



“... AN OPPORTUNITY FOR  
JUSTICE.”

*Legal Services of North Florida, Inc.*

2003-2004 Report to the Community



## About Us

Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. (LSNF) has been working for 28 years to provide an opportunity for justice for eligible residents through representation conducted efficiently and comparable in quality to that of the private bar, and through other forms of legal aid designed to provide a full range of civil (non-criminal) legal aid to those in need.

LSNF serves sixteen counties in the North Florida area from five office locations: Tallahassee, Quincy, Panama City, Fort Walton Beach and Pensacola. LSNF provides civil legal aid without fee primarily to persons whose income falls below 125% of federal poverty guidelines, with priority emphasis on preservation of the home and promotion of home ownership; support for families and improved outcomes for children; promotion of employment, economic security and health; promotion of safety and stability; and protection of vulnerable populations.

LSNF utilizes creative approaches to maximize efficient and effective delivery of legal aid to eligible residents, including a mail intake system and a vibrant volunteer attorney program. Our services are enhanced through active affiliations and collaborations with the State Attorney's Office, the Clerks of the Court, the Public Defender's Office, domestic violence centers, Workforce Development offices, homeless shelters, a public housing tenants' association, and numerous senior citizens' centers. The Tallahassee Women Lawyers Association and the legal departments of the City of Tallahassee, the Florida Department of Transportation, the Florida Department of Community Affairs, the Florida Department of Financial Services, and the Florida Attorney General's Office participate in our Telephone Legal Advice Hotline and evening legal clinic programs.

LSNF's services include not only direct representation, but also public education and outreach regarding issues in any of our priority service areas. During this reporting period, LSNF has been involved in special outreach and education projects involving abuse and neglect of the elderly; lead screening for children; domestic violence issues among military families; consumer fraud; taxpayer assistance to low-income and English-as-a-second language clients; and special advocacy for children facing juvenile justice issues.

### Legal Service of North Florida, Inc. Board of Directors

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## From our Executive Director and Board President

What an exciting couple of years! There have been many challenges as well as victories in our struggle to provide “An Opportunity for Justice” for all in our community.

Through the efforts of the Legal Services Corporation to streamline programs throughout the state, Legal Services of North Florida (LSNF) has added Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties to its service area. So now we stretch from Monticello to Pensacola, over 16 counties with five offices. To enhance our services to clients, Legal Services Corporation provided LSNF with a one-time \$800,000 grant to purchase offices in Pensacola, Ft. Walton Beach and Panama City. This has enabled LSNF to eliminate paying rent on three of its offices and put more resources into services. So, we have been busy renovating and moving. We were also thrilled to make the last payment on our Tallahassee office. We will always be grateful to Leon County for making that dream a reality. Along with these exciting cost savings have come increased costs in health care for our staff and the elimination of some of our long-standing grants. It is always a juggling act to maintain quality legal aid services. We need to appreciate dedicated and resourceful staff for their flexibility and good humor.

New programs such as TeamChild have provided increased opportunities for representation of children and their families. Seniors have benefited from special outreach efforts. Domestic violence victims have had additional assistance and increased access through our telephone legal advice hotline. Expansion of our program website and participation in the development of a statewide client based website has improved client access to legal services. There are never enough hours in the day. Staff attorneys travel many miles to reach their homebound clients, community centers and courts. Volunteer attorneys work on evenings, weekends and throughout the week helping clients. Yet, clients still stream through our doors. A national study conducted several years ago found that legal aid programs are able to serve about 20% of the people needing their help. LSNF struggles to maintain that minimum while providing the best in poverty law representation.

The good news is that many families have been saved from homelessness; children are in school and graduating; women are safer; and our seniors are less worried about their futures, all due to the heroic efforts of our LSNF staff and volunteers. We couldn't have done it without the many local governments who have realized that equal access to the courts is necessary for a safer community, or the family and private foundations who understand that eliminating problems through legal representation leads to less reliance on social services, or individuals volunteering their time and resources in support of legal aid services, or the business and legal community who contribute time and resources to make LSNF the lasting agency of hope that it is.

We can only hope that someday there will be sufficient resources for legal aid. But until that day comes we will do our best to continue to advocate for the voiceless, the homeless, the poor, the elderly and our children. We thank you for your help and support.

*Kristine E. Knab*

*Martin R. Dix*



## Services Provided

Legal Services of North Florida, Inc, is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that enabled us to provide representation to 11,646 clients during 2003 and 2004.

