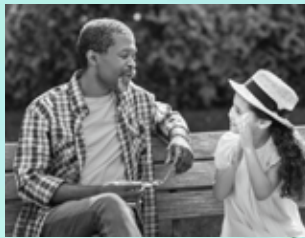


PASSION & PURPOSE

2024 IMPACT REPORT



LOWCOUNTRY LEGAL
VOLUNTEERS

CELEBRATING
25
Years

For over 25 years Lowcountry Legal Volunteers has been serving low-income clients providing direct legal representation to residents of Beaufort, Jasper, and Hampton counties, living at or below 200% of the current federal poverty guidelines. This support enables us to help better the lives of all of the individuals and families we serve, helping us provide hope, safety, security, financial stability, and brighter futures. The following report provides a snapshot of the profound impact our volunteers and team had on our community over the past year.

AREAS OF ASSISTANCE

Many legal issues require an attorney's specialized legal knowledge and/or time helping represent you in court. Our goal is to make sure all families have access to these services regardless of their ability to pay, so that the doors of justice are open to all.

FAMILY LAW

Two of the most important ingredients in strong families are balance and stability. And when these are upset, individuals can count on us to help them through these difficult times. We do everything we can to help restore these families foundations.

We assist individuals with the following:

- Custody Matters
- Registration of Out of State Child Support
- Securing Child Support
- Parental Visitation
- Divorce (involving minor children)
- Clinics for Uncontested Divorce (with no minor children)

LIFE & FUTURE PLANNING

Being prepared for the future is something many of us don't think about until we find ourselves needing a little help. And, that is exactly what we are here for – to offer you advice and the services you need for where you are in your life.

We assist individuals with the following:

- Creating a Durable Power of Attorney
- Creating a Health Care Power of Attorney
- Preparing Simple Wills
- Probate
- Securing Guardianship/Conservatorships

HOUSING PROTECTION

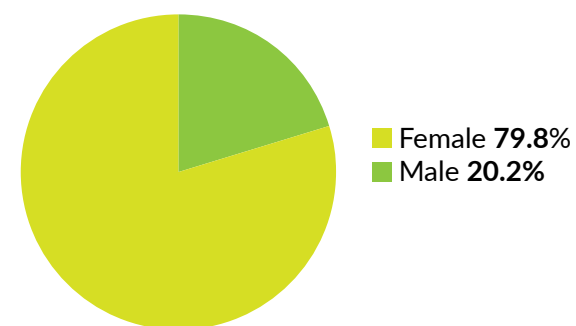
Being able to provide safe and stable housing is essential to all families.

We assist individuals with the following:

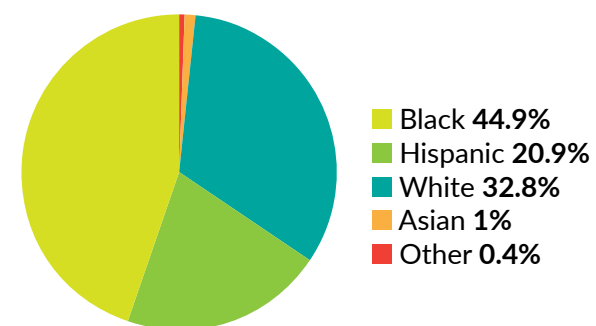
- Eviction Defense and Landlord Tenant Matters
- Consumer Matters
- Non-Refund of Security Deposits
- Improving Living Conditions' Health and Safety Concerns

