case. In the first case, Karen was able to assist a father of six whose bank account was being garnished because of an automobile loan. Sam was the sole provider for the family when his bank account was frozen. Believing his family would be evicted, and that bankruptcy was his only option, Sam was distressed as he was working hard, and his rent was due.

In the second case, Janise lost her job and later her son passed away, both due to COVID-19. Although she was actively searching for work, Janise had unsuccessful job searches and was receiving unemployment compensation benefits. Because of her financial circumstances she was living with her ex-spouse and his family. Her bank account only had her unemployment compensation, and it was being wrongfully garnished.

In both cases Karen's precise, cordial, and factual engagement with opposing counsel led to a Notice of Dismissal of the garnishment action.

Sam's family was not evicted and remained in the home they had for several years. Janise was able to maintain the limited independence that her unemployment compensation afforded her.

Pro bono assistance on these cases is vital to the economic stability of struggling households, which in turn stimulates the economy. Represented clients can maintain economic security by avoiding garnishment of exempt wages and property.



SUPPORT EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH PRO BONO SERVICE

Follow Karen's lead as well as countless other pro bono attorneys who give of their time and skills to create a meaningful impact on someone's life. Now more than ever, there is a huge critical need for pro bono attorneys to help fill the gaps that will arise out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES

Remote Tenants' Equal Justice Clinic

Designed for pro bono attorneys to give free legal advice to low-income individuals whose landlord has not returned a security deposit or clients who are living in unsuitable, unsafe, or unhealthy living conditions. Attorneys assist with initiating pro se Small Claims Court cases or drafting letters to assist the client in curing legal issues that impede stable housing or habitability. Types of cases: Security deposit, prohibited practices, conditions cases. *CLE training available— 1 General and 1 Real Estate.*

Remote Consumer Equal Justice Clinic

Designed for pro bono attorneys to give free legal advice and brief service to low-income individuals who face abusive debt collection problems. Types of cases: collection issues for credit card debt, medical debt, and auto loan deficiencies, collector harassment, identity theft fraud, credit reporting errors. *CLE training available— 2 General and 2 Business Litigation.*

Transactional Equal Justice Project

The Transactional Equal Justice Project is a collaboration where firms and corporate law departments assist eligible Legal Services clients in the areas of tax, estate planning, small business startup consultation, and nonprofit work. The Project was originally founded in 2017 in response to feedback from transactional attorneys for more transactional pro bono opportunities to use their specialized legal skills to serve the public good. The Project goal seeks to incorporate collaboration and business development with corporations in South Florida.

Eviction Defense Project

Designed for pro bono attorneys to represent low income clients facing eviction and assist with defense of case to prevent eviction record. These are full representation matters and can include negotiating with landlord, filing responsive pleadings, mediation, filing counterclaims. *On demand CLE training — 2 General — is provided with a form bank and wraparound pro bono attorney assistance.*

For a complete listing of Clinic dates, contact Chief Diversity Officer & Pro Bono Advocacy Director Jayme Cassidy at JCassidy@legalservicesmiami.org.

Mentorship and malpractice insurance provided.

STEP UP TO MAKE AN IMPACT

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL HEART OF GIVING



After receiving her award, **Judge Marcia G. Cooke** stands with **Manuel Dobrinsky**, **Monica Vignes-Pitan**, **Neki Mohan**, and **Lilly Ann Sanchez**.



Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava accepts award and delivers remarks.



Robert Fatovic, EVP, Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary of **Ryder System**, the event's **Title Sponsor** sharing a touching and poignant message confirming a multi-year gift in memory of **Julie Azuaje**, recently deceased Ryder counsel and 15-year Legal Services board member.



Special guest appearance by **R. Donahue Peebles**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the **Peebles Corporation**, as he posthumously presents **Jacqueline Allee Smith** with the **Equal Justice Philanthropic Award**.



Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava with **Lilly Ann Sanchez**, HeART of Giving Celebration Chair.



Army Veteran Felix Cepeda shares how Legal Services successfully assisted him with his wrongful military discharge and denial of VA disability benefits. The outcome was **life changing** as it gave him and his family the financial stability he rightfully earned.



Full of talent, **Nicole Henry**, characterized as one of the jazz world's most acclaimed vocalists, enchanted viewers with a powerful tribute performance to **Julie Azuaje** and her rendition of *Imagine* at the finale.

From Our Hearts to Yours, THANK YOU!

