

Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc.  
**2017 ANNUAL REPORT**



CIVIL LEGAL AID SINCE 1978

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CLAY • COLUMBIA • DIXIE • DUVAL  
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Offices in Gainesville • Lake City • Jacksonville

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Toll Free 866-256-8091

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## A Message from Board President, Ray Brady

Dear Friends,

It has been my pleasure and true privilege to serve another year as President of the Board of Directors of Three Rivers Legal Services. This past year has been one of continued progress and growth for Three Rivers. For example, our clients obtained cumulative benefits in excess of \$3 million. We created a Senior Medical Legal Partnership with Elder Affairs and UF Health. And Three Rivers' work with those facing homelessness expanded and, in general, we continued to accomplish positive outcomes for our clients. Three Rivers also faced (and successfully resolved) several challenges, including the move of the Gainesville office to a new and smaller location, and the loss of several staff and members of the Board of Directors.

I could not be more proud of the outstanding work and passion of the exceptional attorneys, staff, law students, and volunteers of Three Rivers. Sincere thanks also are due to the committed Board of Directors, and the generous donors and funders, and supportive community partners, of Three Rivers. I encourage you to review the accomplishments of Three Rivers highlighted in this Annual Report, and ask also that you recognize the on-going funding needs that Three Rivers faces in providing their much-needed services. We need, and very much appreciate, your continued support!



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc. is guided by a 15 member Board of Directors. Five board members represent low-income client groups or are low-income clients themselves. The other members are attorneys recommended by local bar associations and one community representative.

**Raymond F. Brady - President**  
**Bill Salmon - Vice President**  
**Leslie Jean-Bart - Secretary**  
**Leslie Haswell - Treasurer**

#### Members:

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**Roger W. Cruce, Esq.**  
**Paula Everett**  
**Blaine Harrison**  
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**Thelma Johnson**  
**Thomas Stone, Esq.**  
**Kevin McNeill, Esq.**  
**Elizabeth Rosado, Esq.**  
**LaTonya Star-Porter**  
**Katherine 'Kasey' Wagner, Esq.**



## A Message from Executive Director, Christine Larson

Dear Friends,

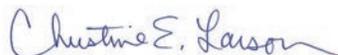
We are so pleased to be celebrating our 40th Anniversary.

It does not seem possible that we first opened our doors to serve clients in 1978. Just thinking about it takes us back. In 1978, Jimmy Carter was our President, crowds lined up at the movies to see Saturday Night Fever and Grease, gasoline cost 78 cents per gallon, NASA unveiled its first group of female astronauts, Egypt and Israel signed the Camp David Peace accords, and a treaty was signed which eventually returned the Panama canal to Panama. Meanwhile, in Northeast Florida, a small group of visionary lawyers put together the first framework for our legal aid program; a program that went on to be highly successful in serving countless numbers of poor families for decades.

While we are rightfully proud of our history, we cannot rest on our past successes. Three Rivers is always striving to serve in new and transformative ways. In the past year, we have moved forward with some innovative projects that will continue to insure that help reaches the most vulnerable. These include: 1) a new Medical-Legal Partnership with UF Health/Shands to address abuse, neglect and exploitation of frail seniors, 2) a new outreach project to persons experiencing homelessness that will embed a paralegal into the coordinated intake system of our local homeless coalition, 3) a dedicated staff attorney who is now working with victims of Hurricane Irma to make sure their rights are protected, and 4) a new alliance with a children's rights group, that seeks to help youth escape the school to prison pipeline through early intervention and the protection of their rights.

Our struggle to find new and cutting edge ways to overcome poverty and injustice is constant. We must always remain relevant in our clients' lives. All of us are so grateful to have your support in this effort. We could not do this without you.

With thanks,



*"I think the first duty of society is justice."*

- Alexander Hamilton

# HOW WE HELP OUR CLIENTS

We closed cases for 3,306 clients in 2017; here are some of their stories:

AB is an elderly woman from a rural area who came to Three Rivers in fear of her son, who had a history of criminal involvement and other problems. He had come to her home, refused to leave, and pushed her to the floor. In pain, she crawled into her bedroom, called the police, and hid until they arrived. Three Rivers assisted her in obtaining an injunction for protection prohibiting him from coming near her home or contacting her in any way. AB feels safer and is very relieved.