Year 2003		Year 2004	
Area of Law	Clients Served	Area of Law	Clients Served
Consumer	832	Consumer	1,017
Education	20	Education	43
Employment	125	Employment	98
Family	2,745	Family	2,976
Juvenile	105	Juvenile	393
Health	37	Health	39
Housing	544	Housing	922
Income Maintenance	232	Income Maintenance	259
Individual Rights	35	Individual Rights	51
Misc.	574	Misc.	599
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,249</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,397</b>

### *Summary Financial Information*

*Total support and revenue, year 2003* .....\$3,625,135  
(includes \$617,058 in donated services and \$808,919 in one-time property grant)

*Total expenses, year 2003*.....\$2,946,618  
(includes \$201,375 property purchase)

*Total support and revenue, year 2004* .....\$3,494,977  
(includes \$615,000 in donated services)

*Total expenses, year 2004*.....\$3,254,717



## Major Projects and Litigation 2003–2004

*Scott Manion, Director of Litigation*

**Legal aid clients come to us with a variety of problems. Many strive to keep their homes, rebuild broken families, or simply attempt to maintain a day-to-day existence with the hope of a better tomorrow. The names may change, but the efforts to resolve the gamut of our clients' legal issues remain a challenge that serves to motivate our talented legal staff to reach these accomplishments. In the past two years LSNF served 11,646 people - these are a few of their stories:**

**Consumer Issues** - A disabled man was facing foreclosure of his home after his wife became ill, and lost her job. He obtained a second mortgage with a 27 % interest rate to pay his mounting bills. As a result he fell behind on both of his mortgages and faced foreclosure. LSNF filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy and was able to remove the second mortgage from the home. Five years later the company holding the second mortgage tried to enforce a lien against our client's home. LSNF reopened the case and forced the company to release the lien. The client tried to refinance the property but was unable to extinguish another lien until a nationwide search was conducted by LSNF and a release of the lien was obtained. After a six and a half year legal battle, the client was able to recover financially.

In 2003 and 2004 LSNF filed 112 Chapter 13 bankruptcy reorganizations that resulted in clients saving their homes from foreclosure. North Florida is unique in that many of the poor are homeowners but the loss of job or an illness can quickly place their homes in foreclosure. As a result LSNF has developed the expertise and staffing to handle this complex and demanding legal area to save the homes of citizens with temporary setbacks. LSNF is unique in that it is one of the top filers of reorganizations in the Northern District of Florida. Additionally, LSNF receives referrals from the Credit Counseling Bureau of elderly citizens and persons with catastrophic medical illnesses and files Chapter 7 bankruptcies to give them a second chance.

*Sometimes ruthless people take advantage of our elderly or uneducated neighbors. Jimmy was a veteran serviceman and fireman. He tried to help his community and family but his trusting nature was betrayed the day he met Dennis. Dennis took advantage of Jimmy's setbacks and frail health to obtain not only his car but the very land he was living on. Constant intimidation and coercion on Dennis's part threatened the only vestiges of dignity Jimmy had left. LSNF stepped in and got Jimmy's land and trailer deeded back to him along with the tools of his hobby. Now he can live out his life in the dignity he has earned.*

**Domestic Violence Issues** - A LSNF client had been physically abused throughout her marriage. In the divorce she requested alimony and an interest in both their homes. She was totally disabled and unable to work. Her husband intentionally allowed both homes to be placed into foreclosure. LSNF attorneys convinced the court to award the wife all of the equity in one home and half of the equity in the other. LSNF threatened to file bankruptcy if the creditors did not stop the foreclosure, thus enabling a real estate agent time to arrange a lucrative sale of both homes. As a result, the wife had enough funds to comfortably live on until she began receiving her disability benefits.

*Marian has been with us since 2001 when LSNF helped her file for a domestic violence injunction after her husband threatened her and her children with a shotgun. After two years of fighting him in court for a divorce and custody of their child, Marian finally has primary custody - thanks to her LSNF lawyer.*



**Education Issues** - A 6th grader stabbed a student that was beating another student. LSNF staff got the child evaluated and it was discovered she was suffering from post traumatic shock syndrome from a very early childhood trauma. This caused the child to come to the aid of anyone being threatened. Instead of expulsion the child was placed in counseling and allowed to continue her schooling in a special class until her counseling ended and she could return to regular classes.

