

Central Jersey Legal Services

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ANNUAL REPORT

Central Jersey
Legal Services
Inc.



2021 IN REVIEW

In 2021, Central Jersey Legal Services marked **55 years** of service to low-income New Jersey residents in need of legal help. As we continued to work through the **crisis of COVID-19**, our 55th anniversary was an important reminder of the significance of legal aid in uncertain times. Throughout our history, legal aid has protected the rights of low-income people in times of economic hardship, through political strife, and in the aftermath of natural disasters. This past year our staff answered the call yet again, working much of the year out of their homes to ensure that our clients had access to the legal expertise they needed. Despite all the challenges, **CJLS staff processed more than 6,800 intakes in 2021** – opening new cases for families trying to save their housing, workers denied unemployment benefits, elderly victims of consumer fraud, and survivors of domestic violence seeking court protection. We built up our Housing Unit knowing how severe the need would be as the courts began to work through a backlog of **tens of thousands of eviction filings**. Housing attorneys and paralegals opened 20% more cases in the last quarter of the year than they did in the first quarter – **helping over 700 clients** to resolve serious legal issues threatening their housing. We adapted to the challenges of the pandemic in ways which have changed us for the better – using technology to connect with our client community in different ways, delivering legal information and self-help materials in new formats, finding innovative methods to reach underserved communities, especially those with limited English proficiency.

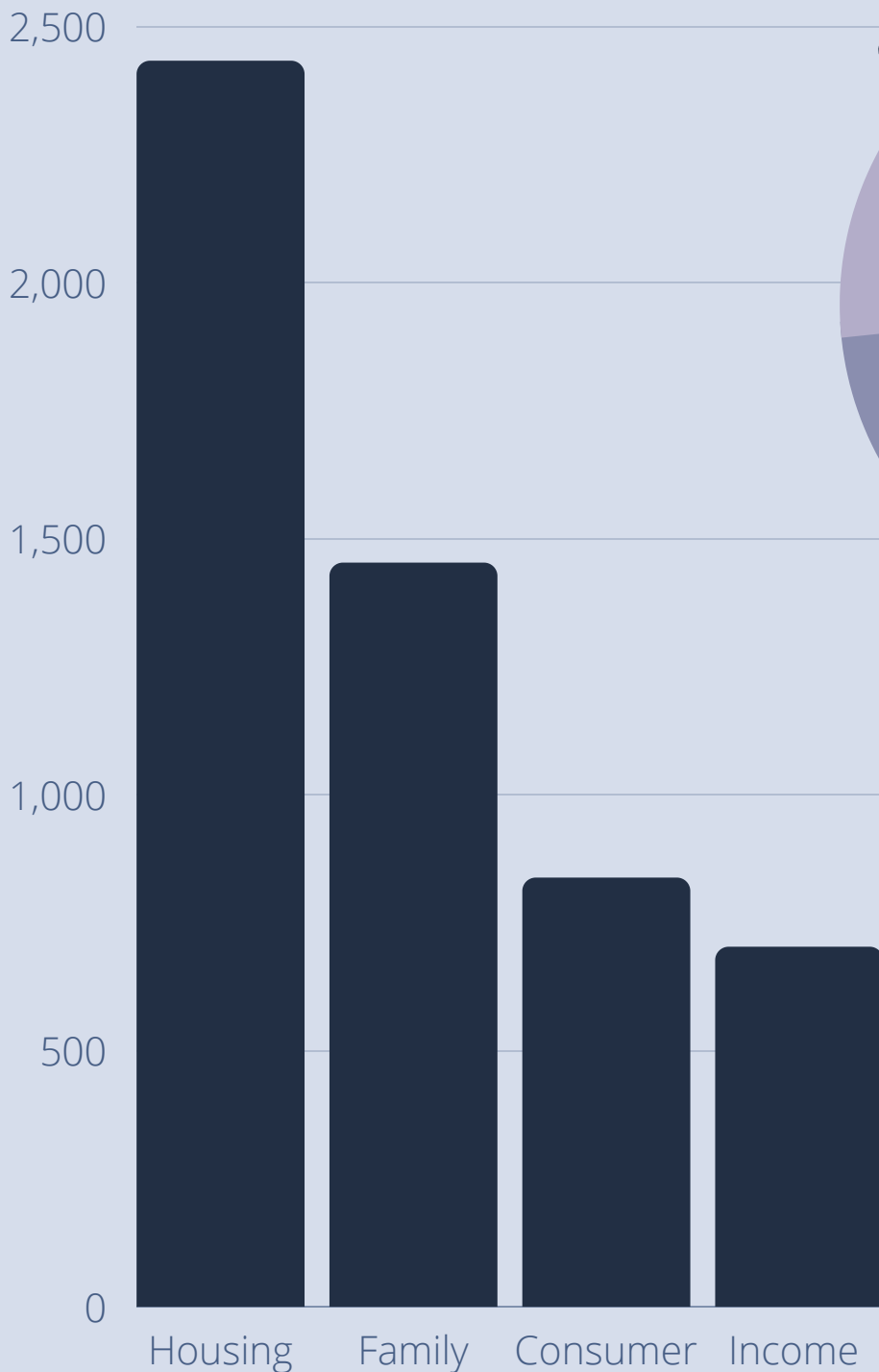
CJLS looks forward to the promise of 2022 with a strengthened resolve to **keep the promise of Justice for All** and a confidence that we will meet the challenges that await us.