CD worked long hours at a hospital, but was barely able to meet her obligations. She had an oral agreement with the manager of her apartment to make her rent payments bi-weekly with her paychecks. When a new manager came, he ignored the oral agreement and filed an eviction when her rent was late due to Hurricane Irma. The eviction surprised her because she hadn't received any prior notice. Three Rivers filed responsive pleadings, CD deposited her rent with the court, and a settlement was reached. CD has serious health issues and was grateful that she could stay in her home, and focus on her health.

EF is a veteran who had injured his spine while serving in the military during the 1970's. He suffered from crippling back pain but had been unable to make a successful claim for Veterans Benefits. TRLS helped him with an appeal using old medical records and testimony from his family members to show that his injuries were service connected. EF was found partially disabled, received a lump sum back award and now has an ongoing monthly stipend to help with his living expenses.

GH is a hard working single mother of four children and two grandchildren. Served with foreclosure on her rural home in 2007, she did not come to our office until 2010 when a judgment had been entered against her. She had tried unsuccessfully to apply for a modification and had sent \$14,000 in payments prior to the judgment. Three Rivers entered the case, defended her in court, and eventually got the foreclosure dismissed. We helped her to apply again for a modification, showing increased income from her job. We were also able to get some of the loan amount forgiven. It took almost ten years but GH never lost faith, and is still in her home.



Staff attorney Dominique Lochridge-Gonzalez

IJ was the victim of severe abuse, for which her husband had been jailed. She contacted us because she was in fear for the life of her child, and for her own life. She had an order of protection but her husband continued to call her from jail to let her know that he would not obey the order. We helped IJ file for divorce and asked for supervised visitation for the father. Our client was awarded a divorce, child support, and full custody of the child. With our help she was able to move to a secure location and begin to build a new life for her family.

**Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc. is a non-profit law firm dedicated to the provision of quality legal assistance to the poor, abused, disabled and neglected, and to empowerment through preventive legal education.**

# IMPACTING THE LIVES OF OUR CLIENTS

**Disaster/Hurricane Irma Assistance** - assisting with legal issues and challenges that arise following natural disasters, such as appealing FEMA claim denials, obtaining disaster food assistance or re-employment benefits, and dealing with insurance companies, contractors, mortgage companies and landlords.

**Domestic Violence Protection** - helping victims of domestic or intimate partner violence in cases that cover many of areas of law. We work with shelters and victims' advocates to help survivors find safety and stability, helping them to obtain such things as an injunction for protection, a dissolution of marriage, time sharing with the children, or permission to relocate.

**Education Advocacy** - providing help to ensure that every child has the right to free, quality education, particularly helping with special education aids, placement issues and disciplinary procedures.

**Foreclosure Prevention** - working with homeowners to try to save their homes. We can help with a response to the foreclosure complaint, assist in the completion of the paperwork to apply for a loan modification, or negotiate an exit with dignity in the form of a short sale, or cash for keys. We also help with foreclosures arising from reverse mortgages.

**Homelessness Prevention Project** - assisting and advocating on behalf of homeless persons with disability and public benefit issues, meeting them where they are (in the woods, the library, in shelter). This is a collaborative project with the North Central Florida Alliance for Continuum of Care.

**Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic** - representing low income persons before the IRS in audits, appeals, collections, tax debt relief and other disputes.

**Pro Bono Program** - Working with volunteer attorneys and law students to provide representation, brief services, advice and community education to our clients. Projects include Ask-A-Lawyer for the homeless, Advance Directives Clinics, Small Claims Clinic, Project R, Veterans Outreach, and Pro Se Family Law Clinics.

**Senior Medical Legal Partnership** - this new holistic model of care teams health care providers at UF Health/Shands with legal assistance to solve social, economic, and environmental problems that may be effecting patient health. Senior patients are referred for assistance through the hospital staff. Our advocates are located within the hospital, are able to meet with the referred clients without delay, and work with hospital staff to resolve the problems.

**Veterans Assistance** - advocating for veterans and their families on issues such as housing, income, family, disability and VA or veterans benefits.



