

CGLA

Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic

Fall 2005

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IN BRIEF

By Robert B. Acton, CGLA Executive Director



An inquisitive seminarian once created a "Bible full of holes." In his curiosity to better understand the extent of God's concern for the poor and oppressed, he conducted an experiment-to create a Bible void of the themes of poverty, oppression and injustice. The process of cutting out these passages took weeks. When he finished, thousands of Old Testament prophetic words were gone; Mary's Magnificat fell to the cutting floor; even the red-lettered words of Christ in the Beatitudes stood no chance. The result: a dull pair of scissors and, in the words of the author, a Bible that "was literally falling apart in our hands." (Jim Wallis, God's Politics)

In our most recent national election, it was reported time and again that the single most decisive issue for voters was moral values. As I reflect on the polls, I wonder whether poverty, injustice and oppression are part of the moral values "package" held in esteem in today's society. Perhaps not. But should they be thought of as a moral issue? For those who look to Scripture to discover norms for Christian morality, the answer is unequivocally, "Yes!" Morality lacking genuine concern for justice or active care for the oppressed is not Christian morality at all. Undoubtedly, the same can be said for all of society's religious systems and beliefs.

If an informed system of values does in fact properly include concern for the poor and a commitment to justice, then one might worry about our nation's moral standing. In February 2005, a major study on the legal needs of low-income Illinoisans found that **only one out of every fourteen legal problems encountered by the poor is handled with the assistance of an attorney at no cost.** This statistic matters. In our adversarial system, justice presumes a trained advocate able to apply specific facts to complicated law. In fact, in the first year of law school, inevitably 1Ls learn an old adage: "He who represents himself has a fool for a lawyer." Yet each year, on at least 140,000 occasions, a low-income Illinoisan seeks a lawyer, fails to secure one, and is consequently forced to resolve the issue on his or her own. This situation occurs frequently in complex cases where the consequences of the outcome are considerable, with direct impact on an individual's family, safety, health, stability, education, employment or future.

If we take seriously the biblical exhortation of concern for the needy, the state of our justice system should both humble and sadden us. Understanding the nuances of a legal issue is difficult for anyone, much less a person who is impoverished, suffering mental health issues, uneducated, or not fluent in English. Here at Cabrini Green Legal Aid, we are working out the call to morality day-by-day. **We strive to fill the vast unmet demand for free legal services by offering clients quality legal representation that seeks to transform lives, rather than simply tender a temporary patch.** When clients come to us, they are often confused and demoralized by the weight of their situation. When at our best, we clarify the problem both to our clients and to the courts, so that justice can prevail. We partner with neighborhood social service agencies and houses of worship to ensure sustaining life transformation. We reach into the community to educate the poor about their rights and responsibilities under the law. We teach employers, landlords and other providers how they can help our clients without jeopardizing their own interests. And we restore dignity to those who are most vulnerable. If that doesn't define "moral values" in our society, I'm not sure what does.

(research and writing assistance provided by CGLA volunteer Aaron Churchill)

New Faces

In the past few months, we have welcomed a number of new staff members to the CGLA family:

Tyree Brinson - Coordinator of Holistic Services

Maggie Devany - Volunteer Coordinator

Andy Dougherty - 711, Housing Law

Alecia Humphrey - Staff Attorney, Family Law

Beth Johnson - Expungement Help Desk Coordinator

Tim Wallace - Associate Development Officer

Please refer to our website, www.cgla.net, to learn more about them.

In Action: [Written by Aaron Churchill](#)

This year CGLA is acting upon its vision-to build the capacity that meets the need for our services, to develop innovative strategies that provide our clients with sustaining life transformation, and to further our reach into Chicago communities-by developing and expanding our services.

The Family Support Teams program, in partnership with LaSalle Street Church, is an initiative that extends our relationship with a client after their legal issue has been resolved. We have found that some of the problems our clients face before our legal intervention persist when our work has finished-most notably, barriers to self-sufficiency. In order to meet this client need, we have begun to train volunteers to guide our clients in areas such as managing their finances, setting and achieving career and educational goals, and finding stability in their relationships. With the help of these volunteers, our clients are set firmly on the path toward self-sufficient, even flourishing, lives.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle an ex-offender faces is their criminal record. A criminal record limits access to employment, housing, and education all of which are key to preventing recidivism. In 2001, CGLA addressed this need by initiating our Criminal Records Program, which seeks to access employment opportunities for qualified ex-offenders through the expungement, sealing, and clemency process, all of which seal criminal records from view. The demand for this service has increased since the program's inception, and this year we have expanded the Criminal Records Program to be a full program, staffed by attorney Margaret Soffin.

