



Change starts with **ONE.**

Changing lives...one client at a time



PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Access to Justice

Home. It's where the heart is.

A place we often take for granted as we go about our busy lives. But in 2008 the reality of homelessness, well, *hit home* for many Americans as our economy faltered...jobs were lost...and low-income homeowners and renters were swept up in the foreclosure crisis.

Prairie State Legal Services was ready to help. We made concerted efforts to ensure that our legal staff was well prepared to assist Illinois families in the struggle to save their homes. Some of their stories are presented here in our 2008 Annual Report.

As unemployment rates rose, Prairie State renewed emphasis on equipping our staff to help displaced workers access public benefits. With our advocacy, many folks who needed to rely on social safety-net programs took action, such as applying for food stamps and medical coverage.

2008 saw our numbers escalate in the area of family law, as well. A poor economy creates stressed households which leads to increased instances of divorce and domestic violence. Unfortunately, there are simply too many requests for Prairie State to afford to handle. As I write to you, I've learned that we will lose \$600,000 in funding in fiscal year '09.

In a perfect world, we could help them all. In reality, change starts with ONE. As you read through this report, I ask you to please consider making a difference in one person's life...in your community...by making a charitable contribution to Prairie State Legal Services. If you are an attorney, please consider partnering with Prairie State by handling a pro bono case.

In these difficult times, your willingness to support our services means more than ever. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Michael O'Connor, *Executive Director*



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One. It's a bigger number than you realize.

One client. One attorney. One donor who makes it possible. It starts small and adds up to hundreds of struggling Illinois families whose lives changed for the better in 2008...with help from you and Prairie State Legal Services.

The following stories highlight the dedication, innovation and perseverance typical of Prairie State staff and volunteer attorneys. Our attorneys look beyond the immediate needs of their clients, thereby saving them from future hardship. They advocate for their clients whenever and wherever necessary, and often visit clients at their homes, in shelters or at the hospital.

Our attorneys make Prairie State a leading force in bringing equal access to justice to all.



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One more family still has a place to call home.

Carla, a Peoria mother of four children, contacted Prairie State Legal Services in May 2008. She had developed a thyroid problem that required extensive radiation. She was not able to work as much and had fallen behind in her mortgage. Five months had elapsed since she last paid her mortgage and she was in foreclosure.

Prairie State contacted volunteer attorney Jennifer Connelly, who was able to negotiate the mortgage with the bank. The foreclosure was dismissed and Carla was able to return to work. She is making her mortgage payments and has been able to remain in her home.

Without the help of a volunteer attorney, Carla and her children could have become homeless and Carla might not have been able to return to work. Attorney Connelly demonstrates the change a volunteer attorney can make—one client at a time.



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One more single parent can support her disabled child.

Paralegal Dori Michaels won a victory for a hard-working single mother and her beautiful but severely disabled daughter. Amanda, a 7-year old, has had serious behavior problems since she was a small child. She was expelled from a series of day care settings. Amanda's problems intensified when she started school, and she began to hurt herself, including banging her head into the wall at school. The school district moved her class setting repeatedly, putting her in more restrictive environments, and finally into a therapeutic school.

Amanda's mother held a good job which allowed her to support Amanda, but was forced to leave that job to care for Amanda, resulting in a substantial drop in income. Her mother found work delivering newspapers; Amanda sleeps in the car while her mother drives the route in the middle of the night.

Our client, Amanda's mother, applied for disability benefits to help her care for the child. Frequently, the Social Security Administration will reject a claimant's initial application for benefits, and this is what happened to Amanda's mother. She turned to Prairie State Legal Services, where she was assisted by paralegal Dori Michaels.

The child's impairments have been difficult to diagnose; most recently doctors state they believe she may have a form of autism. Ms. Michaels gathered evidence and worked with Amanda's therapist and teachers to develop opinion letters to support her mother's claim. Ms. Michaels represented Amanda's mother at a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. The ALJ was convinced by the evidence and argument Ms. Michaels presented, and awarded Amanda benefits.

