

Chicago Bar Foundation Report



The Chicago Bar Foundation at 60

A Growing Force for Equal Access to Justice in Our Community

By Bob Glaves
CBF Executive Director

As we finish our 60th anniversary year at The Chicago Bar Foundation, CBA members have much to be proud of in the work of their foundation. Former CBF Board President Tom Morsch wrote an excellent history of the CBF's first fifty years in the CBA's 125th Anniversary publication in 1998, and the CBF has continued to build on those earlier successes to be an even greater force for good today.

While everyone in the legal community—lawyers and legal professionals, judges, law firms, corporations and other organizations—has the ability to help make equal access to justice a reality, the CBF is the one place that Chicago's legal community can come together around this issue to make a powerful impact that no one person or organization could acting alone. Our position at the intersection of the key institutional stakeholders in our justice system (the bar, the courts, pro bono and legal aid organizations, law firms, corporations, government, and the philanthropic community), along with the “bully pulpit” of our CBA charter, gives us a unique

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platform from which to effectively tackle access to justice issues on a “macro” level and a heightened responsibility to use that platform as a force for good in challenging times like we are experiencing now.

Over the past ten years, the CBF's work has had a tremendous impact in the community as we have increased the amount of our annual grants and fundraising tenfold, been a leader in a number of groundbreaking access to justice initiatives, and developed a solid infrastructure to continue to build on those successes in the future. In addition to the broad and multifaceted impact of our work during this time, the CBF is now seen as a local and national leader on these issues in the legal community, the “access to justice community,” and the larger philanthropic community.

This growth and impact has only been possible with the strong support of the CBA and the CBF's dedicated and growing base of supporters, which now include thousands of individual donors, more than 150 law firms and corporations, and many other committed supporters. With that strong support and the leadership of an outstanding board, an acclaimed staff, and many dedicated volunteers, the CBF has defined an ambitious vision for our community and pursued an aggressive growth strategy in pursuit of that vision in collaboration with the CBA, the courts, and a number of other organizations.

A number of key partners played a criti-

cal role in virtually all of our successes in recent years, and collaboration remains one of our core strategies to maximize our impact. But few if any of these advances would have been possible without the CBF's active leadership and long-term commitment to these initiatives. Below are some of the major highlights of the CBF's growth and impact over the past ten years:

Significant increase in engagement and commitment from our legal community, both in direct support of the CBF and in overall support for the larger cause

- The annual Investing in Justice Campaign is now institutionalized and has given thousands of new individual donors an opportunity to come together as a community to contribute to this cause. An increasing number of donors also are making more substantial and longer-term commitments to support the cause through the CBF's Lincoln Circle and Life Fellows programs.
- A robust program to encourage cy pres awards to support the CBF and its grantee organizations that has generated more than \$4 million for the cause over the past five years.
- The groundbreaking Law Firm Leadership Circle, a statement of best practices on pro bono, support for legal aid and related issues for firms.
- A number of acclaimed special events that both raise funds and build awareness of the cause in the larger legal community.

- An increasing commitment to pro bono in our legal community, and the CBF's leadership has played a key role in that. Just a few examples include our leadership in the advocacy efforts for the Illinois Supreme Court Pro Bono Reporting Rule and a separate pro bono rule for retired, inactive and limited admission corporate lawyers; developing and funding several innovative new pro bono projects; and the now annual CBA/CBF Pro Bono Week.

Substantial increases in the CBF's annual grants and support for the cause

- Thanks to the increased involvement of the legal community noted above, over the past ten years the CBF's grants have increased tenfold to more than \$2 million and we now have a solid and scalable infrastructure in place to effectively distribute grant funds as we continue to grow. The CBF's grants ensure that tens of thousands of low-income and disadvantaged people in most critical need of the protections of our civil legal system have access to justice.
- A comprehensive review and evaluation process for our grants that promotes best practices among our community's pro bono and legal aid organizations on common issues like management, governance, pro bono, and coordination with other relevant organizations.
- The CBF's grants also have directly leveraged well over \$1 million from other government and private sources that would not otherwise have been available for this cause. Partnerships with other funders on a number of projects and initiatives have substantially increased the impact of the CBF's grant funds as well.

Groundbreaking systemic improvements in access to justice

- The CBF spearheaded a collaboration that nurtured and developed a groundbreaking project that eventually became Illinois Legal Aid Online (www.illinoislegalaidonline.org), now an integral part of our pro bono and legal aid delivery system in Illinois and a national model. More than 70,000 people a month now visit www.illinoislegalaid.org, ILAO's web site for the

The CBF in a Nutshell



Sally McDonald is the 2009-2010 President of The Chicago Bar Foundation Board of Directors

As the charitable arm of the CBA, The Chicago Bar Foundation (CBF) brings our legal community together around a cause that is uniquely important to us as lawyers and legal professionals: working to ensure that everyone in the Chicago area has access to justice, particularly the low-income and disadvantaged Chicagoans who are in most critical need of the protections of our civil legal system.

Through grants, advocacy and other programs, the CBF takes a system-wide approach to improving access to justice and focuses on objectives we can best achieve by coming together as a community. More specifically, the CBF:

- Advances the work of our community's pro bono and legal aid organizations;
- Enables dedicated lawyers to pursue careers in legal aid and helps pro bono attorneys to most effectively supplement their efforts; and
- Makes the courts and legal system more user-friendly and accessible for all.