2021 CASES

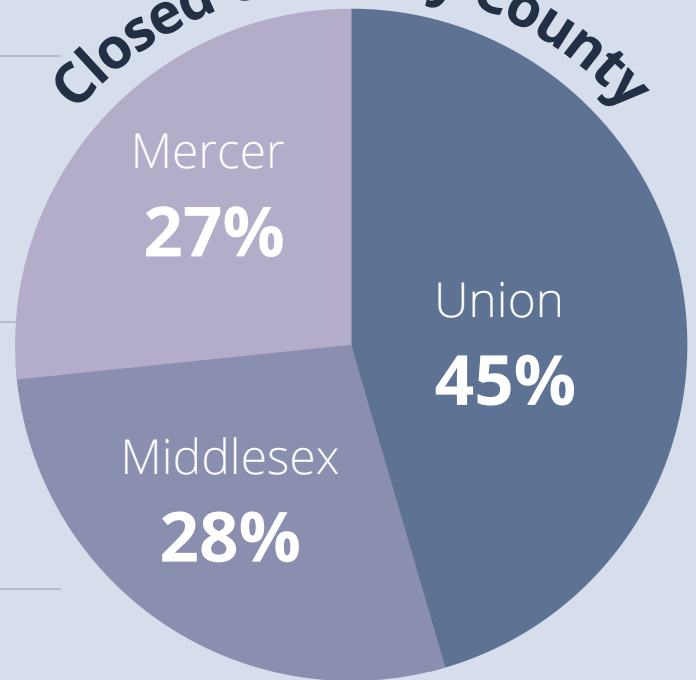
6,888 Intakes

5,297 Cases Closed

Top Problem Categories for Closed Cases in 2021



Closed Cases by County



Closed Cases by Level of Service

Counsel and Advice
3591

Extended Service/Litigation
1706

OUR CLIENTS



2021 clients spoke
18 different languages

- American Sign Language
- Arabic
- Bengali
- Chinese
- English
- French
- Haitian Creole
- Hindi
- Hungarian
- Italian
- Korean
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Swahili
- Urdu
- Vietnamese

126 veterans served

1,200 clients were over the age of 60

4,898 children lived in households assisted

1,246 victims of Domestic Violence assisted

42% of cases in 2021 were housing issues

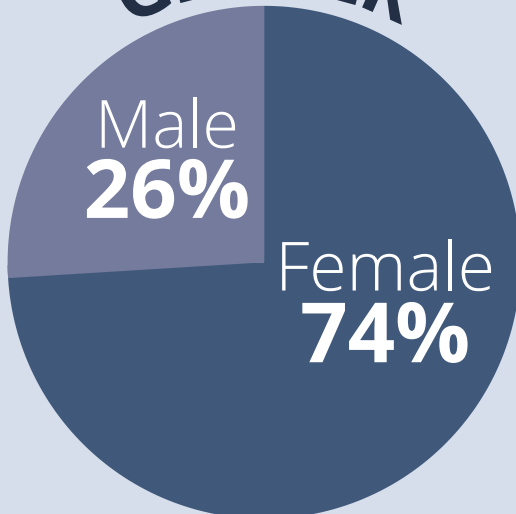
1,999 clients living with a physical or mental disability

