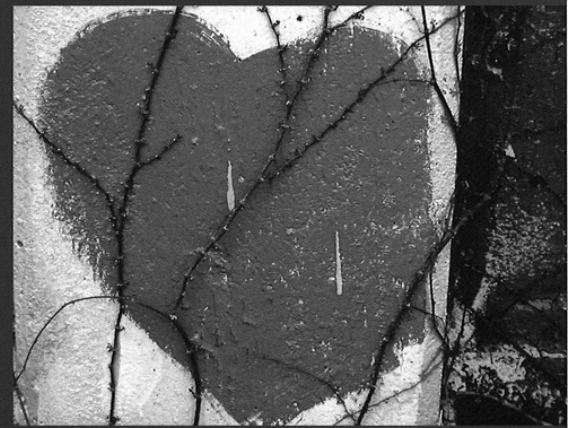


# DuPage Legal Assistance Foundation



## 2016 Annual Report

Helping Families in DuPage County for Over 40 Years

126 South County Farm Road, Wheaton, Illinois 60187

(630) 653-6212 [www.dupagelegalaid.org](http://www.dupagelegalaid.org)

# Our Mission Statement

The DuPage Legal Assistance Foundation was incorporated as an Illinois not-for-profit corporation on October 10, 1975: (A) to assist natural persons and community organizations to secure legal protection against injustice and to obtain due process of law and the equal protection of the laws; (B) to promote knowledge of the law and of legal process, rights and responsibilities among the poor and the public generally; and (C) to study the use of law and legal process to combat poverty and living conditions among the poor and to provide counsel to natural persons and groups seeking these ends.

## From Our Executive Director



*DuPage Legal Aid Executive Director, Cecilia Najera, meets with supporters at DCBA's 2017 Judges Nite Fundraiser.*

I am so grateful to work for a not for profit organization in a county where service is a tradition and where so many of the residents are committed to giving back. I want to take the time to thank the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit, the DuPage County Bar Association ("DCBA") and its membership, Lawyers Trust Fund, DuPage County Human Services Grant Fund, Naperville Exchange Club, and Milton Township for supporting our program.

The DuPage Legal Assistance Foundation ("LAF") provides legal help to those in need in DuPage County. We help with issues pertaining to divorce, parentage, Orders of Protection, bankruptcy, expungement, guardianship, and adoption. We have two staff members who speak Spanish which allows us to more effectively serve Spanish speaking clients. Many times our cli-

ents are domestic violence victims, elderly, or disabled. Our program is about giving individuals a helping hand to stability.

In this last fiscal year, despite challenging economic times, the attorneys employed by our office closed a total of 359 cases. Our volunteer attorneys closed an additional 142 cases during that same time period. LAF was responsible for providing approximately 10,000 hours of pro bono service during 2015-16, something which would not have been possible without the support of our sponsors and the volunteer attorneys who work with us. Over 400 volunteer attorneys from the DCBA accept pro bono cases from us which they litigate from beginning to end. Their dedication to protecting the vulnerable, giving access to the legal process, and advocating for those less fortunate reflects the tradition on which our program was founded. The membership is the backbone of our program. Their time, effort, and donations have helped thousands of individuals in our community achieve a more stable life.

Last year, LAF changed its eligibility guidelines to make our services more accessible. We now serve individuals with a household income of up to 175% of the federal poverty guideline. If the client is a victim of domestic violence, elderly, or disabled, we allow house-



*(Top) Receiving a new grant from the Naperville Exchange Club (LtoR): Cecilia Najera, Robert Black, Robin Slattery, and Brenda Carroll. (Bottom) Brenda Carroll, with LAF staff and Lawyers Trust Fund representatives, receiving the Esther Rothstein Award on June 23, 2016.*

hold income of up to 250% of the federal poverty guideline. We have also developed a new website at [dupage-legalaid.org](http://dupage-legalaid.org) and are working with the DCBA on a Veterans Initiative Program to serve veterans by directing them to experienced volunteer lawyers who can help them with their legal issues. If you have any suggestions, concerns, or questions, please contact us at (630) 653-6212. Thank you very much for your support!

Sincerely,

Cecilia Najera, Executive Director

## Our Board of Directors

The members of our Board for 2015-16 included: Jeff York (President), Sean McCumber (Vice President), Heather Jamieson (Secretary), Penny Hinze (Treasurer), Connie Gessner, Bernard Kleina, Dorothy Mintz, Michael J. Scalzo, Thomas Slymon, Daniel Smyth, and Christa Winters. The members of our Board for 2016-17 include: Sean McCumber (President), Connie Gessner (Vice President), Heather Jamieson (Secretary), Penny Hinze (Treasurer), Mary C. Downard, Bernard Kleina, Dorothy Mintz, Lisa K. Murphy, Michael J. Scalzo, Joseph Yee, and Jeff York.