DV Attorney Merise Jalali



Three Rivers Legal Services Staff Retreat

## 2017 CUMULATIVE BENEFIT AMOUNTS OBTAINED FOR CLIENTS

Tax Relief	\$	96,160
Social Security, Reemployment, Other Public Benefits	\$	610,110
Consumer Law and Debt Relief	\$	101,944
Alimony, Child Support, Family Law	\$	423,141
Educational Benefits and Supports	\$	77,700
Assets obtained in Probate	\$	697,406
Housing and Real Property	\$	1,079,384
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>3,085,845</b>



LSC President James Sandman and  
TRLS Executive Director Christine Larson

**Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc.** is a private, not-for-profit corporation serving North Florida since 1978. TRLS provides free civil legal help to indigent families and veterans in seventeen counties with three offices and a staff of 37, including 22 attorneys. We also provide legal information and education to low income persons and groups. Our offices, open Monday through Friday, are located in **Jacksonville, Gainesville and Lake City.**

Applicants can access services through a toll free helpline number **866-256-8091** or they can come in-person to one of the three offices.

This service area covers more than **11,000 square miles.** within this area, there are approximately **318,000** individuals living in poverty. The rural parts of our region face many challenges, including the fact that many of the counties we serve have the lowest number of attorneys per capita in Florida. However, we are fortunate to have two law schools in our service area and to be able to recruit well trained and motivated student volunteers to assist with our work.

In cases closed in 2017, we served over 663 seniors, 393 veterans, and 923 survivors of domestic violence.