Today, Amanda is receiving regular SSI payments. She is doing better and has been in summer school. Amanda and her mom still do the paper route together in early morning to make ends meet. Ms. Michaels' determination to find the needed information to support Amanda's claim for disability enabled the family to win the case, and demonstrates the change Prairie State makes in individual lives—one client at a time.



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One more patient receives urgent medical benefits.

When Steve, a Waukegan man with multiple medical conditions, learned he had a tumor growing on his face, he went to the local medical center to seek treatment. He was in need of urgent care, but the hospital refused to do surgery until he had a medical card. Steve came to Prairie State to seek assistance in getting public aid coverage so he could get the surgery he so desperately needed.

Attorney Amy Weiss reviewed Steve's information and determined that he was eligible to receive Medicaid. Through strong professional relationships she had built at the medical center, Attorney Weiss was able to expedite the Medicaid application process with Steve's doctor. The doctor referred Steve to an ENT Surgical Specialist, but his problem didn't stop there.

While waiting for surgery to begin, Steve was becoming very upset and was in a lot of pain. He felt the hospital was giving him the runaround, so Attorney Weiss went up to see the doctor and worked with the medical center to get the surgery scheduled. The surgery was completed, but Steve lost his right eye in the procedure and was having a difficult time coping. Steve's doctor submitted a letter to the Illinois Department of Human Services discussing the limitations Steve would face due to the complications from surgery.

At first the Social Security Office would not process the forms and wanted Steve to come in to their office. Attorney Weiss explained to them that Steve was hooked up to an IV of antibiotics and went to the Social Security Office herself to get the paperwork completed.

Steve was approved for presumptive SSI benefits and received his first check. All of his medical bills were paid, including additional surgery he needed for an infection that developed. He is doing fine and is continuing with radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

Attorney Weiss showed great dedication to her client, and by anticipating future problems she was able to Steve the medical care he would need after surgery. She demonstrates the positive change Prairie State attorneys make—one client at a time.



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One more homeowner rescued from a mortgage scam.

DuPage County resident Kim had lost her job, fell on hard times and found her home in foreclosure. She had been working with Prairie State Legal Services for help on her mortgage foreclosure defense.

One day, Kim told Attorney Laura Myers that her problems were solved. Kim had signed an agreement with a company that specialized in helping persons in foreclosure save their homes. Kim would make payments to the company at much lower interest rates, and would be able to keep her home. Months passed and eventually the mortgage was paid off...but Kim's payments did not decrease; in fact, a monthly service fee was added to her mounting debts.

Meanwhile, with the growing number of mortgage fraud scams, Attorney Myers became concerned and took it upon herself to do further research. She discovered that Kim had unknowingly signed a quitclaim deed, transferring ownership of her property to the foreclosure company. The amount of equity in Kim's home, essentially stolen by the company, came to over \$77,000.

After three years of litigation by Attorney Myers and Attorney David Wolowitz, this mortgage rescue fraud case was finally settled in 2008. Through Prairie State's advocacy, Kim was able to remain in her home during the lengthy litigation process and eventually received a benefit of at least \$72,626. She also realized that she could not afford to keep the home and decided upon a cash settlement instead of the title.

Attorney Meyers trusted her instincts and took it upon herself to check in on her client. Without her dedication to the case, Kim would not have only lost her house, but also the additional funds stolen by the company. Attorney Myers shows us how determined advocacy can make a positive change in one client's life.



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One will be helped—yet another turned away.

2008 was a challenging, rewarding and productive year for Prairie State Legal Services and the clients we serve. Supporters like you made it all possible. But others still harbor the perception that we are a government agency with resources to help anyone and everyone with a legal problem.