*The TeamChild program has seen many children in desperate circumstances, without a stable home, without the right educational access, without hope for the future. Stephanie was one child who had been in foster care since she was 10. She was shuttled from place to place without someone to love or care about her. After LSNF stepped in to help place her in her grandmother's home she began to blossom. Her grades became so good that she took her GED at 15 and enrolled in Tallahassee Community College. She is now living a productive life on her own with the continued support of her grandmother and LSNF.*

**Probate Issues** - A grandson came to LSNF saying his "mother" had died and his sister told him he had to leave. After investigating, LSNF found the man was speaking about his grandmother who had raised him as her son for 17 years of his life. LSNF filed a probate action claiming the grandmother had virtually adopted him. The other side later produced a will that weakened the claim. However, a settlement was reached in which our client was allowed to remain in the home.

**Property Issues** - A company tricked our client into deeding part of her father's land that had been in the family for over 100 years in exchange for a mortgage and mobile home that turned out to be defective. The father sued to void the deed. The daughter was sued for fraud. The mobile home company went out of business and only the mortgage company was left. They foreclosed. After much legal wrangling the company decided to drop the action but demanded the mobile home be returned. LSNF was able to broker a settlement where the daughter got to keep the mobile home and the father got back his land. The daughter made an agreement to stay on the land in return for paying rent. The court granted title to the mobile home to the daughter free of any liens.

An elderly lady was told by an agent for an individual that he would repair her home with funds provided by the individual if she deeded him her property and he would not take possession until she died. It turned out this agent had entered similar agreements with hundreds of homeowners in Leon and Gadsden counties. Many times the property owners never received any funds or repairs. LSNF undertook seven of these cases, recovered over \$10,000 in damages, and cancelled all the mortgages. The broker was sued by his principal for return of thousands of dollars and was shut down from making further transactions on his behalf. In the case of the elderly lady LSNF was able to prove the client never received any funds and the foreclosure was dismissed.

*Mr. Petty thought he had married the woman of his dreams - it quickly turned into a nightmare. He almost lost his retirement home, pension and life. She withheld medications, food and access to his family. Finally the beatings started and he had to cry out for help. LSNF helped Mr. Petty divorce his 30-year old wife, and restore his home and savings. As part of the divorce, she was ordered to pay him alimony. Mr. Petty can live out his remaining years in peace and safety thanks to LSNF.*

**Tax Issues** - A group of legal aliens had their social security numbers stolen and wages were reported to IRS under these numbers. As a result they owed IRS thousands of dollars in back taxes but could not read the notices of back taxes owed. LSNF's bi-lingual staff contacted the IRS and convinced them the social security numbers had been stolen. The clients obtained releases of liability for thousands of dollars in taxes due, and were able to claim and obtain thousands of dollars of refunds that had been previously denied.



## Private Attorney Involvement

*John Fenno, Development Director*

The Private Attorney Involvement Program helps fill some of the gaps created by increased demand for services and decreased resources to meet the needs. Of the 500+ members of the LSNF pro bono pool of attorneys, there were 440 contributions of \$130,000 in cash through the Partners in Service Program for 2003-04. Included in this amount are regular substantial donations received from three area law firms: **Akerman Senterfit (formerly Katz, Kutter, Alderman & Bryant, P.A.); Hopping, Green, & Sams, P.A. ; and Rutledge, Ecenia, Purnell & Hoffman, P.A.** In addition, pro bono attorneys provided 4,114 hours of service in 2003, and 4,521 hours in 2004. Based on the fair market value of attorney services calculated by The Florida Bar, total hours worked by volunteers in 2003-2004 equals over \$1.2 million. These volunteer hours resulted in over 2,677 additional clients being assisted during the two-year period.

Volunteer activities of note during 2003-2004 include the establishment of a state-wide client self-help website. [www.FloridaLawHelp.org](http://www.FloridaLawHelp.org). provides clients and volunteer attorneys with information and tools for resolving many legal problems. The site was recognized by the General Practice Section of The Florida Bar in 2003 with a special cash award of \$1,000. In addition, LSNF created additional opportunities for volunteer lawyer participation by expanding its 2nd Judicial Circuit Telephone Legal Advice Hotline, establishing an expert panel of tax lawyers to support LSNF's new Low Income Tax Clinic (LITC) project, and expanding volunteer coordination of its Homeless Legal Advice Clinic. Also, LSNF petitioned and won statewide recognition for four of its volunteers, **Bruce Conroy** and **Bob Cohen** (2nd Judicial Circuit) and **Sher Allan** and **Allen Jelkes** (14th Judicial Circuit) in 2003-04 through The Florida Bar President's Pro Bono Circuit Awards, presented annually at a ceremony held before the Justices of the Florida Supreme Court.