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

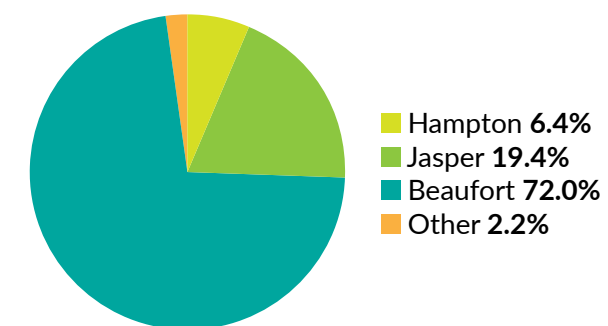
GENDER



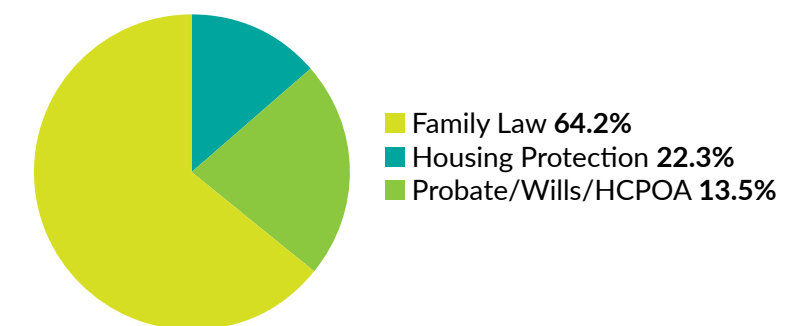
RACE



COUNTY OF RESIDENCE



CASE MIX



Family Law

Family is at the heart of what we do at Lowcountry Legal Volunteers. For almost 25 years, LLV has served low-income individuals with their family law needs.

Most of our clients are single women or newly single women who have been abused, abandoned, or dealing with a relationship that is unhealthy for themselves and their children. These individuals take the brave step to call us for free legal services and support. Lowcountry Legal Volunteers is honored to help families get what they need from a legal standpoint to move forward with their lives in a powerful way.

The services we provide for free include custody and visitation actions, divorce involving minor children, and restraining orders. We see the impact of our clients getting a child support order in place and the benefits that flow from it for that client's children. So far this year, LLV has been able to obtain over \$220,000 in child support for our clients.

We also have the pleasure of helping our clients with birth certificate amendments for their children. Why this is so important? It allows children to be able to attend school, apply for financial aid, passports, dual citizenship and more. These children's birth certificates must be correct as to not only their name, but their parents' names and information as well. We see this across the board for our low-income clients, but our Spanish speaking clients face this issue a good deal of the time.

It's all about access for these families, and we are happy to be the legal conduit for these families to get that access to the courts and to the positive outcomes that they deserve.



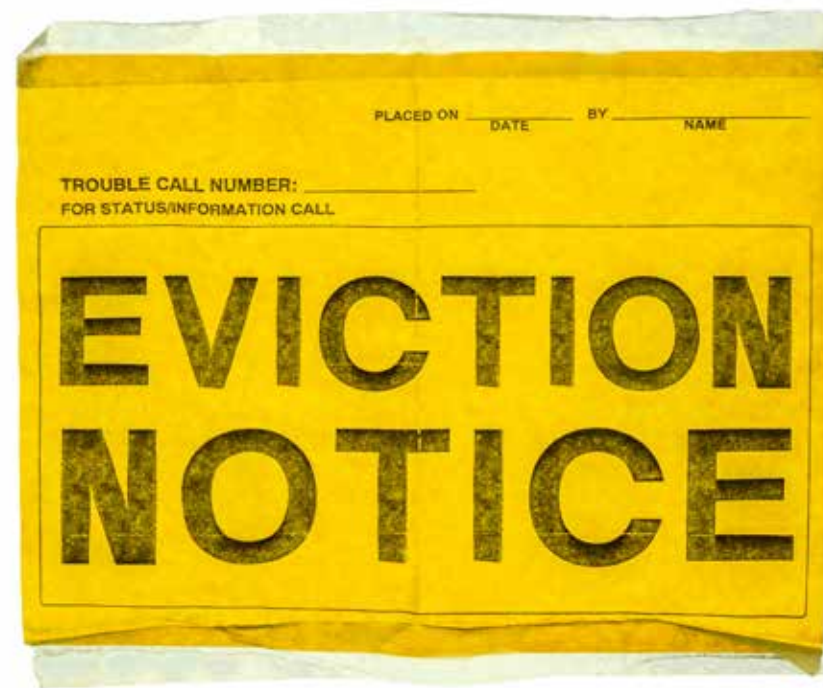


Creating a Brighter Future

Amber came to Lowcountry Legal Volunteers in November of 2023 seeking help with a divorce from her husband, including custody of her young daughter and child support. She had previously lived in New Jersey with her husband. But upon separating, she and her daughter returned to Jasper County, where they lived with family as Amber began rebuilding her and her daughter's lives. Struggling to get back on her feet financially and in desperate need of legal counsel, Amber came to Lowcountry Legal Volunteers, where she ultimately found what she was looking for – someone to help her and her daughter get what they needed to move forward with their lives.