As an independent, not-for-profit agency, PSLS only wishes we could make our services available to all. But in reality, we do not have enough staff, volunteers or financial funding to handle every request for help.

Times are tough. Families are stressed. Calls to Prairie State are on the rise. As we face our own funding cutbacks in the upcoming fiscal year, your ongoing support will help us continue to serve those whose situations are most critical—those in danger of losing homes, income, personal safety.

Thank you for making a difference in one person's life. A difference in your community. A financial donation—or a donation of time, legal talent and tenacity—to Prairie State Legal Services.



PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES

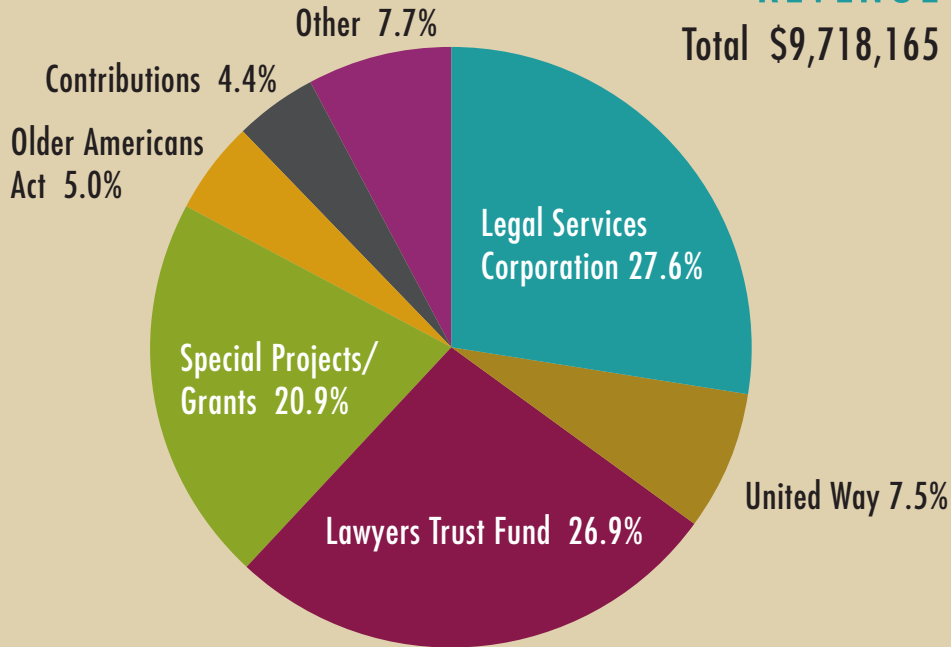
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Financial Statement 2008