Volunteer attorneys and law students at Ask-A-Lawyer event in Chiefland

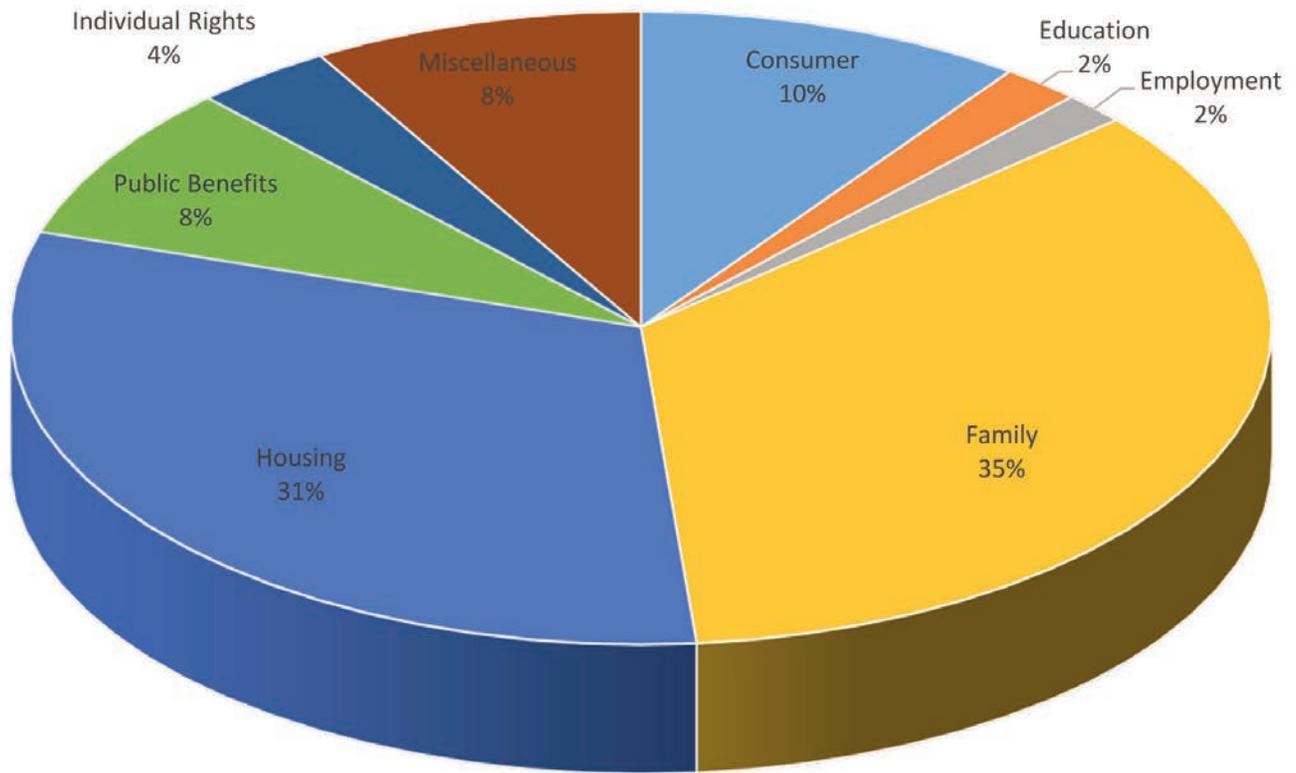


Our late Foreclosure Specialist Tom Depeter



Recognizing volunteer attorneys and colleagues in Jacksonville

## Legal Issues for 3,305 Cases Closed in 2017



Staff attorney Lisette Deleon and Equal Justice Works Fellow Katrina Hamilton at Veteran's Outreach in Jacksonville

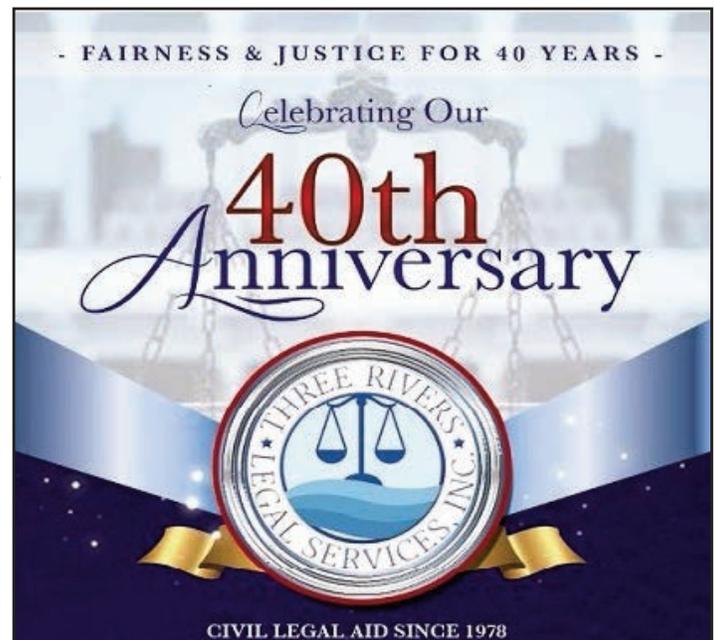


Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Director Lakesha Thomas preparing for radio presentation

# 40 YEARS OF CIVIL LEGAL AID

In 2018, Three Rivers Legal Services celebrates its 40th Anniversary of providing free, civil legal services to North Florida's low income and vulnerable populations. It's hard for us to believe we have been in business for so long, accomplished and grown so much, served so many people, and grown such deep roots. We have a proud history, a story which actually began in 1964.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty and later that year, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act. It provided the initial federal funding for the provision of a nationwide system of help for the poor. Programs such as Head Start and Job Corps were part of that Act. Legal services were also included in the effort to end poverty. As President Johnson stated, "To a great many poor Americans, the law has long been an alien force ... the Legal Services Program was created to give the poor the same access to the protection of the law that more fortunate citizens have.. It is a weapon in our comprehensive attack on the root causes of poverty ..."



President Johnson's chosen head of the War on Poverty, President John F. Kennedy's brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, placed a strong emphasis on a nationwide system of legal services, as part of the effort. He once remarked "... I am proudest of Legal Services because I recognized that it had the greatest potential for changing the system under which people's lives were being exploited. I was proud of the young lawyers who turned down fat, corporate practices to work for the poor." In 1974, the Legal Services Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon, actually creating a separate federal agency, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), and in 1977 LSC began to make funds available to local legal aid programs across the country.

Meanwhile, in Florida, during the early 1970s, a group of Gainesville attorneys and University of Florida College of Law professors banded together and formed a legal aid clinic known as Storefront Legal Aid. Local attorneys were instrumental in forming clinics and other opportunities for volunteer attorneys to provide legal services to low-income clients of Storefront Legal Aid.

In 1977, Storefront Legal Aid joined forces with the legal aid branch of the Suwannee River Economic Council in Live Oak to form Three Rivers Legal Services, and they applied for funding from LSC. With new grant funds, Three Rivers began serving clients in seven North Central Florida counties in 1978. Three Rivers opened with small offices in Gainesville and Lake City led by our first Executive Director, Robert Graddy. That first staff consisted of three attorneys and three paralegals plus a small clerical staff. One year later, the service area increased to include the 12 counties of the Eighth and Third Judicial Circuits.