We went virtual again this year for the 12th Annual HeART of Giving Celebration, as we proudly presented the **2021 Equal Justice Leadership Award** to the **Honorable Daniella Levine Cava**, Mayor of **Miami-Dade County**, the **2021 Equal Justice Judicial Leadership Award** to the **Honorable Marcia G. Cooke**, Judge of the **U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida**, and the **Equal Justice Philanthropic Award** posthumously to **Jacqueline Allee Smith**.

The celebration was co-hosted by **Legal Services Campaign Committee Co-Chair, Lilly Ann Sanchez**, as well as **Legal Services Board President Manuel Dobrinsky** and **Legal Services Executive Director Monica Vignes-Pitan**.

CELEBRATION & JUDICIAL RECEPTION



A few members of Legal Services' leadership attend the small reception for the presenters and award winners. Among them are **Darrell Payne** (Board Member), **Joseph Pack** (Campaign Committee), **Jesika D. Munar** (Board Member), **Arya Li** (Board Secretary), **Manuel Dobrinsky** (Board President), **Monica Vignes-Pitan** (Executive Director), and **Lilly Ann Sanchez** (Campaign Committee Chair).

Jacqueline Allee Smith honored posthumously with Equal Justice Philanthropic Legacy Award for largest single gift in Legal Services' history.



The bequest totaling **more than \$3 million is the largest single gift to Legal Services.**

Jackie was a pioneer and leader in the legal community. She was the **third dean of the St. Thomas University**

School of Law and one of only six women serving as law school deans in the country in the 1990s. Prior to taking the leadership of St. Thomas, Jackie was a partner and head of the bankruptcy department at **Holland & Knight** where she met the love of her life, Chesterfield Smith. They both shared a mutual commitment to equal justice for all.

After a decades-long relationship with Legal Services, Jackie entrusted us with this gift to support those who selflessly dedicate their time and talent to serving this community, and to carry out the mission that she and Chesterfield so fervently believed in, to continue to "Do Good." This gift showcases Jackie's passion to use the law to better the lives of those who could not afford legal representation and continues her legacy of leadership and service.



Lilly Ann Sanchez, Manuel Dobrinsky, and Monica Vignes-Pitan pose with **Mayor Levine-Cava** after presenting her with the 2021 Equal Justice Leadership Award



Legal Services Deputy Director of Operations **Vivian Chavez** stands with **Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz** and **Commissioner Sally Heyman**. Chairman Diaz congratulated the honoree during his remarks.

The celebration began with a wonderful performance by **Nicole Henry, Award-Winning Jazz Singer**, a warm welcome by **Celebrity Host Neki Mohan**, as well as heartfelt messages from **Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Legal Services Client, Army Veteran Felix Cepeda**, and **Title Sponsor, Ryder System**. Recognized throughout the presentation were the outstanding sponsors dedicated to the support and mission of Legal Services.

To view the HeART of Giving Celebration on demand, [CLICK HERE](#).

Our work is made possible through the generous support of our

Leadership Circle Donors

Blue Diamond 100,000+

Edie Laquer Foundation – *Endowed Women & Children's Rights Attorney Chair*

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Donor Levels Reflect Cumulative Giving for the Campaign Period from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022.

As of 10/6/2021

Contact MViguesPitan@legalservicesmiami.org for information on joining the Leadership Circle.

Ryder Establishes the Julie Azuaje Fellowship



Legal Services sincerely thanks and recognizes Ryder for its \$50,000 multi-year inaugural pledge over five years designed to fund the Julie Azuaje Legal Fellowship in honor of General Counsel Julie Azuaje, who served on the Legal Services Board of Directors for almost 15 years and was First Vice-President.

Julie was a dedicated leader and fierce advocate for the underserved. As a board member, she was reliable, competent, and frequently asked tough strategic questions in her gentle manner. Despite the high demands on her time professionally, she was tirelessly devoted to service. She continuously volunteered her time and energy to make a difference in the lives of others.