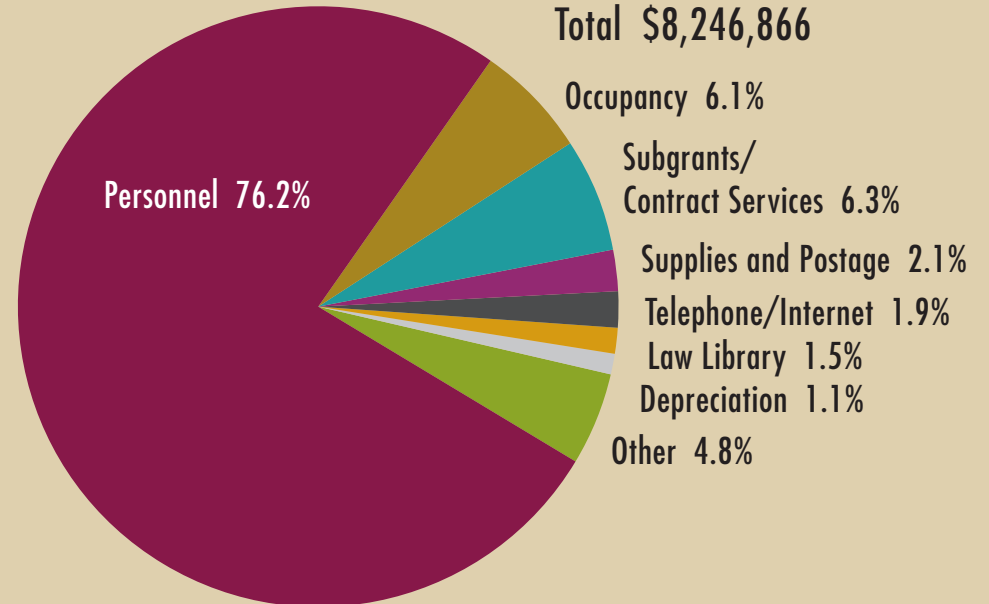
REVENUE

Total \$9,718,165



EXPENDITURES

Total \$8,246,866



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Partner Organizations

Each year, dozens of partner organizations commit their resources in order to help us provide legal services for populations and communities throughout our service area. In 2008, the following partners helped ensure access to justice for tens of thousands of clients in northern and central Illinois.

Aurora Mental Health & Mental Retardation Services
Batavia United Way
Bureau County United Way
Catholic Charities
Central Illinois Agency on Aging
Chicago Department of Public Health
City of Aurora Police Department
City of Aurora Division of Neighborhood Redevelopment
City of Bloomington Township
City of DeKalb
City of Peoria Neighborhood Development Division
City of Waukegan Community Development Block Grant
County of DuPage Human Services
County of DuPage Senior Services
County of McHenry Tax Levy
DeKalb County Community Services Department
Doris and Victor Day Foundation, Inc.
DuPage Community Development Commission
Dwight Community Chest
East Central Illinois Care Consortium
East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Far Northwest Suburban United Way
Fox Valley United Way
Geneva Community Chest
Heart of Illinois United Way

Herbolsheimer Foundation
Illinois Attorney General's Office
Illinois Bar Foundation
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Illinois Department of Human Services
Illinois Department of Public Health
Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
Illinois Office of Rehabilitation Services
Kane County Bar Foundation
Kendall County Tax Levy
Kishwaukee United Way
Lake County Department of Planning and Development
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Legal Services Corporation
McDonough County United Way
McHenry County Dept. of Planning and Development
Naperville United Way
Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Peoria City/County Health Department
Rock Island 708 Mental Health Board
St. Charles 708 Mental Health Board
St. Charles Township
The Fairbury Community Fund

U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development
U.S. Dept. of Justice
United Way of Boone County
United Way of Central Kane County
United Way of the DuPage Area
United Way of Eastern LaSalle County
United Way of Elgin
United Way of Grundy County
United Way of Illinois Valley
United Way of Kankakee County
United Way of Knox County
United Way of Lake County
United Way of Lee County
United Way of McHenry County
United Way of McLean County
United Way of Metro Chicago
United Way of the North Shore
United Way of Northwest Illinois
United Way of Ogle County
United Way of Pekin
United Way of Pontiac
United Way of Rock River Valley
United Way of the Quad Cities Area
Warren County United Way
Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Winnebago County Health Department



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Prairie State receives four cy prè awards in 2008

In 2008, Prairie State Legal Services received several cy prè awards totaling more than \$750,000. This is the first time Prairie State has received cy prè awards in such a large amount. These funds have significantly added to Prairie State's stability in a period of economic disruption, and have allowed us to better serve the poor and elderly residents of Illinois.

Cy prè is a French term which means "next best use." When funds from class payments cannot be distributed to all class members, the court must decide how to distribute funds unclaimed by the class members. The court then designates a third party or agency to use those residual funds. In recent years, courts have awarded cy prè funds to programs that provide free legal services to low-income people. Cy prè awards have proven to be one of the best means available to help close the justice gap, helping to expand the capacity of the pro bono and legal aid system.

