



We are a Civil Legal aid program which provides legal help at no charge to eligible low-income persons in non-criminal legal matters. We serve a 36 county region covering northern/central Illinois (except Cook County).

Our services are provided from 11 office locations, staffed by full-time staff attorneys; part-time intake attorneys and volunteer attorneys
-Important to understand that demand greatly exceeds capacity

Priorities: stopping domestic violence, helping elderly and disabled to access needs based benefits, preventing eviction.

We cannot serve all of the eligible people seeking help with basic needs issues.

Services tend to respond to crisis.

Justice, Equity and Opportunity programs- R3

1. Collar Region grant serving Waukegan, North Chicago, Zion, Kankakee and Joliet.
2. Northwest Central region grant serving Bloomington and Peoria
3. Northern Region Grant serving Rockford and Freeport
4. Northwestern Region grant serving Rock Island



Our Approach

Utilize a Community Lawyering approach, to engage with the community to understand the issues and barriers facing residents, and develop strategies to address these issues using legal tools and advocacy.

Targeting Services: we hire residents of the R3 Community to help us effectively engage, and that advocate in turn identifies and trains “community navigators”, to create an effective network to ensure that we are accessible



Our Goals:

Build confidence in the legal system to resolve non criminal legal problems.

- Embedding legal aid staff in trusted community organizations
- Hiring local residents for full-time positions with benefits working as a part of legal aid.
- Engaging community residents in efforts identified as desired in that community:
- In Waukegan: Entrepreneurship Incubator program with community based organization working with residents who have served prison or jail time to help them build businesses.
- In Rockford- working with schools on developing restorative justice programs for students and teaching youth and young adults to communicate issues in a healthy manner.
- Listening to community residents about their needs and helping them address those needs using legal services.



Our Goals:

Empower residents to help themselves and one another

- Hiring local residents to lead outreach efforts
- Creating a training program to teach local residents how to find legal information using Illinois Legal Aid Online and how to help fellow residents find the resources and legal tools they need.
- Providing a title of community navigator to those who attend the 5 hours of training.
- Offering legal education programs for community residents



Our Goals:

Increase access to civil legal aid services

- Provide legal services to eligible residents to
- Expunge or seal criminal records that may be a barrier to jobs or housing
- Obtain health care waivers to allow persons with criminal records to work in health care.
- Help residents with legal barriers to employment due to drivers license issues, transportation issues, or similar problems
- Help residents with barriers to adequate housing due to threats of eviction, poor housing conditions, loss of utility services.
- In Peoria: many public housing tenants were victims of identity theft and as a result were facing allegations of higher past due rent owed and the potential for eviction. R3 staff conducted outreach and represented tenants to prove they did not obtain government COVID grants for businesses.



Challenges:

- Starting this program in 2021 during pandemic made it difficult to hire staff in some areas. This is just now improving.
- Pandemic limited in-person outreach efforts.
- Continuity of services over time is key to building relationships and trust.
- Year one funding was based on 9 month budgets and year two has continued this 9 month funding level to a second full year.