Thanks to the generous financial support of thousands of lawyers and other legal professionals, more than 150 law firms and corporations, and many other dedicated supporters, in 2009 the CBF awarded more than \$2 million in grants and continues to play a lead role in a number of innovative access to justice initiatives.

public, for user-friendly legal information and resources. ILAO's other sites, www.illinoisprobono.org, and www.illinoislegaladvocate.org, provide a number of important training and support resources for pro bono and legal aid lawyers throughout the State.

- The CBF has been a local and national leader in working with the courts and other stakeholders to develop advice desks, pro bono projects and other resources to help the growing number of unrepresented people in the courts. The CBF has helped launch and continues to provide consistent support for nine legal advice desks in the federal and state courts as well as a help desk in the City of Chicago's Department of Administrative Hearings. These desks now provide brief legal advice and assistance to more than 35,000 people a year and have attracted

additional funding from state and local government and other foundations as well.

Significant advocacy successes in increasing state and federal funding and other support for the cause

- The CBF was one of the founding partners of the Equal Justice Illinois Campaign, a collaborative effort to help build a stronger, more stable base of state funding for Illinois' pro bono and legal aid system. Thanks to the collective efforts of the Campaign partners and the leadership of numerous elected officials, the State provided its first funding for legal aid in 2000 and over time has increased its annual appropriation for the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation to \$3.5 million.

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- The CBF led a successful multi-year advocacy effort that culminated in 2007 with a new Illinois statute that will increase funding for legal aid and related initiatives by requiring at least half of all residual funds in state court class action cases are used for this purpose.
- The CBF also has partnered with the ABA and other local and national groups in advocacy efforts that have led to a solid increase in federal funding for legal aid and new student loan forgiveness programs for legal aid and public service lawyers.

Dedicated lawyers are in a much better position to pursue and remain in careers in legal aid

- A groundbreaking November, 2006 study with the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice, *Investing in Justice*, which identified a growing crisis in the retention of our community's legal aid attorneys and made a series of recommendations aimed at helping dedicated lawyers to pursue and remain in these careers
- The CBF spearheaded a communitywide effort through which Chicago's pro bono and legal aid organizations immediately gave much-needed salary increases to all of their attorneys and committed over time to both bring their attorney salaries up to par with their public service peers and address other non-compensation issues impacting attorney retention identified by the *Investing in Justice* study.
- Innovative fellowship programs (Anderson and Sun-Times) that assist outstanding legal aid lawyers with repayment of their law school debts so that they are financially able to remain in these careers.
- Improved training and professional development opportunities for legal aid lawyers through free CBA memberships and CLE and the CBF Legal Aid Academy, an innovative new pro bono training and professional development program.

These are just the major highlights of our growth and impact in recent years. But we still have a long way to go to achieve our vision of equal access to justice for all people in our community. Even with the

CBF Supported Organizations 2009

- Access Living—*Civil Rights Project*
- AIDS Legal Council of Chicago
- Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA)
- CARPLS (Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services)
- Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR)
- Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL)
- Center for Economic Progress—*Midwest Tax Clinic*
- Centro Romero—*Latin American Legal Assistance Services*
- Chicago Coalition for the Homeless—*Law Project*
- Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM)
- Chicago Legal Clinic
- Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS)
- Community Economic Development Law Project (CEDLP)
- Domestic Violence Legal Clinic
- Equip for Equality
- Evanston Community Defender
- The Family Defense Center
- Farmworker Advocacy Project
- First Defense Legal Aid
- Health & Disability Advocates (HDA)
- Illinois Legal Aid Online
- Lambda Legal—*Midwest Regional Office*
- Latinos Progresando—*Immigrant Legal Services*
- Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing (LCBH)
- Lawyers for the Creative Arts (LCA)
- Legal Aid Bureau of Metropolitan Family Services (LAB)
- Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF)
- Life Span—*Center for Legal Services & Advocacy*
- Midwest Center on Law & the Deaf (MCLD)
- National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)
- Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI)
- The Roger Baldwin Foundation of the ACLU—*Children's Initiative*
- Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
- Uptown People's Law Center
- Working Hands Legal Clinic
- World Relief-Chicago—*Immigration Legal Services*

*This list represents organizations that receive organizational support grants from the CBF. The CBF also supports a number of other special projects and initiatives that advance the CBF's mission.

significant advances in recent years, there are only about 300 legal aid attorneys to serve the more than 1 million low-income residents of the Chicago area who qualify for their services due to a long-term underinvestment in our pro bono and legal aid system. As a result, even before the current economic downturn, the majority of low-income and disadvantaged Chicagoans were unable to obtain legal assistance that is often critical to their safety and independence and were left to try to solve complex legal problems on their own because there is

simply not enough capacity to serve them.

Looking Ahead

Thanks to our many dedicated supporters, the CBF has made real strides towards closing the justice gap in our community and has a solid infrastructure to build on these successes in the future. We look forward to continuing to work with the CBA and our many partners in the community in the fight to ensure that everyone in the metropolitan Chicago area has equal access to justice. ■