A cy prè award is made when a judge approves an agreement between plaintiff's and defense attorneys. We are grateful to all parties who have made these awards possible. We would especially like to thank the following:

Phillip A. Bock, Bock & Hatch

Brian J. Wanca, Anderson & Wanca

Edelman, Combs, Lattuner & Goodwin, LLC

Steven J. Seidman



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Thank you

We thank our individual and corporate supporters who gave *so generously* in time and money to Prairie State Legal Services in 2008.

\$10,000 or More

Caterpillar Foundation in Honor of
Caterpillar Legal Services Division
John W. Condon
Howard & Howard
Illinois Bar Foundation
Lane & Waterman, LLP
Anthony C. Raccuglia

\$5,000 to 9,999

Anonymous
Matthew Kaplan and the A. & E. Kaplan Foundation
Dudley & Lake LLC
Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen
Hinshaw & Culbertson, LLP
Legal Aid 2008
McLean County Bar Association
Peoria County Bar Association including
Thomson West/John Roach Golf Contest
Proceeds and Golf Outing Raffle Proceeds
Quinn, Johnston, Henderson & Pretorius
S. Edward Marder Family Foundation in honor
of the Chris and Linda Marder Family
James Walker
Westervelt, Johnson, Nicoll & Keller, LLC

\$2,500 to 4,999

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Duncan & Reagan, P.C.
Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP
Husch Blackwell Sanders, LLP
Suzanne and William Lindsay
McHenry County Bar Association
Leonard W. Sachs
Vonachen, Lawless, Trager & Slevin

\$1,000 to 2,499

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Hon. Barry R. Anderson
Association of Women Attorneys of Lake County
Robert S. Baizer
Frank Black
Jim and Trish Black
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Campion, Curran, Dunlop & Lamb, P.C.

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Doris and Victor Day Foundation, Inc.
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Todd and Sonja Faulkner
First Midwest Bank
First Presbyterian Church
Gretchen Fisher
James P. Ginzkey
Deborah L. Goldberg and Dr. Neil Puller including
gifts in memory of Troi Lwaxana Cat and in honor
of 50 years of Michelle Wiejaczka
Hon. Mary P. Gorman
Cheri N. Greenlee
Haskris Company in memory of Arlene M. Falotico
Hasselberg, Rock, Bell & Kuppler LLP
J. F. Heckinger
Stephen J. Heine
Heritage Bank of Central Illinois
Holmstrom & Kennedy, P.C.



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Illinois Mutual
Bob and Sue Jennetten
Johnson, Bunce & Noble, P.C.
Kane County Bar Foundation
Karen L. Kendall
Justice Thomas and Mary Kilbride
in memory of Joe Smith
Raymond J. Kloss
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William Kohlhase
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Vance C. Parkhurst
Hon. Carol M. Pentuic

Prairie Home Alliance
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Rauch Family Foundation 1, Inc.
Rockford Bank & Trust
Russell, English, Scoma & Beneke
Peter Schlax
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in honor of Michelle Wiejaczka's 50th birthday
and in honor of Linda Rothnagel

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John A. Slover, Jr. in memory of Durward J. Long, Sr.

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Howard E. Smith, Jr.

Nancy Sohn in honor of Sarah Megan and
Kathy Betcher, and all their fine and dedicated work

State Farm Companies Foundation
Good Neighbor Grant Program

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in memory of Leon Zuckerman

\$250 to 499

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Anonymous in honor of Marvida Valiukenas

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Mike and Jeanne Marlow in memory of Jess Wilson
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Peg Fourie and Marian Bretton
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Linda A. Rothnagel and Thomas A. Lilien including gifts in memory of Gretchen Martin Farwell's mother, Anne Cavanaugh's grandfather, and Kathy Bettcher's mother

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\$100 to 249

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Hon. Michael Caldwell
Geraldine Callan in honor of
Larry McShane
Ross E. Canterbury
Hope W. Carter
Joel Carter
Kathy Casey
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