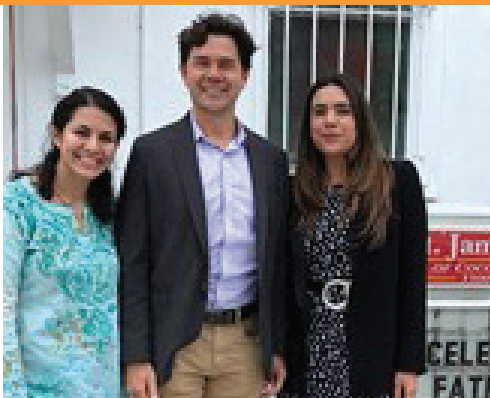
This tribute gift from Ryder is intended to provide financial support for the Julie Azuaje Legal Fellowship, which will preserve her legacy of social justice advocacy. Her exemplary leadership shall serve as a role model for future young lawyers selected to be fellows. Fellows will be exposed to real-world client experiences, which will help them develop professional legal skills and provide critical support for Legal Services' attorneys who strive to provide low-income clients with the highest quality legal advocacy. Most importantly, the fellowship provides an opportunity to instill in the younger generation a commitment to service.

"Julie brought a special combination of knowledge, grace, and kindness, and her exemplary care and efforts were meaningful and appreciated," said Monica Vignes-Pitan, Legal Services Executive

Director. "We are truly grateful to Ryder for this thoughtful, generous gift in Julie's memory, which will allow us to address the growing legal needs of low-income families at a time when the pandemic continues to threaten their financial stability."

It is fitting that Ryder chose to make this announcement at our Twelfth Annual Heart of Giving Celebration and Judicial Reception, an event Julie was proud to support each year. In addition to this recent gift, Ryder has been a long-time sponsor of this event and served once again as this year's Title Sponsor. Pursuant to these cumulative gifts, the Ryder Charitable Foundation will be recognized at Diamond level on our Leadership Circle.

LEGAL SERVICES HELPS NEGOTIATE COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS IN WEST GROVE



Daniela Cimo (far right) with law student, Daniela Tagtachian, and Miami City Commissioner Ken Russell outside the 104-year-old church on the corner of Charles Av. and Hibiscus St., where over 100 people filled the 10 rows of pews for a community meeting about the West Grove.

Once a vibrant black community, the West Grove suffered decades of racial segregation and disinvestment, making this neighborhood particularly vulnerable to gentrification. This development often displaces residents and businesses that have called the neighborhood their home for generations.

To foster a more equitable form of gentrification, the West Grove community, its residents, historic black churches, communi-

ty organizations, and other stakeholders, formed the nonprofit organization "Grove Rights and Community Equity", or "GRACE" with the assistance of Legal Services' Community and Economic Development unit.

Using a "community lawyering" approach, Legal Services works alongside GRACE to ensure the community, and those most impacted by displacement, are leading the efforts to combat gentrification.

For GRACE, this means negotiating Community Benefit Agreements with the investors and developers flocking into the West Grove. Community Benefit Agreements are contracts with developers. In exchange for public support, developers must provide opportunities and benefits to the community such as affordable housing, employment opportunities and training, community spaces, public amenities, and other benefits for the current residents.

Legal Services' attorney Daniela Cimo represented GRACE and led the team negotiating

the Community Benefits Agreements with developers in the West Grove. Legal Services represented GRACE in several City of Miami hearings to ensure the City heard the voices of West Grove residents in the development process.



Daniela Cimo
Staff Attorney

Legal Services successfully negotiated two Community Benefit Agreements with developers on GRACE's behalf. These agreement secure funding for home repairs for West Grove residents, job training programs, and affordable housing set-aside for the West Grove's low-income residents.

As more and more developers snap up prime real estate in the neighborhood, GRACE's role supporting the West Grove community and Legal Services' role in supporting GRACE are becoming even more important in the future.



Marcia Cypen
Former Executive Director,
Legal Services



Terry Ann Howell
Former Staff Attorney,
Legal Services



Rene Murai
Former Staff Attorney,
Legal Services



Darrell Payne
Board Member & Past President,
Legal Services

Virtual Alumni Panel Discussion In Celebration of 55 Years of Service

Wednesday, Nov. 10th, 2021 | 6pm | Via Zoom

Link: us02web.zoom.us/j/85140892931 | Meeting ID: 851 4089 2931 | Dial in number: (929) 205-6099



SAVE THE DATE!

The Miami Foundation
GiveMiamiDay
ANNIVERSARY

11.18.21

SAVE OUR LINK



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The Young Professionals Council is a group of professionals with diverse backgrounds and careers who are dedicated to Legal Services' mission of providing high-quality, free civil legal services to low-income individuals and families in Miami Dade and Monroe Counties.

Contact JGeeker@legalservicesmiami.org for information on the Young Professionals Council.