Upon filing for divorce, her husband then hired an attorney. The good news, Amber was now represented by Lowcountry Legal Volunteers and on equal footing, if not better, than her husband with respect to her legal team. Ultimately, after a lengthy discovery process and protracted mediation, we were able to obtain a complete settlement agreement giving her primary physical custody of her young daughter and requiring her husband to immediately begin paying child support.

What our team also witnessed while the case was moving forward was Amber continuing to grow as a young woman and mother. She was working hard and excelling in her job as a manager at Chick-fil-A®. She took advantage of every opportunity that was presented to her to become an empowered and confident woman. She was even able to obtain a scholarship, from one of Lowcountry Legal Volunteers community partners, for her daughter to attend an outstanding faith-based local school. Because her daughter is in school close to her work, Amber no longer has to work nights and can be on the same schedule as her daughter. At her final hearing, we presented her with the final Decree of Divorce with no doubt that she and her daughter were now on the path to a much happier and healthier life. And, we recently learned from Amber that she is now pursuing her GED.



Housing Protection – Essential for our Community

Over the past year, Lowcountry Legal Volunteers has continued its successful Housing Protection Program, which was initially launched in 2020 during the pandemic. This program provides critical legal counsel and representation to low-income renters facing eviction as well as ongoing education on tenant's rights via community outreach and clinics. In the spring of 2024, we also added a new full-time attorney to our team to handle these cases and other urgent landlord/tenant matters and who now specifically dedicates the majority of his time to serving our Housing Protection Program clients.

Why is this so important?

In South Carolina, someone who is being evicted only has 10 calendar days to respond in writing to the eviction action if they want to defend themselves.

LLV is dedicated to ensuring safe housing for families in the Lowcountry and has experienced great success with our educational clinics and outreach designed to better educate low-income families on their rights and responsibilities as renters. These clinics also offer attendees the opportunity to ask questions, benefiting all attendees, as well as apply for legal representation with our LLV team. Collaboration with local community partners, like Deep Well, Bluffton Self Help and others is also enabling us to expand our reach through them making sure those using their services are aware of our free legal services, and when needed, offering our collective team's support to get them through the eviction process and become their invaluable ally. By providing timely assistance, support, and resources, we are making a tangible difference in the lives of those families and individuals facing eviction and/or dealing with other related housing issues.

We are also pleased that we can now serve even more people in need of housing protection with our announcement of increasing the family income level requirement from those at 150% of the federal poverty guidelines to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. LLV's Housing Protection Program utilizes our entire team, including our three attorneys: Anne Caywood, Hannah Kidd and David Bartholomew, to provide legal education and counsel to those facing the myriad of challenges our area's residents often face. And of course, we could never get all that we do accomplished without the support of our bilingual paralegal, bilingual legal assistant and the tireless work of our volunteers that continue to make this program a success.



A Home of their Own

Brittany was in between a rock and a hard place when our team at Lowcountry Legal Volunteers first met her. It all began when she came to one of our Housing Protection Program clinics desperate for help – really desperate.

She and her daughter, Jada, had already been forced out of their rental home and now the property manager was refusing to return Brittany’s sizable security deposit.

Despite all of her attempts to resolve the matter and trying to be respectful of the property manager nothing had gone her way. After hearing her full story, reviewing her lease agreement and making sure we had all of the facts correct, we took her case. And yes, while Brittany’s eviction had been handled legally, but certainly not professionally, her security deposit was an entirely different issue.

The fact was that her security deposit was now being held illegally and was due to her in full. At this point, we proceeded on her behalf and not only got her full security deposit back but also obtained additional monetary damages for Brittany allowing her and her daughter to secure an even better place to live. Brittany and Jada are now living in a beautiful apartment. Now Brittany has become a business consultant and is pursuing additional education. Another takeaway for our team was not only a win for Brittany but the profound impact we had created in her life. How did that become so apparent to all of us at LLV? That’s a touching one, and occurred when Brittany asked if she could become one of our volunteers. Of course our answer was a resounding “Yes!”



