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 more than 50, including 24 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 866-256-809, come in-person to one of the three offices or they can apply on-line through our website at www.trls.org.

The service area covers more than 11,000 square miles. Within this area, there are approximately 310,000 individuals living below poverty guidelines. 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. We are fortunate, however, 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 2019, we served over 10,104 persons in households, including 1,278 seniors, 718 veterans, and 1,182 survivors of domestic violence.

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 elderly, and to empowerment through preventive legal education.
A Message from Board President, Leslie Haswell

Dear Friends,

It is an honor to serve, not only as a board member of an organization of which I have long been a volunteer attorney and a fan, but as the incoming President of the Board of Directors for Three Rivers Legal Services. As you will see from this Annual Report, the past year was one of progress and accomplishment. In 2019, Three Rivers closed 3,366 cases for low-income families and recovered benefits and other financial awards for clients valued at more than $3.5 million dollars. We expanded our services to veterans, the elderly, persons experiencing homelessness, low income taxpayers, and survivors of domestic violence. We are happy and proud of our contribution to the North Florida community in 2019.

However, 2020 is set to be a year of challenge and uncertainty as our communities face the COVID-19 crisis. Unemployment rates have reached record highs, bringing fears of loss of income, eviction, foreclosure, and inadequate nutrition, and we suspect, greater incidents of domestic violence to a growing number of Florida citizens. Now more than ever, the services provided by Three Rivers’ staff and volunteers will be essential to meeting the critical needs of so many people, as they seek to rebuild from this pandemic.

Many thanks to LSC, our committed Board of Directors, dedicated volunteers, hardworking staff and law students, generous donors, other funders, and supportive community partners. We admire and are grateful for your commitment to fairness and justice for all. In 2020, your continued support will be invaluable as we move into an uncertain future.

With deep appreciation,

Leslie Haswell, President

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**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.

**2020 Board of Directors**

Leslie S. Haswell, Esq.
President, Gainesville

Katherine ‘Kasey’ Wagner, Esq.
Vice President, Jacksonville

LaTonya Star Porter, Secretary
Gainesville

Roger W. Cruce, Esq.
Treasurer, Orange Park

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Amber R. Donley, Esq.
Orange Park

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Gainesville

Blaine Harrison, Starke

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Yvens Pierre-Antoine, Esq.
Gainesville

Elizabeth Rosado, Esq., Live Oak

Monica Taibl, Esq., Madison

Dawn Vallejos-Nichols, Esq.
Gainesville

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**Legal Issues for 3,366 Cases Closed in 2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/Tax</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefits</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Rights</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CASES CLOSED 3,366**

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**IMPACTING THE LIVES OF OUR CLIENTS**

- Education Advocacy
- Domestic Violence Protection
- Foreclosure Prevention
- Homelessness Prevention Project
- Senior Medical Legal Partnership
- Veterans Assistance
- Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic
- Disaster/Hurricane Irma Assistance
- Pro Bono Program

**Clinics:** Small Claims, Advance Directives, Pro Se Family

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**Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin.**

~ Dwight D. Eisenhower
2019 CUMULATIVE BENEFIT AMOUNTS OBTAINED FOR CLIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax Relief</td>
<td>$ 464,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security, Reemployment, Other Public Benefits</td>
<td>$339,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Law &amp; Debt Relief</td>
<td>$110,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alimony, Child Support, Family Law</td>
<td>$842,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Benefits &amp; Supports</td>
<td>$4,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets Preserved in Probate</td>
<td>$1,097,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Benefits &amp; Real Property</td>
<td>$680,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,537,642</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our **Home Sweet Home** project, funded by the Florida Bar Foundation, allowed us to hire two attorneys to focus on saving family homes through probate, lawsuits to clear title, and estate planning. The grant primarily addresses heirs’ property issues for rural, elderly and African American households throughout our 17-county service area. In 2019, the Project closed 161 cases and saved or obtained title to fifteen homes valued at well over $634,000.

In order to target our resources where needed most, we undertook a comprehensive **Legal Needs Assessment**, involving examination of mapping and case data, focus groups, and the responses to 628 completed surveys. We surveyed low-income persons from every county in our service area, as well as judges, attorneys, community groups and social services providers.

We engaged in an extensive **Outreach Campaign** to rural parts of our service area, attending events such as the Blackberry, Strawberry, Watermelon and Zucchini festivals, FarmShare food distributions, Health and Back-to-School fairs. We brought our tent, banner, candy and “swag” and educational materials, letting more than 2,400 people know about our services.

We expanded the reach of our **Low Income Taxpayer Clinic** by hiring a paralegal to assist our project attorney with the expanding caseload.

Natalie Maxwell joined the team as **Litigation and Advocacy Director** to further strengthen and improve our advocacy skills.

We came together in Lake City for our **Annual Staff Retreat**, where we engaged in some cultural competency training and focused on our legal needs assessment data and revisions to our case priorities.

Looking forward, at the end of 2019, we received funding for the new **Fresh Start Project** to assist low-income families with representation in Bankruptcy Court. So far, the Project has been able to discharge debts valued at $155,779 for our clients.
How We Help Our Clients

The challenges facing the parents of disabled children are great enough with the best of resources and care. However, when job relocation forced the parents of a 29-year-old with severe cognitive impairment and seizures to face limited services and lack of access to the legal system in North Florida, they turned to TRLS for help. Once the court established the parents as their daughter’s legal guardian advocates, the desperately needed medical and dental care for their daughter became routine and available, and their added stress was relieved.

Needing protection from an abusive spouse was just one of the many issues facing a young mother. With help from TRLS attorneys, she was awarded not only a dissolution of marriage but also name changes for herself and the children, sole parental responsibility and the opportunity to move forward without the weight of a painful past.

Losing her husband was just one of the hurdles facing the elderly guardian of two young children. She had health issues and the finance company had filed a replevin (repossession) to take their mobile home. Facing the loss of her home, as well as the threat of losing the children to the foster care system, she turned to the attorneys and volunteers at TRLS. With legal representation to help face the finance company and probate her husband’s estate, they maintained their residence and can stay together as a family.

Finding housing, after years of battling homelessness and numerous medical issues, was made possible for one older man due to the advocacy of the TRLS homeless outreach paralegal. Assistance in securing monthly disability benefits, Medicaid and a lump sum retroactive benefit, allowed him to purchase a mobile home, receive regular primary medical care and, most importantly, escape from life in the woods.

Securing ownership of a permanent home was a high priority for one young man. With representation from TRLS, he was able to file a probate of his mother’s home, pay off an old tax debt, and reduce his annual tax obligation with homestead exemption. Though the home is valued at less than $50,000, it is now his forever home.

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.