In addition to an expanded Criminal Records Program, we have partnered with other legal service agencies to create an Expungement Pro Se Assistance Desk at the Daley Center. This initiative meets the demand for expungement services providing on-the-spot legal assistance. The Desk is managed by CGLA staff and volunteers. Through the help desk, each year hundreds of clients will receive legal advice and obtain help filing the necessary forms. We expect to serve over 1,000 clients this year at the desk alone!

We are proud of these opportunities to serve a growing number of people. We believe that through these programs we will give deserving individuals the opportunity to reintegrate themselves into their communities successfully.

CGLA Does Its Part to Give Illinois Residents a Second Chance [By Lyndsay T. Walters](#)

Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic attorneys, Christine Farrell and Margaret Soffin, daily lend their expertise and compassion to serve clients in specific legal matters. Recently, their extensive knowledge of criminal records work proved instrumental in improving legal options for clients throughout the State of Illinois.

The Illinois House and Senate approved a bill late last year that allows individuals with non-violent drug and prostitution convictions in their past to seal their records. Governor Blagojevich signed it into law. By sealing these non-violent prior convictions to potential employers, thousands of individuals can overcome ongoing barriers to life improvements that might otherwise follow them for decades. Employment, housing and licensure become attainable goals when criminal histories are cleared.

Farrell has seen prior convictions and arrest records haunt clients for years. "Public and private employers have increasingly used a person's background as a reason to fire someone," she said. "Additionally, prior backgrounds are used to keep poor people out of the workforce in the first place." Although clients may have made mistakes in the past, Farrell believes they should have an opportunity for a future as well.

CGLA's mission to access justice on behalf of "the poorest of the poor" inspired staff attorneys Farrell and Soffin to become integral players in constructing the proposed bill. At the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Director of Advocacy John Bouman worked with CGLA attorneys to gain valuable insight on the reality of the issue at hand. "They are the top experts in the area - they know the reality, not just what the laws say but what they mean in practice," he said, describing Farrell and Soffin's dedication.

"When we were assailed with the endless problems of the various interest groups that lined up with 'concerns' about the bills, and we needed to draft amendments, Chrissy and Margaret helped us understand how to draft them, what they would mean, and whether the remaining bill as amended still accomplished positive change," Bouman said about CGLA's efforts. Farrell and Soffin lent their expertise by providing information about current laws, identifying problems that could arise, and constructing workable solutions.

With the help of Farrell and Soffin, CGLA helped to bring criminal records programs to the forefront in Illinois. The legislation helps many individuals with non-violent crimes that are 10 or even 20 years old to finally be able to enter or reenter the work force. CGLA's Executive Director, Rob Acton, expressed that "this new law provides a much-deserved opportunity for worthy individuals, trying to turn the corner on life, to become productive members of society."

In Memoriam

On June 10, 2005, CGLA lost a precious friend. **Tyndale House Publishers** founder, **Dr. Kenneth Taylor**, whose translation called *The Living Bible* helped millions of people discover they could read and understand Scripture, died at the age of 88 in his home in Wheaton, IL.

Dr. Taylor's translation became the best-selling book in the United States for three years beginning in 1971. He and his wife, Margaret, committed from the start to deposit all profits from *The Living Bible* into a charitable trust, insisting that the Bible's royalties be donated to **Tyndale House Foundation**.

Dr. Taylor is remembered as one of three co-founders of CGLA. In response to a call from Reverend Bill Leslie and attorney Chuck Hogren, Dr. Taylor provided the first year and a half of funding to make the vision for faith-based legal services in Chicago a reality. He remained a faithful and responsive friend to CGLA over the course of our 32 year history. Dr. Taylor will be sorely missed. His legacy lives on through his wife, Margaret, ten children, 28 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren.





Christian Kemnitz By Aaron Churchill

As is the case with many who are involved here, Christian Kemnitz was attracted to CGLA by its mission. Recounting his first experience at CGLA, he was struck by the simplicity of the office. But behind the simple walls, he was impressed "from the minute you walked in that you knew there was important work done." Chris, a partner at Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, is acutely aware of the importance of quality legal assistance for the poor, and he chooses to work with CGLA because of its mission-to answer God's call to seek justice and mercy by providing legal services to the poorest of the poor. Chris comments: "The mission is what makes the clinic special."

Chris is in his second year serving as the elected Chairperson of CGLA's Board of Directors. He has been a Board member since 1999 and served as Vice-Chairperson for two years as well. Chris is vital in fundraising efforts and was a leader in the search for an Executive Director. In addition, Chris coordinates the CGLA's Summer Associate Program at his firm, where law students, who are hired as Summer Associates, take time to volunteer at CGLA.

As the Chairperson, Chris is deeply committed to upholding the mission of CGLA while expanding the services to meet the needs of low-income Chicagoans. One challenge Chris sees in CGLA's future, as it grows, is the pressure to "dilute the mission." In order to remain focused on securing justice for the poorest of the poor, he maintains that the identification of clients whose needs fit our mission and securing a committed staff are crucial. Even as CGLA grows, Chris explains, "we must remember our faith-based roots-we were formed out of a church."