Community Outreach

Knowledge is power – we have all heard that quote, but we get to see it on a daily basis at Lowcountry Legal Volunteers. A big part of what LLV does in our three county service area is to share the knowledge that our staff and volunteers have about the law. Whether it is a wills clinic, a family law rights clinic or a tenant’s rights clinic, we seek to provide vital information to low-income members of our community that can be life changing.

LLV works with local community leaders and organizations to make sure we are in the right place at the right time for people to gain access to that information without inconveniencing them or their families. Because most of our clients or clinic attendees work one to two jobs to make ends meet, LLV either goes where they are or hosts clinics on convenient days or times to increase the opportunity for people to attend.

Our collaborations with other organizations and agencies are key to the success of these outreach and education clinics. LLV is particularly excited for a new initiative to train local attorneys how to assist abuse victims with obtaining restraining orders. We held the first of many CLEs, with our partner in this new initiative, Hopeful Horizons, on September 12 at the Beaufort County Council Chambers with the support of the Beaufort County Bar Association, the 14th Circuit Solicitor’s Office, Victims Services Center, and SCCADVASA. LLV’s goal is to ensure that a victim of domestic violence can call us, and we can either take the restraining order on or refer it to a trained local attorney on our roster to represent them in that emergency situation for free. Part of this initiative will include community outreach clinics to make the public aware of this new service and resource for intimate partner victims of harassment or physical abuse.

LLV recently received funding through Georgetown Law as the legal service provider for their SC Justice Navigator Network Trainings. LLV will train “Justice Navigators” to spot legal issues and get people to the right legal resource, with a particular focus on heirs’ property issues. We are working with the Center for Heirs’ Property and Legal Link to create these materials and are very excited to lead multiple trainings in Hampton and Jasper counties. Our goal is to touch more people’s lives through the training sessions and the connections we are able to create as a result of this outreach.

This year we have held 27 free clinics with over 200 attendees. LLV has an upcoming Wills for Veterans Clinic and two Pro Se Divorce Clinics for the remainder of 2024 and is already planning for our outreach next year.



One of the clinics we are the most proud of is our Free Legal Service Provider Clinic. This year, we have held two of these clinics: one at our Beaufort office and one at the Tarboro Community Center as part of their Juneteenth Celebration. The goal of these clinics is to provide a one stop shop for local families to find out about their legal rights and resources that are available to them. LLV invites all the local free legal service providers to have a table and bring their information. Last September, we were honored to have Olivia Stafford Jones come and volunteer at our Free Legal Service Provider Clinic at Antioch Education Center in Ridgeland, South Carolina.

27 free clinics with
over **200** attendees

A Father's Story of Triumph

When Shawn came to us looking for help, we quickly realized that this was going to be an intense custody battle. Why? Because what Shawn was facing was potentially a matter of life and death for his little boy.

His son had just turned two when his six-year-old half-sister died at the hands of his biological mother and her boyfriend, after suffering years of physical abuse.

Shawn and his mother, the little boy's grandmother, had then received immediate emergency custody of him. After pleading guilty, his mother, went to prison for several years.

Fast forward, and his mother was just recently released from prison and hired an attorney from Columbia to file for complete and total custody of this wonderful little boy, now an 11-year-old young man. Shawn's son began having nightmares at the thought of even seeing his mom and worrying about if he would be safe and who would protect him.

Yes, a mother who had killed her own child now seeking full custody of Shawn's son. That's when Shawn came to see us, to get our help protecting his son, and to fight for his rights as a father to continue raising him in a loving and safe home. Our attorney, staff, and volunteer team then went to work to make sure this would never happen. And, it didn't! We got the case dismissed for all the reasons cases like this one should never be brought to court.

The result, no more living in fear for this 11-year-old and what were true tears of joy for Shawn.

This is just one more example of how Lowcountry Legal Volunteers is representing amazing parents who lack the financial resources to hire an attorney. Remember, it's your support that makes stories like this possible every day. We simply couldn't do it without you!



VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,508

OUTREACH CLINICS HELD

27

CASES CLOSED

153

VALUE OF FREE LEGAL SERVICES

2.95M

CHILD SUPPORT OBTAINED

178K+



How Can We Help Address The Structural Problems At The Root Of So Many Health-Harming Inequities?