*"I am happy to be associated with General Counsel Pam Leslie and the lawyers in the Florida Department of Transportation, where pro bono participation is great and involvement is highly encouraged. We get a lot out of helping serve the legal needs of the poor."*

*-Bruce Conroy, recipient of Florida Bar President's 2003 Pro Bono Service Award, 2nd Judicial Circuit.*

### *Volunteer Attorney Success Story*

*Mable*, a sixty-year old nursing home employee, purchased disability insurance in connection with a mortgage loan. A few years later, she became disabled and applied for benefits under that insurance policy. Her claim was denied without adequate explanation, and the company referred her to an Arbitration Agreement appended to the insurance policy. The Arbitration Agreement required that all disputes regarding insurance coverage be resolved through a process that required an initial filing fee - - and then substantial additional costs - - that far exceeded her available financial resources.

The volunteer attorney filed a lawsuit seeking the receipt of the disability insurance benefits in Circuit Court, and included in the Complaint an Action for Declaratory Relief asserting that the Arbitration Agreement was an unenforceable contract of adhesion. The company responded to the Complaint by agreeing to pay the full amount of the claim. In October, 2003, *Mable* received a check in the full amount.



**LSNF Administrators:** *LSNF's dedicated administrative team has over 165 years of combined experience serving the agency. From payroll to developing client resources and making certain it all serves our clients' greatest needs, the LSNF administration is devoted to its mission of providing an opportunity for justice.*

*LSNF's administrative team (and years of service) include: **Javan Ferguson**, Program Administrator (27); **Kristine Knab**, Executive Director (26); **Mary Jane Rudd**, Personnel Technician (26); **John Fenno**, Development Director (25); **Connie Davis**, Grants Administrator (22); **Theresa Kung**, Chief Financial Officer (20); **Scott Manion**, Director of Litigation (10); **Mary Dekle**, Resource Developer (6); **Anne Barnes**, Fiscal Assistant (3); and **Maria Williams**, Development Assistant (recent hire).*



**LSNF Attorneys:** *From domestic violence to unlawful evictions, the attorneys of LSNF work to ensure that people in our community have an opportunity for justice when their rights are denied. We are grateful to these dedicated attorneys who make many personal and professional sacrifices in order to provide legal aid for those in our community who would otherwise have nowhere else to turn.*

**Scott Manion, Director of Litigation**, received a B.A. with honors in political science from the University of Kansas and a J.D. from Washburn University School of Law. He oversees all aspects of litigation for LSNF's five service delivery locations. He has over 27 years experience as a public interest lawyer working with low-income clients.

#### **Tallahassee Office:**

**Marc Taps, Senior Attorney**, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and graduated with a B.S. in Aeronautics from Miami University. After receiving a J.D. from Cleveland State University, he managed an office for Lorain County (Ohio) Legal Aid in 1977-78, and joined the staff of LSNF in 1979.

**Chris DelMarco, Staff Attorney**, was born in White Plains, N.Y., and grew up in Connecticut. She received a B.S. in psychology and an M.S. in mental health counseling from Florida State University, and worked for several years as a domestic violence advocate. In 2000, she received a J.D. from Florida State University, graduating with high honors. She joined LSNF in 1998 as an intern and now works as a staff attorney specializing in domestic violence.



**Michael Donovan, Staff Attorney**, was born in Washington, D.C., Arlington, Virginia area and grew up in Bristol, Connecticut. He received a B.A. in Psychology/Economics from the University of Notre Dame in 1979. In 1984, he received his J.D. from Florida State University, and worked for several years for the Apalachee Regional Planning Council, and then the City of Tallahassee. He worked as a Law Clerk for LSNF in 1983 and rejoined Legal Services in 2003 specializing in child dependency.

**Stephanie Johnson, Staff Attorney**, was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut and grew up in Satellite Beach, Florida. She graduated with honors from the University of Florida College of Law, and joined the staff of LSNF in 1993. She specializes in education, consumer, and housing law.

**Tara Rosenblum, Staff Attorney**, was born in Black Mountain, North Carolina and grew up in Naples, Florida. She graduated from the University of South Florida with a B.A. in English. She joined LSNF in 2002 as a legal intern before graduating from Florida State University College of Law in 2003. She specializes in education and low income tax issues.

