



FROM THE GROUND UP

WSBA's Powerful Communities Project—helping legal services providers meet their communities' unique needs

for addressing gaps in Washington's justice system.¹ For example, the State Plan quantified the inadequacy of funding for civil legal aid by documenting that 70 percent of low-income households in Washington face at least one significant legal problem every year, but three-quarters of them will never receive legal help or even understand that there are legal solutions to their challenges.

The WSBA recently dispersed funds for the 2020 Powerful Communities Projects: 16 projects were offered a total of \$35,500 in funding to help clients and organizations in their communities. Applications for 2021 funding open in late fall 2020 (see page 36 for information on how to apply).

Too many organizations provided critical legal aid to their communities in 2019 to cover all of them here. What follows are descriptions of just a few Powerful Communities Projects. (You can also read more about each of the 2019 projects at NWSidebar, www.nwsidebar.wsba.org—just search for “Powerful Communities Project.”)

YAKIMA COUNTY VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY SERVICES

Serving Latinx Parents and Students

In early 2019, Yakima County Volunteer Attorney Services (VAS) was made aware of a problem in the community: In the absence of an active TeamChild attorney advocate,² Yakima School District students were being expelled at higher rates than normal, with many of the children expelled being Latinx. (Yakima School District is the second largest Latinx majority school district in the state.) In June 2019, Yakima VAS applied for, and was awarded, a grant through the WSBA Powerful Communities Project to work on addressing this issue in the school system. Yakima VAS immediately connected with other businesses and nonprofits to put together a “Back to School: Know Your Rights” event. Because a high percentage of the families were below the federal poverty rate, Yakima VAS coordinated with businesses to

SIDEBAR 2019 RECIPIENTS

The Washington State Bar Association was pleased to partner with the following 14 organizations in 2019 for the inaugural launch of Powerful Communities Projects.

- Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program
- Colectiva Legal de Pueblo
- Columbia Legal Services
- Cowlitz Wahkiakum Legal Aid
- Eastside Legal Assistance Project
- Family Law CASA
- Northwest Justice Project's Native American Unit
- QLaw Foundation
- Seattle Clemency Project
- Snohomish County Legal Services
- The STAR Project (serving Walla Walla and Columbia counties)
- TeamChild and Tacoma Healing Awareness Community
- Thurston County Volunteer Legal Services (serving Pacific County)
- Yakima County Volunteer Attorney Services

Following months of close coordination and planning with community stakeholders throughout Washington, in the fall of 2019 the WSBA launched the Powerful Communities Project, a program aimed at reaching underserved and underrepresented communities in the state. A second and equally important goal of the project is developing deeper partnerships and relationships between legal services providers and the people they serve.

In the first round of 2019 funding, 14 projects received up to \$3,000 each. These community-based civil legal aid projects provide free legal services, education, and access to the courthouse to hundreds of people in communities that have historically been blocked from the justice system, unjustly targeted by it, or both. With funds provided exclusively by the Washington State Bar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity that raises funds to support WSBA programs, the Powerful Communities Project is the latest demonstration of the legal community's wider financial support for public service and diversity and inclusion programs.

Working closely with legal aid providers in Washington, who in turn look to the members of their communities to identify the services they need, the Powerful Communities Project is aimed at advancing the goals outlined in the State Plan for the Coordinated Delivery of Legal Aid to Low-Income People, a three-year roadmap

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provide free supplies and services. WILD-JAY, a clothing boutique, collected school supplies to be given away; Belu, a salon, was present giving haircuts; and I Love Media was on site to connect with senior students and give them vouchers for a free senior photo session. The venue and dinner was provided by the Henry Beauchamp Community Center, located in Southeast Yakima.

Approximately 200 people showed up at the event. Shannon McMinimee, a lawyer who specializes in school law at Cedar Law, PLLC, gave multiple presentations to packed rooms of students and their parents. Students who listened to the presentation received a ticket for a free backpack and school supplies. A court-certified interpreter was present and provided real-time interpretation for each presentation. At the end of the night two Spanish-speaking mothers approached the Yakima VAS executive director and asked if they could listen to the presentation because they had missed the previous sessions. McMinimee sat down and spoke with them through the interpreter as they asked questions and shared concerns. The two women walked away with knowledge on how to address the issues they were facing. Ultimately, the goal of the presentations was to educate students and their parents on school-related issues so they could advocate for themselves and, therefore, the event was a success.

THURSTON COUNTY VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES

Mobilizing Legal Assistance to Underserved Counties

Thurston County Volunteer Legal Services (TCVLS) received a grant to help buy tablets, a laptop, and a printer so that attorneys in the legal clinics could quickly look up cases online, do any legal research, print out court forms, and other tasks. This allowed them to focus on the clients and what the clients needed rather than spending their limited time trying to gather facts.

Pacific County volunteer attorney Jon Quittner used the laptop bought with the Powerful Communities grant to look up court records so he knew exactly the status of his client's quest to get a parenting plan in place protecting her young daughter. Knowing that she had already submitted a proposed plan and served the opposing party allowed him to focus on her questions and help her get ready to appear on her own behalf in court. Quittner helped the client finalize the parenting plan, which ultimately was signed off on by the court.

Quittner says his client was "a joy to serve. She was intimidated by the process and I was able to work with her so that she

could go in front of [the judge] and tell her story with confidence. She is a perfect example of a person we would serve: a single mother trying to stabilize her life for the sake of her little girl."