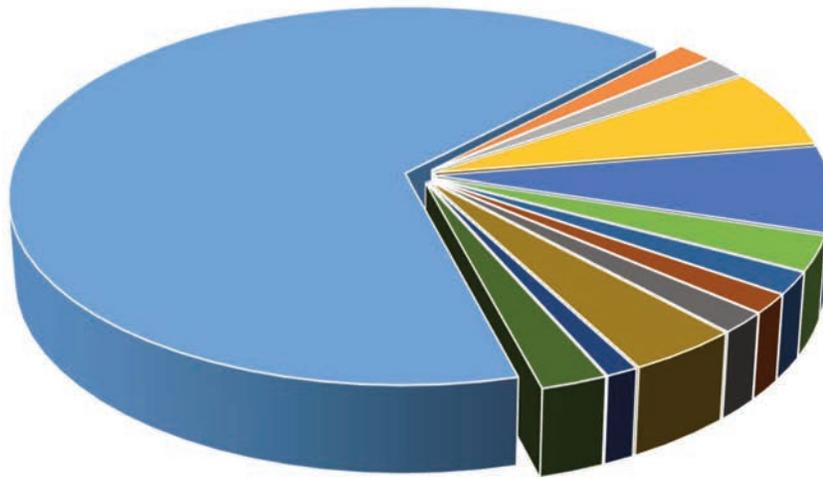
As a grantee of LSC, Three Rivers' budgets have ebbed and flowed throughout the 40 years, based on available federal resources. When The Florida Bar founded The Florida Bar Foundation in 1981 and created the first Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts program in the United States, additional funding helped supplement the federal grants received by Three Rivers.

In 2004, under the leadership of Executive Director Allison Thompson, Three Rivers opened a third office in Jacksonville as part of a statewide restructuring of programs and services. Our service area grew to cover 17 counties and currently provides services from the Georgia border to the southern edge of Alachua County, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Under the current leadership of Executive Director Christine Larson, Three Rivers is funded by over thirty grants, with a staff of 20 attorneys, 4 paralegals, 9 support staff and a small administrative team. We are fortunate to have numerous volunteer attorneys and law students help with accomplishing our mission.

Forty years ago, Three Rivers opened the doors to become the provider of much needed free civil legal services to the poor. Throughout those 40 years, our mission has remained clear: to provide quality legal assistance to the poor, abused, disabled and elderly and to empower through preventive legal education. It is a mission we undertake with pride.

# 2017 Sources of Funding

\$3,224,109 Total



- Legal Services Corporation - \$2,137,273
- Florida Bar Foundation - \$54,778
- United Way/Local Grants - \$61,627
- Florida Attorney General - \$216,485
- Department of Justice - \$235,801
- Older Americans Act - \$96,432
- Veterans Administration - \$60,729
- IRS - \$53,000
- Other Federal - \$58,368
- County Court Fees - \$132,429
- Attorney Fees - \$38,200
- Donations, Interest, Other - \$78,986

**The Legal Services Corporation**  
**The Florida Bar Foundation**  
**Office of the Florida Attorney General**  
**Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence**  
**Department of Children & Families**  
**Equal Justice Works - AmeriCorps**  
**Internal Revenue Service**  
**United Way of North Central Florida**  
**United Way of Suwannee Valley**  
**Santa Fe College**  
**USDA Rural Development**  
**City of Gainesville CDBG**  
**HUD Continuum of Care**

**University of Florida Community Campaign**  
**Alachua County Community Agency**  
**Partnership Program**  
**Supportive Services for Veteran's Families with Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Volunteers of America, Family Endeavors & Changing Homelessness**  
**County Commissions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, & Union Counties**  
**Elder Options in Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Suwannee & Union Counties**



Three Rivers Legal Services is very grateful to the attorneys and other advocates in our community who have provided services, made donations and otherwise supported Three Rivers Legal Services in achieving our mission. We are humbled by the good deeds of our legal community and the volunteers who help us accomplish so much more than we could do on our own. Our program and our clients are reliant on the generosity of those who have volunteered their time, shared their expertise and/or made donations to our program in the past year. The low income residents of our community need access to our civil legal system and we are grateful to those who recognize this and help make so much possible.