

# COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES IN EAST PALO ALTO



Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto ("CLS-EPA") provides free legal services to low-income and under-served people in the areas of housing and immigration through advice clinics, direct services and representation. It is also home to the Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) and a Juvenile Justice clinic, which provide legal services in a broad range of practice areas by engaging the assistance of volunteer law students and *pro bono* attorneys.

CLS-EPA opened in September 2002. We are a community-based organization funded by grants and donations from foundations, law firms, legal organizations, and individual donors. In our first six months, we have helped over 690 people.



**Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto**  
**2117-B University Avenue**  
**East Palo Alto, CA 94303**

**fax (650) 326-9722**

**tel. (650) 326-6440**

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## HOUSING

In a community with tremendous need for help with housing questions, CLS-EPA turns no one away. Staff attorney Jeanne Merino and paralegal Victor Ramirez see clients both at evening clinics and on a walk-in basis. They are assisted by Stanford Law School students who participate in our twice-monthly advice and brief sessions, interviewing and counseling tenants under the supervision of an attorney. Services include:

**Advice and Information.** CLS advises clients on their rights and responsibilities regarding eviction and threatened eviction, habitability, rents, Section 8 housing, discrimination, retaliation, and security deposits. Our office helps tenants write letters and complete documents. We attend inspections. Assistance from our office is on-going.

**Brief Services.** CLS writes demand letters, helps file answers in court, and negotiates with landlords and opposing counsels on behalf of clients. We frequently assist clients who represent themselves in unlawful detainer and in small claims court. CLS does not currently litigate housing cases. We refer individuals to other legal service agencies, including Stanford Community Law Clinic.

*In the last six months, the Housing Program has served over 100 families with housing issues. Our victories include helping a family of four get their Section 8 Housing benefits after being wrongfully denied eligibility, negotiating the return of several security deposits improperly denied, and negotiating to keep families in their homes after eviction notices.*

**Community Outreach and Education.** CLS is available to do presentations in English and Spanish on topics ranging from how to get a security deposit back to how to work with a landlord and other tenants in the building to reduce habitability problems.

**Referral.** We refer individuals to social service organizations or other legal agencies where additional assistance is needed.



## VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY PROGRAM (VAP)

Community Legal Services helps people with a wide range of legal problems. In addition to assistance with housing and immigration, we work with a variety of cases including consumer fraud, insurance, bankruptcy, car financing, and predatory lending.

Trained Stanford Law School students assist clients under the supervision of attorney Shirley Hochhausen. They conduct interviews, write legal memoranda, provide advice, advocate, and negotiate, as appropriate in each case. Clients with more intractable legal problems are referred to attorneys from local firms, who provide their services free of charge.

### WHO DOES VAP HELP?

- **Dale** lived with his family of four in a rented garage that served as their home. The garage burned when a light fixture started a fire. The family lost their home and many of their possessions. They were sued by the homeowner's insurer to recover thirty thousand dollars in damage to the property.
- Individuals are often helped with multiple issues. VAP helped a victim of a **predatory home loan, refinance his loan** and also obtain **Social Security Disability benefits**. A lawsuit was filed in Federal District Court to redress the predatory lending issues. VAP assisted the client's wife, injured in the workplace, with her **Worker's Compensation**. A life changing experience for a family of seven made possible by VAP!



## JUVENILE JUSTICE PROGRAM

In response to community requests, CLS-EPA offers monthly advice sessions for juveniles, with volunteer attorneys who specialize in criminal matters.

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## IMMIGRATION

Two-thirds of the East Palo Alto population is Latino or Pacific Islander. CLS-EPA provides much needed reliable and effective immigration legal assistance to these communities. Program Director Katy Henrikson is the only agency-based attorney providing free immigration services in San Mateo County and the mid-peninsula area. Services include:

**Advice and Information.** A team of trained, supervised Stanford Law students performs intake, and relays to clients advice on how to regularize their own, or family members' immigration status. Bilingual informational handouts on more than 20 immigrants' rights topics are distributed.

**Brief Services, Applications, Representation.** We help clients with Violence Against Women Act claims, family petitions, FOIA requests, green card renewals, political asylum claims and more.

*CLS has assisted clients from American Samoa, Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico, Samoa, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, and the United States. In CLS's first six months, over 235 clients have been helped – with services that would cost \$50 - \$500 to complete with a private attorney.*

**Referral.** Where needed, CLS refers individual clients to social service agencies or private attorneys.

**Community Outreach and Education.** CLS does presentations in Spanish or English on topics such as immigrants' rights, legislative updates, avoiding "notario" scams, and how to get a green card.

*In six months, our immigrants' rights community presentations have reached over 700 people.*

**Policy Work and Advocacy.** CLS offers technical assistance and legal expertise for local pro-immigrant leaders and grassroots organizers.

## COLLABORATION

In order to provide the best possible services to people who come to us for help, Community Legal Services collaborates extensively with:

- community organizations and local non-profit groups
- local government and business
- Stanford University and Stanford Law School
- Service providers throughout the Bay Area

**Board of Directors.** Our board of directors and advisory board are made up of community members and other friends of CLS, including executive directors of local non-profits (including EPA CAN DO, Family Support Center, Community Development Institute and Pacific Islander Outreach), the local bank branch manager, prominent attorneys and law professors, members of the EPA City Council and Rent Stabilization Board, former clients, and the first Mayor of East Palo Alto.

**Executive Director** Geraldine Steinberg, former Santa Clara County Supervisor, is Executive Director.

**Stanford Community Law Clinic.** CLS-EPA and the Stanford Clinic are located in the same building. The two agencies cooperate to provide as much service as possible without duplication of effort. We overlap specifically in those areas where the need exceeds the capacity of either agency.

## OUR VOLUNTEERS

CLS-EPA has benefited in six months from over 4000 hours of volunteer service, without including the countless hours of our Board and VAP firms. Students (particularly Stanford law students), attorneys, other professionals, former clients and other community members provide help to CLS-EPA with everything from legal advice to reception, translation, and furniture assembly.

**Please contact us if you are interested in joining our volunteer team!**



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community Legal Services has received extraordinary support from the East Palo Alto and surrounding communities. It is only through their backing that we are able to provide free legal services to those who need it.

## OUR FUNDERS

We express our gratitude to the following -- and to our many other donors of time, goods, services and funds.

Alexander, Hawes & Audet  
Atkinson Foundation  
Goldman Foundation  
IKEA (funding and furniture)  
Morgan Family Foundation  
Palo Alto Area Bar Association  
Peninsula Community Foundation  
Philanthropic Ventures Foundation  
VanLobenSels/RembeRock Foundation  
San Francisco Foundation  
Silicon Valley Campaign for Legal Services  
Lisa and Matthew Sonsini Family Fund  
Many generous individual donors

## VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY PROGRAM FIRMS

Cooley Godward LLP  
Fenwick & West LLP  
Gray Care Ware & Freidenrich LLP  
Morrison & Foerster LLP

## SPACE FOR CLIENT SERVICES

EPA CAN DO  
Family Support Center of the Mid-Peninsula  
South County Community Resource Center  
St. Joseph's Worker Center

**THANK YOU!**



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