Average Household Income

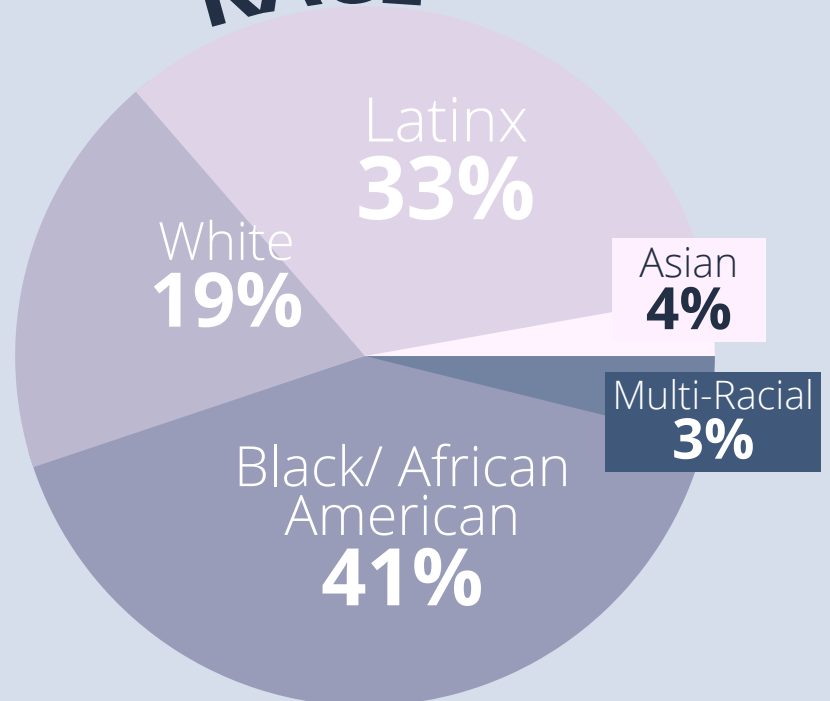
\$20,950



GENDER



RACE



CASE OUTCOMES

225

Prevented evictions

110

Protection Orders obtained for Domestic Violence victims

106

Disability, Unemployment, and other public benefits secured

103

Child Custody & Support Secured

88

Competed wills, power of attorney, or health care proxy

137

Excessive & Unlawful Debt Resolved



OUR STORIES

Avita

Avita and her young daughter moved into an apartment with Avita's friend who needed help due to some health issues. They were never added to the lease as household members but lived there for several years with the landlord's knowledge. In the summer of 2020 Avita's friend passed away. Avita and her daughter continued to live in the apartment and paid the rent. Then Avita had a call from her friend's daughter. The landlord wanted them out in 14 days. Avita's daughter went to school in the town where they lived, and Avita didn't know how she would find a new place to live while everything was shut down during the pandemic. She wanted to stay in the apartment, so she contacted CJLS for help.

A CJLS attorney advised Avita that the landlord would need a court order and could not remove them in 14 days. They were also protected by the moratorium on removals. Avita's attorney negotiated with the landlord who agreed to dismiss the eviction and let them stay. We also determined that Avita was income eligible for a rent subsidy, so her monthly rent was more affordable for her family. The landlord wanted Avita to pay the full market rent for two months that she lived there after her friend died but before her subsidy was approved. We helped her negotiate a payment plan for that amount, since Avita could not afford to pay it in a lump sum and also provide a new security deposit. With our assistance, Avita and her daughter kept the apartment they had called home for the last several years, at a rent they could afford. Avita's daughter remained in her school district with her friends, and Avita avoided having to search for a new home in the middle of a pandemic.

OUR STORIES

Devon

Devon is a 39-year-old man living with HIV. He was extremely ill for the last several years, in and out of the hospital, unable to work, or see his young daughter. He came to CJLS for help with multiple legal issues. He had applied for Social Security Disability benefits and was denied. He had child support arrears that he needed to work out, and he wanted to reestablish parenting time with his daughter. He contacted the child's mother but she refused to work out parenting time voluntarily.