COLECTIVA LEGAL DE PUEBLO

Increasing Empowerment for Immigrant Families

Through the WSBA Powerful Communities project, Colectiva Legal de Pueblo was able to educate and empower immigrant communities by providing free legal consultations to immigrants in their own language and within their own communities.

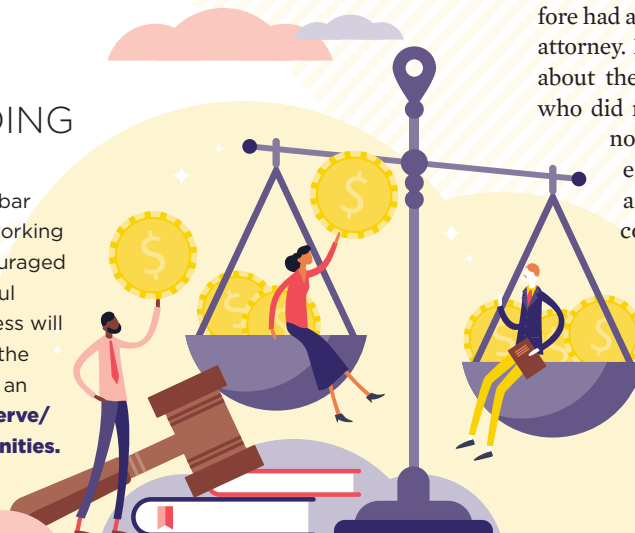
It is important for immigrants to receive thorough immigration consultations every few years to ensure that they do not miss out on any new opportunities that arise from developments in the law or from changes in their personal lives. Such consultations empower immigrants by teaching them about the immigration system and which documents and types of information they need to gather for any future form of immigration relief. Colectiva attorneys met with dozens of people who had been in the United States for decades, many of whom had never before had a consultation with an immigration attorney. Many had been too scared to talk about their immigration status with folks who did not speak their language or were not part of their communities. Others simply could not afford to hire a private immigration attorney who could review their case. Through the support of the WSBA, Colectiva has been able to expand its ability to focus its legal services to be culturally and community specific while working with more isolated communities.

As a result of this project, Col-

SIDEBAR

APPLY FOR 2021 FUNDING

Qualified Legal Service Providers, minority bar associations, and nonprofit organizations working with nonprofit legal organizations are encouraged to apply for funds through the 2021 Powerful Communities Project. The application process will open in late fall 2020. To learn more about the project and its past recipients, or to submit an application, visit www.wsba.org/connect-serve/volunteer-opportunities/powerful-communities.



ectiva was able to assist individuals like “Guadalupe”³ with her applications. When she came to the community legal clinic, she had been recently released from immigration detention. This client had experienced severe domestic violence and massive trauma when migrating into the country—she had been sexually assaulted repeatedly by cartel members—and tried seeking asylum from her home country, but was denied. Guadalupe worked with police to help track arms, guns, drugs, and money that the cartel was bringing in. Despite all of these things, Guadalupe was still detained. She suffered a lot in detention, battling multiple medical issues.

After the clinic, the legal team decided to take Guadalupe’s case pro bono and explored many forms of relief. Three attorneys dedicated a total of 80-plus hours to her case. The team understood the many forms and cycles of violence Guadalupe had experienced and pursued a U visa as her best chance at relief. With the support of the WSBA’s Powerful Communities Project, Colectiva was able to help Guadalupe and many other immigrant families feel safe and supported. **BN**

NOTES

1. The 2018-2020 State Plan for the Coordinated Delivery of Civil Legal Aid to Low-Income People was created by the Alliance for Equal Justice to more effectively deliver civil legal aid to low income, vulnerable, and marginalized individuals and communities. Its purpose is to “expand access to our civil justice system and identify and eliminate barriers that perpetuate poverty and deny justice.” The plan sets five goals: promote and foster race equity, provide clients with legal education, increase access for underserved and underrepresented communities, develop and increase holistic client-centered services, and engage in systemic advocacy. www.allianceforequaljustice.org/for-the-alliance/state-plan/. The State Plan cites the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study, which can be found here: https://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CivilLegalNeedsStudy_October2015_V21_Final10_14_15.pdf.
2. For more information about TeamChild, visit www.washingtonlawhelp.org/organization/teamchild.
3. The client’s real name has been changed to protect her privacy.



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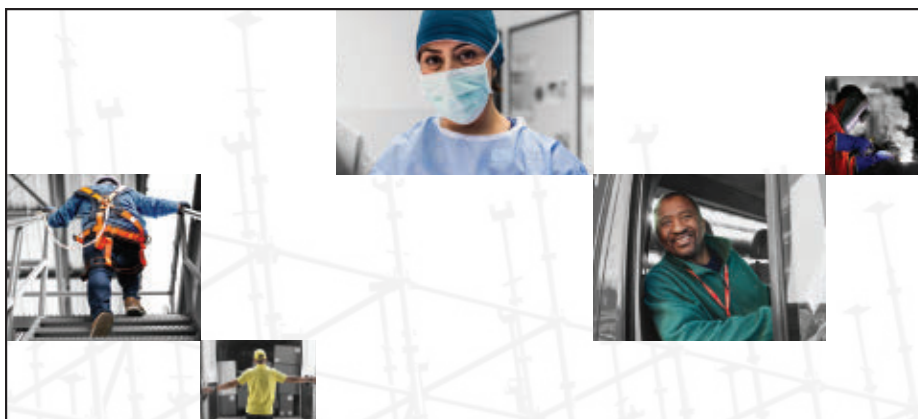


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