Chris is a graduate of Michigan State University and the University of Chicago Law School. Chris and his wife Julie have two daughters, Catherine and Caroline.

We are sincerely grateful for Chris' work, and we also look forward to his leadership, as we continue to fulfill God's call of justice and mercy for the poor.

CGLA 2005 Annual Benefit

On September 7, CGLA held its Annual Benefit at the Chicago Hilton. The evening was an inspirational tribute to CGLA's work on behalf of impoverished Chicagoans, and included a delicious dinner, renowned speaker Tony Campolo, jazz from the Kinsley James Trio, and a moving presentation from former CGLA client Jimmy Ramsey. The event was a real success, bringing in a grand total of over \$158,000 to support the work of the clinic. This included a generous \$50,000 gift from the law firm of Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw. It was also the largest event in CGLA history, with 465 guests in attendance, nearly half of whom were attending a CGLA event for the first time. We would like to thank the CGLA Advisory Board for underwriting the event and our corporate sponsors for their support.

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Finally, the event could not have been a success without the support of so many individuals - table hosts, table sponsors, CGLA staff and volunteers, and the generosity of hundreds of individuals like you.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Save the date for the 2006 CGLA Annual Benefit - September 21, 2006!
Featured Speaker: Cardinal Francis George, Archdiocese of Chicago



Volunteer Profile: Rich Balind By Sarah Baum

One of the things that make CGLA exceptional is the high quality volunteers it attracts. One such volunteer is Richard Balind. Rich began volunteering at CGLA in September 2004 when he was referred by another deeply committed volunteer, Shahzad Khan. Ever since, Rich has become an integral member of the CGLA family.

Rich graduated from DePaul University College of Law in 2004. Like most volunteers, Rich started his work at CGLA conducting intake interviews. He says that he enjoys meeting with potential clients because many times they don't know where to go to get the help they need, but have found CGLA to be just the place.

Rich's pleasant demeanor with the clients he meets fits well with the Clinic's mission to treat all who walk through our doors with hospitality and respect. CGLA family law attorney, Alecia Humphrey, praised Rich's intake skills. "He doesn't pass judgment on clients," she said. "He's extraordinarily professional in his intake presentations."

Rich also handles and assists with Clinic cases. He stands up in court on CGLA cases, and has handled two clemency petitions for the Clinic. Criminal records director, Margaret Soffin, also speaks highly of Rich. "He goes the extra mile," she said. "He has developed a good, intuitive nature about the clients."

Before going back to school, Rich worked in construction for 13 years. He is so dedicated to his volunteerism that he did some carpentry work that was needed at the Clinic. "He truly is a jack of all trades," said Humphrey.

"I absolutely love doing it," Rich said about his work at CGLA. "I didn't know that I would like it as much as I do. I would like to continue doing this my whole life it is so satisfying."



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 Alecia Humphrey
 Beth Johnson (711)
 Margaret Soffin

Volunteer Coordinator

Maggie Devany

Office Manager

Dierdre Johnson

Development Officer

Tanya Haughton

Associate Development Officer

Tim Wallace

Coordinator of Holistic Services

Tyree Brinson

2005 Fall Interns:

Kari Beyer
 Annalise Buth
 Rob Felker
 Michelle Kaplan
 Kelly Kennedy
 Rachael Mamula
 Ryan Patton



Office Manager Dierdre Johnson is the first point of contact with CGLA. She is often praised by clients for her warmth, helpfulness and calming demeanor. Dierdre utilizes these qualities in her community as well. Dierdre serves on the Parent Advisory Board and Local School Council as a parent representative at Joseph Kellman Corporate School. She was recently recognized as Parent Volunteer of the Year and acknowledged for her commitment and dedication during her son's 8th grade graduation ceremony.

Congrats to Sarah Baum!

Former Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Baum was recently awarded the **Abraham Lincoln Marovitz Scholarship Award** from the Chicago Bar Foundation. Sarah will receive \$5,000 in the first year of law school, \$10,000 in the second year, and \$15,000 in the third year. She will attend DePaul.

Sarah won this \$30,000 award for her tremendous abilities, strong academic record, and outstanding contributions to CGLA. She has developed a great reputation in the Chicago legal aid community. Congratulations, Sarah! We are proud of you!

CGLA Ready to Assist Victims of Hurricane Katrina in Chicago

In partnership with the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago (UWMC), Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic will offer free legal assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina who come to Chicago to find temporary or permanent lodging. The UWMC is organizing a coordinated relief effort across the region to ensure that as many as 10,000 displaced individuals find the necessary relief. CGLA is listed on a comprehensive register of agencies ready and willing to provide much needed relief.