A CJLS attorney helped Devon file an appeal of the denial of Social Security benefits, and his SSD was approved, including derivative benefits for his daughter. The derivative benefits should have ended his child support obligation, but probation continued to garnish his SSD benefits for the prior child support amount. CJLS filed a motion and had the collection of child support stopped.

We also asked the court to apply the retroactive derivative benefits received by the mother to the account, which cleared all arrears. At the same time, we helped Devon determine that there was an existing parenting time order. He asked his child's mother to comply with the order and allow him parenting time, but she refused, so we filed a motion to reestablish parenting time. The judge ordered a brief period of daytime visits followed by a permanent schedule of overnight weekend visits, vacation time, and division of major holidays between the parents. We were also able to get the court to establish that Devon is an emergency contact on all school and health forms and that he be informed of all medical and school decisions. With assistance from CJLS, Devon was able to secure disability benefits that provided him with a stable source of income and health care coverage. Child support obligations were cleared from his account, and garnishments to his SSD for child support were eliminated. He's reestablished parenting time with his daughter and is rebuilding his relationship with her after overcoming a long illness.

OUR STORIES

Judy

Judy is a 60-year-old woman living alone in a home that she owns. A tree fell on her house causing damage to her roof. She hired a contractor to make the repairs based on her insurance company's inspection. The contractor recommended they repair rather than replace her roof and use the extra insurance money for other work on the home. After some of the work was completed, Judy's insurance company asked for an itemized scope of work from her contractor. He refused to provide one. Instead, he incorporated the insurance adjuster's scope of work into the contract, which didn't accurately reflect what was being done. The insurance company rejected that and demanded an itemized contract. When the contractor again refused, Judy reached out to CJLS for help.

A CJLS attorney advised Judy that what the contractor was doing was fraud, and that insurance money could only be used to complete work that was approved by the insurance company. Our attorney advised Judy what her options were at this point, and she decided to ask the contractor to separate the extra work into an additional contract. He agreed and then vanished. Soon after, Judy received demands for payment for the work that was completed and threats to place a lien on her home. The contractor continuously asked for in-person meetings which Judy refused because she was at higher risk for complications from COVID due to her age. The contractor then claimed Judy was deliberately avoiding him to avoid paying him the balance of the contract. A CJLS attorney helped Judy through lengthy negotiations with her insurance company, the mortgage company, and the contractor to settle the issue. We assisted Judy to file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Affairs. We were eventually able to reach an agreement that satisfied the contractor for the work he had completed and left the client with enough to complete the repairs to her roof. The negotiations took place over several months and involved multiple parties. Judy was grateful that she had CJLS on her side to help her through the process and safeguard her rights. With our help, she was able to avoid a bad deal and get the repairs to her home completed properly.

OUR STORIES

Roseline

Roseline was here on a temporary visa when she met her husband. After they married, he petitioned his wife and she became a conditional permanent resident. Conditional permanent residence expires in two years. Normally, the couple has to petition together to remove the conditions so the immigrant spouse can get permanent residence.

Unfortunately, before this was possible, he began physically, sexually, and psychologically abusing Roseline. Police were at their apartment numerous times after calls from neighbors. He frequently threatened to call the police and immigration to have her returned to her country of origin. He was extremely controlling. He examined her phone, wanted her to explain all incoming/outgoing calls, and did not allow her to see her family or go out. During one incident, he took her wallet with her green card and driver's license and refused to return it. Police officers offered restraining orders, but she was always too afraid to follow up. She eventually sought help from a domestic violence program and they referred her to us. When she contacted us she was still living at home with her husband and was five months pregnant. She could only communicate by email, which she would go and check at the library. We explained that she could remove conditions on her permanent residence on her own without her husband's knowledge or participation. Armed with the understanding that she no longer depended on her husband for her residence, she left him and got a Final Restraining Order. We helped Roseline apply to remove conditions on her permanent residence. After many months we received confirmation that her application was approved, picked up her permanent resident card, and delivered it to her at her apartment where she was living with her infant daughter.