In late 2023, this was the very question we set out to answer with the leadership teams at local medical clinics, knowing the enormous potential providing free legal services could have in helping local healthcare providers respond to the social needs they see every day in their clinics. The solution on the table – the creation of a medical legal partnership (MLP).

Medical Legal Partnership: How Lowcountry Legal Volunteers and our Local Free Medical Clinics Are Working Together to “Treat the Whole Patient”

In the Fall of 2023, supported by a grant from the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry, Lowcountry Legal Volunteers launched its Medical Legal Partnership program. Through LLV’s partnership with local free medical clinics, low-income patients are now able to receive free critical legal services as part of their medical treatment.

Why is this so important?

According to the National Center for Medical Legal Partnership, every low-income person has two to three unmet civil legal needs that can create barriers to healthy eating, healthy housing, employment, and safety. Addressing those needs improves a person’s health and helps medical treatment work more effectively.

Medical legal partnerships provide a holistic approach to patient care by joining together legal expertise into healthcare settings. Additionally, medical legal partnerships are important because they simultaneously address both legal issues and healthcare, acknowledging that a person’s health and well-being is significantly impacted by legal and societal issues. These partnerships bring healthcare providers and lawyers together as a multidisciplinary team to address these issues and provide comprehensive care to vulnerable residents to overcome health disparities.

“Healthcare means treating the whole person, which may include legal issues. Because our patients trust us, and knowing we have a strong relationship with Lowcountry Legal Volunteers, any anxiety or hesitation our patients might feel when working with an unfamiliar person or organization has been removed.”

Pam Toney - Executive Director at Bluffton Jasper Volunteers in Medicine

Studies have shown that when legal services are used to address social needs, patients:

- have been admitted to the hospital less frequently
- more commonly take their medications as prescribed
- report less stress and experienced improved mental health
- improve their financial situations



Dr. Newman, Director of VIM’s Hilton Head Island, and **Hannah Kidd**, LLV MLP Attorney

Medical legal partnerships can also reduce long-term healthcare costs. This is accomplished by helping patients in accessing public benefits, insurance coverage and other financial resources, which can save on costs for healthcare systems and the community.

Source: [medical-legalpartnership.org](https://www.medical-legalpartnership.org)

Through the Medical Legal Partnership, Lowcountry Legal Volunteers, is in a position to assist healthcare to improve the social determinants that can negatively impact health. Issues related to housing, hunger, education, and safety can often lead to illness amongst people in our community. While healthcare dedicates resources to treating illness caused by the problems, it is often unable to treat the source. Civil legal aid can work as a type of preventative health measure. Medical legal partnerships can not only improve the overall health of a patient, but can also help keep patients more involved in their healthcare. By increasing healthcare workers’ understanding of social determinants of health and screening for them, patients are more likely to be connected to those legal services available to them.

This program is important to our community because it is able to meet both the healthcare and legal needs of our low-income residents and their children. Whether it’s a mother who needs child support to raise her children, or a grandparent who has been made sick due to poor housing conditions, this Medical Legal Partnership program will undoubtedly improve their lives and the lives of their families.





A Mother's Courage

Alma is a hard-working single mother of two who speaks Spanish as her primary language. She had been separated from her husband for 7 years when she was referred to us by our medical legal partner, Volunteers in Medicine in Hilton Head. Alma had stayed separated for that long because she did not believe she could afford an attorney and was still a little frightened of her husband.

Although she is a very upbeat and positive person, each time our LLV attorney met with her with our bilingual legal assistant, you could see and feel the strain that not having this serious legal issue taken care of had put on Alma.

Alma and her husband had gotten along for the sake of the children, but in the back of her mind Alma feared that without a sole custody order her husband might take the children back to Mexico.

Our LLV Attorney, Anne, showed up at the temporary hearing ready for a contentious fight. Her husband arrived at the courthouse lobby and through his interpreter indicated an unwillingness to even discuss a settlement. Thanks to an hour-long delay before the hearing and cooler heads prevailing, a temporary settlement was reached including child support and everything else Alma desired.

LLV was able to turn that temporary order into a full and final settlement agreement and within three months got Alma divorced! Alma was grinning from ear to ear when she realized that she was finally free.



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