



YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

KENTUCKY BAR ASSOCIATION



**BY TANNER WATKINS,
YLD CHAIR**

As attorneys, we are encouraged under the ethical rules of our profession to perform *pro bono* legal services and to give to legal service organizations. A number of young attorneys in Louisville are taking a creative approach to this call to service, working to expand support for Legal Aid Society of Louisville by engaging with young professionals in other fields. The new group, called the Legal Aid Society Young Professionals Association (LAS YPA, for short), has formed for the sole purpose of supporting Legal Aid in its mission to pursue justice for people in poverty. The group held an informal kick-off event on February 11th at Patrick O'Shea's in Louisville to raise awareness and funds for Legal Aid, as well as attract new members. Their official launch event will take place on April 29th, in the form of an after party to Legal Aid's annual fundraiser: Brush, Bottle, and Barrel of the Bluegrass.

The idea for the LAS YPA came about when Jim Irving of Bingham Greenbaum Doll approached Legal Aid's Director of Development, Julia Leist. Jim told Julia about a similar young professionals group he had been involved with in Chicago and said he wanted to help start something like it in Louisville. When asked about the newly formed group, Julia talked about the importance of raising community awareness of Legal Aid outside of the legal profession. "The work of Legal Aid is largely unsung outside the legal community," Leist said. "Because of the diversity of services we provide, it can be difficult to explain what we do and we're always trying to communicate with a broader audience. Once people learn what we do, they are immediately interested. I think it taps into people's core values." After Jim came to Julia with the idea, about a year ago, they met with, now Executive Director, Neva-Marie Polley and began to plan. Polley and Leist were thrilled. "Jim came to us with the idea and that's extremely rare," Leist recalled. "No one asks to fundraise."

Jim says he's a big believer in the mission of Legal Aid. "It's undeniable that Legal Aid is an integral part of the services for our community's poor, underprivileged, and underrepresented citizens—just like charities that provide for more basic needs, for instance the Cabbage Patch Settlement House or St. Vincent DePaul," said

Irving. Before returning to his hometown of Louisville in the summer of 2014 to work at his current firm, Jim practiced law in Chicago for several years. There, he helped form a young professionals association to support the local legal services organization, the Legal Aid Foundation of Chicago. The group became very successful in its mission and now boasts a broad base of supporters and typically raises six-figure sums on an annual basis. Like Julia, Jim sees the potential for finding untapped sources of support in the community. "The more people learn about Legal Aid, the more inspired they'll be," Irving predicts. "The goal is to engage young lawyers in a new way and bring other professionals into the organization. The hope is to have a mix of participation from the business world, nonprofits, and government. We should all be in this together." Over the past several months, a mixed group of young lawyers, including Jim, and other professionals have been meeting to shape the organization and plan future events.

Legal Aid Society of Louisville directly serves more than four thousand clients each year and offers many legal education opportunities in the community. However, according to Leist, Legal Aid is still forced to turn away one client for every client they take, due to insufficient funds or volunteers. "Every case we take is an impact case," Leist observes. "For an individual client, getting help from Legal Aid might mean the difference between housing and homelessness, or between safety and domestic violence." By supporting Legal Aid, the members of the Legal Aid Society Young Professionals Association hope to help fill some of those gaps in service and make a difference for even more clients.

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By supporting the mission of Legal Aid, we as attorneys support those without a voice, those who often fall through the cracks, but who are equally deserving of justice. On behalf of the YLD, I am excited to see what this group can do in the coming years and hope to see support of our many legal service organizations around the state grow—both within and beyond our profession. I'm marking my calendar now for the launch event at Marketplace Restaurant in Louisville at 9:00 p.m. on the night of April 29th after the Brush, Bottle, and Barrel of the Bluegrass.

For those interested in joining or learning more about the organization, please contact Julia Leist, Development Director of Legal Aid Society of Louisville, jleist@laslou.org.