**Jennifer Sabin, Staff Attorney**, was born and raised in Miami, Florida. She graduated with honors from Florida International University with a B.A. in Political Science. She joined LSNF in 2003 as a legal extern before graduating from Florida State University College of Law in 2004. She specializes in dependency law and low income tax issues.

*The Attorneys in the Tallahassee office are assisted by Kerri Bowden, Paralegal; Zaid Haynes, Legal Assistant; Carolina Williams, Lead Secretary; Doris Williams, Communications Coordinator; Sherri Wellborn, Legal Secretary; and LaShun Williams, Docket Clerk.*

### **Quincy Office**

**Allison Sacket, Lead Attorney**, grew up in Roanoke, Alabama. She received a B.A. with honors in history from the University of Montevallo and a J.D. from Mississippi College School of Law. She joined Legal Services of North Florida in 2002 and practiced in the areas of family law, domestic violence and dependency and is currently working as the lead attorney in our Quincy office.

**Shanee Clark, Staff Attorney**, was born in Jacksonville, Florida and grew up in Newark, N.J. She received a B.S. with honors in Journalism and an M.Ed. from Florida A&M University. She received a J.D. from Florida State University in 2003. She joined LSNF in 2002 as an intern and now works as a staff attorney specializing in family law.

*Assisting in the Quincy office are Juanita Thigpen, Legal Assistant; Kim Fain, Lead Secretary; and Alicia McCloud, Receptionist/Docket Clerk.*

### **Panama City Office**

**Diane Barrs, Managing Attorney**, was born in Holyoke, Mass., received a B.A. in Sociology from the University of South Florida and a J.D. from Stetson University. She has served as an Assistant Attorney General, an Adjunct Professor, and has extensive government and family law practice experience. She was a staff attorney in the Tallahassee office for two years and currently manages the Panama City office. Interest areas include domestic violence; family law; juvenile law; and criminal process and procedure.



**Monique Bryan, Staff Attorney**, was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She received a B.A. in Criminology from Florida State University and a J.D. from Stetson University College of Law. She works as a staff attorney in the Panama City office, where she specializes in domestic violence and family law. She has a special interest in government and administrative law, probate and estate planning, and animal rights law.

**James Coombs, Staff Attorney**, hales from Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He received his B.A. in Political Science from LeMoyne College and a J. D. from Tulane University in 2002. He came to Florida in 2003 seeking a career in law and was hired by LSNF at that time. Jim is a staff attorney in the Panama City office specializing in consumer, housing and probate law.

*Assisting the attorneys in Panama City are Miriam Evans, Paralegal; Lakshmi Ramaraj, Lead Secretary; Claudia Franklin, Legal Secretary/Receptionist; and Vanessa Hawkins, Receptionist/Docket Clerk.*

### **Fort Walton Beach Office**

**Jeff Toney, Senior Attorney**, received a B.A. from Jackson State University and a J.D. from Florida State University. He joined LSNF in 1991 as a staff attorney and has been the managing attorney at the Ft. Walton Beach office since 1994. He has a special interest in housing issues.

**Steve Shelton, Staff Attorney**, has a B.A. in psychology and in studio fine arts, and a J.D. from Indiana University. He has worked as an Assistant State Attorney, an Assistant Public Defender, and for Legal Services in Orlando before joining LSNF in 1998, specializing in domestic violence.

*The Fort Walton Beach attorneys are assisted by Dorothea Toney, Legal Assistant; Bonnie Cardow, Lead Secretary; and Sharon Gingrich, Legal Secretary.*

### **Pensacola Office**

**Leslie Powell, Senior Attorney**, received a B.A. in Political Science, and a J.D. from North Carolina State University at Chapel Hill. She previously served as a senior attorney for Legal Services of Greater Miami specializing in public benefits law. She joined LSNF in 2004 to tackle housing and consumer issues in Pensacola and surrounding communities.

**Margaret Day Baker, Staff Attorney**, received a B.A. in Leadership Studies from the University of Richmond and a J.D. from Cumberland School of Law at Samford University. She joined LSNF in 2004 to assist Pensacola and the surrounding communities in the recovery from Hurricane Ivan.

*The Pensacola attorneys are assisted by Lola Thompson, Receptionist/PAI Assistant, and Jackie Britt, Legal Secretary.*



## Our Thanks

*The work of Legal Services of North Florida, Inc., would not be possible without your support.*

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**Angela L. Kleinstub**

**June 13, 2003**

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