

Legal Aid Society

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The oldest and largest provider of legal services in the United States to its community was founded in 1876. The Legal Aid Society's main function is to provide free legal services to the people living in New York who are living at or below the poverty level. This will help to ensure that the justice system does not miss out on these groups of people who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. These groups of people are unable to even have enough for their daily basic necessities much say a lawyer should they require one when they face a legal situation. The Legal Aid Society basically provides services such as criminal defense and juvenile representation in Family Court for these groups of people in New York.

Every year, the Society will have to handle about more than 200,000 indigent criminal cases. On top of these criminal cases, the Society has to act as legal guardian to more than 30,000 children, representing individuals, families and community groups in more than 30,000 cases. The number of cases taken by the Society has only increased since it was founded in 1876. This could only imply that the income gap between the rich and poor in New York is growing further and further apart as the country progresses. This has resulted in more and more people having to turn to legal aid service provided when they face a legal situation they need help with.

On top of representing in the above mentioned cases, the Legal Aid Society will also frequently conduct major class action litigation on behalf of thousands of welfare recipients, foster children, elderly poor, homeless families, inmates and prisoners. The amount of working and responsibility taken by the Society has increased over the years. Today, the Society plays an active and important role in the providing of justice to the people living in poverty.

Current, the Society has more than 800 lawyers working with approximately 600 paraprofessionals working based in neighborhood and court-based offices in 18 facilities in the five boroughs of New York City. The Society basically gets its resources from public funding from criminal defense work and representation of juveniles in child protective and delinquency matters. Public funding contributes about 90% of the Society's fiscal budget of \$140 million. The remaining 10% comes from the annual fund raising activities organized by the Society. This includes private donations from individual, associates, law firms, corporations, foundations and special events.

The Legal Aid Society can be seen to have the largest pro bono programs in the country. There are about 900 talented volunteer lawyers working for the Society every year. Ever since it started its pro bono program, the Society has done a lot to ensure it is able to retain and maintain its relationships with the volunteer lawyers throughout their careers in the legal field. A unit located at the Society's headquarters at 199 Water Street holds the usual pro bono activities. To the Society, these individuals are very valuable as they help to provide a strong base of contacts and relationships.

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