The DuPage County Bar Association expanded its support this year to include both a Fall and Spring fundraiser for DuPage Legal Aid. A softball game against Kane County was held in September, 2016 (LtoR): (1) Coach Mike Calabrese huddles with the team mid-game; (2) Melissa M. Piwowar at bat; (3) DCBA team standing for the pledge of allegiance. Then, the DCBA's 42nd Judges' Nite was held in March, 2017 (LtoR): (1) Judge Brian Diamond, ISBA President Vince Cornelius, and Zina Cornelius; (2) Tom Pilafas of Near North National Title (which donated box seats to a Cubs game) pulls the door prize winner for those seats with Executive Director Cecilia Najera; (3) a scene from Judges' Nite featuring Christina Morrison, Mark Schmidt, Christopher Ward, Meghan Early, Jay Reese, and Carmel Mercado.

Located at the DuPage County Bar Center in Wheaton, LAF accepts telephone screening calls from individuals seeking legal assistance from 9:00am until 2:00pm, Monday through Friday. Victims of domestic violence are screened daily from 8:30am to 5:00pm. During the screening process, individuals are asked a series of questions to determine if their situation meets financial and case-type guidelines to receive free legal assistance through the program. In addition, screened individuals must submit a written application with the required supporting documentation to verify their eligibility for assistance. If an applicant is approved, they are assigned to either a private attorney who is a member of the DuPage County Bar Association or one of our staff attorneys. Applicants who are denied are given an opportunity to appeal that denial. Others who are denied, but fit other criteria, may be referred to the Modest Means Program, the DCBA's Lawyer Referral Service, or other programs.



### 2015-2016 COMPARISON STATISTICS

|   | 2014-15 | 2015-16 |
|---|---------|---------|
| Total New Cases Screened                                | 1,813   | 1,770   |
| Accepted and Assigned to In House Counsel               | 340     | 350     |
| Accepted and Assigned to DCBA Volunteers                | 137     | 121     |
| Denied and Referred to Lawyer Referral Service          | 550     | 520     |
| Denied and Referred to Prairie State                    | 4       | 10      |
| Denied and Referred Out of County                       | 32      | 13      |
| Denied and Referred to Modest Means/No Retainer Program | 34      | 25      |
| Cases Completed by DCBA Volunteers                      | 171     | 142     |
| Cases Completed by In House Counsel                     | 356     | 359     |
| Total Hours (completed cases) for DCBA Volunteers       | 3,315.6 | 4,688.3 |
| Total Hours (completed cases) for In House Counsel      | 3,966.3 | 3,462.4 |

# DuPage Legal Assistance Foundation

Helping Families in DuPage County for Over 40 Years

"For over 40 years, the DuPage Legal Assistance Foundation has played an important role in providing legal services for litigants of limited means in domestic relations matters in the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit. The need for pro bono legal assistance in family law matters remains ever present, and the attorneys employed by the Foundation and the attorney volunteers from the DuPage County Bar Association meet that need on a daily basis. The judiciary in DuPage County strives to ensure that all persons have access to the courts and to justice, and the work of the Foundation ensures that access is not limited to those of limited means. The Circuit Court of the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit values the work of the Foundation and continues to support its efforts."

*-Hon. John W. Demling, Presiding Judge - Domestic Relations Division*

"Obviously, no one wants to find themselves in a situation where they need a lawyer, but being that life happens, I am so grateful for the entire staff over at the DuPage Bar Legal Aid Service. They handled both my Order of Protection and Divorce/Parentage cases, and I couldn't be more satisfied with the quality of lawyering I received in both cases... both lawyers had mine and my children's best interest at heart... Overall, I would say this was a bad experience with an excellent outcome made possible by great lawyers.... I would recommend this service to anyone who needs a lawyer and help setting up a legal framework stemming from a turbulent life situation."

*-GW, former client*

"My husband of eight years presented me with divorce papers. I was not employed and was raising our two year old son at the time. It was an awful, stressful period of time for me. I wasn't sure how I was going to find representation, I had no income. I was recommended to DuPage Legal Aid.... She provided guidance on issues that were greater than my knowledge. She handled all of my issues with grace and concern.... DuPage Legal Aid's services provided my son and I with a fresh start and, for that, I am forever grateful."

*-PB, former client*



## SERVICE STAFF

Cecilia Najera, Executive Director/Managing Attorney  
Brenda Carroll, Staff Attorney  
Ann Russell, Staff Attorney  
Robin Slattery, Staff Attorney  
Robin Roe, Office Manager  
Lucy Cortez, Intake Coordinator  
Maribel Rodriguez, Administrative Assistant  
Sarah Lange, Volunteer Staff Attorney  
Gabi Lovelace, Student Volunteer  
Timothy Golen, Intern  
Jennifer Shanahan, Intern  
Alyssa Harms, Intern

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