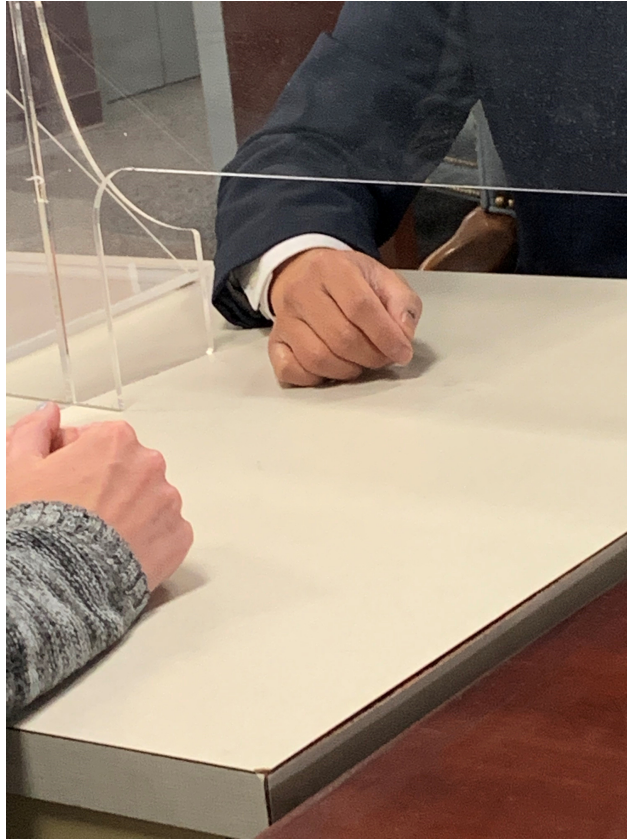


ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Connecting Through Crisis



Connecting Through Crisis:

A letter from the CEO and Board President

It goes without saying that last year presented many challenges to all of us, especially to our low-income client community. Many of our clients faced extreme hurdles, including keeping a job, paying rent and utilities, and unfortunately, having fewer opportunities to be heard in court. These challenges also pushed SMRLS to think outside of the box and create innovative solutions to help our clients.

The Minnesota Legal Services Coalition received \$3.5 million in federal CARES Act money through the state of Minnesota in late 2020. As a part of the Reach Justice initiative, SMRLS planned a series of efforts that leverage technology and emergency staffing to help protect Minnesotans' basic civil and human rights.

For example, many of our clients have limited resources to participate in virtual court proceedings. To meet this challenge, SMRLS planned for **virtual courtrooms** in our Rochester, Mankato, and St. Paul offices to allow our clients and attorneys to safely be present in the same space during remote hearings. These virtual courtrooms provide microphones, better lighting, plexiglass, facemasks, and the ability to share documents in a meaningful and safe way during the hearings. Additionally, SMRLS and its Legal Services Coalition partners came together with more than 250 community partners to plan for **civil legal aid kiosks** in libraries, courts, and other convenient places state-wide for our clients to receive legal assistance.

Similarly, transportation has long been a barrier for many of our clients. In an attempt to increase access and education for our clients throughout the state, SMRLS planned to purchase and outfit vehicles to serve as a virtual, mobile law offices. Four vehicles are currently being outfitted to be a fully operational remote law office in all four corners of the state. This initiative will roll out in 2021.

If you're interested in volunteering for SMRLS, it's now easier than ever to get started. In partnership with **ProBono Matters**, our website lists available volunteer opportunities that are easily searchable by case type and location. Visit smrls.org/volunteer to check out open cases relevant to your experience and interest.

Finally, we would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to everyone who supported our **Social Justice Uncorked** fundraiser last December. This virtual event raised \$151,200 to fund our free civil legal services that thousands of low-income individuals rely on each year. This event would not have been a success without you.

Thank you for your continued support of SMRLS during this difficult time. Your support is critical to providing our essential services.



Jessie R Nicholson, Esq
Chief Executive Officer



Brett Olander, Esq
President, Board of Directors

Mission

SMRLS mission is: To provide a full range of high quality legal services to low-income persons and eligible client groups in civil matters, in a respectful manner which enables clients to (1) enforce their legal rights; (2) obtain effective access to the courts, administrative agencies and forums which constitute our system of justice; (3) maintain freedom from hunger, homelessness, sickness and abuse; (4) empower persons and assure equal opportunity, thus, helping people to help themselves and become economically self-reliant, to the extent their individual abilities and circumstances permit. SMRLS, through a diverse, respectful and fair working environment, and legal assistance and community education activities, promotes and respects the dignity of low-income persons and seeks new and effective solutions to the critical and common legal problems of low-income persons which arise in a broad community context.

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Immigration – Rochester
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Rochester Office
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Justice Matters®

Needs Assessment 2020

Legal Needs of Low-income Households in Southern Minnesota

In 2019, SMRLS partnered with Wilder Research to conduct a needs assessment of the legal problems people in their service area are currently experiencing. The purpose of this study is to assist SMRLS in establishing priority areas for the coming years and gather information from low-income community members about how SMRLS should allocate resources.

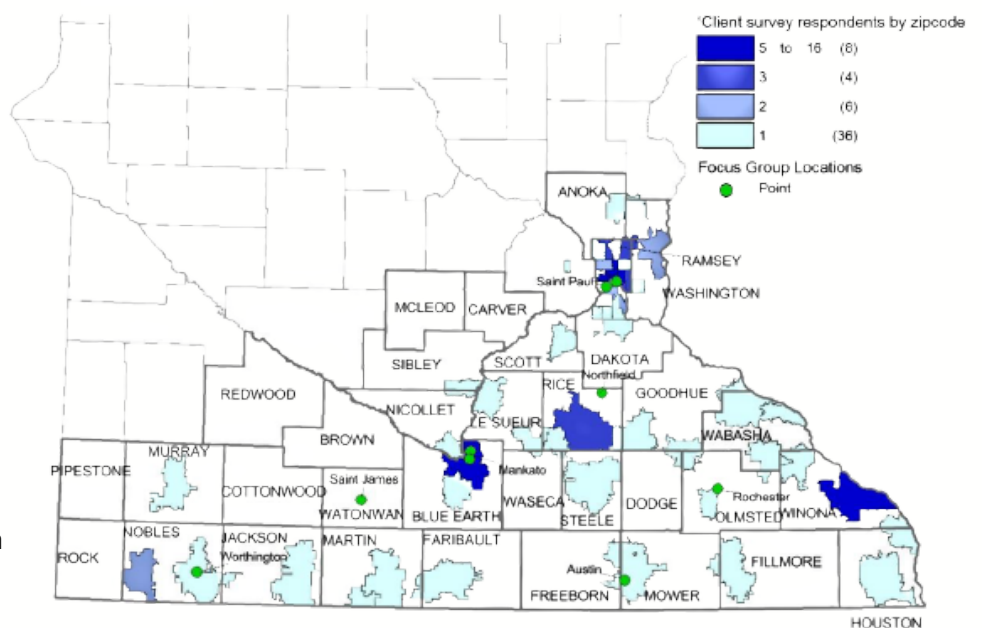
The 2019-2020 study replicated a similar study done in 2015 and consisted of: an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data of the 33 county service area, a paper survey with responses from 132 clients (both prior clients and those deemed ineligible for services), nine focus groups with community members, and an online survey with responses from 197 stakeholders who have worked with SMRLS.

Half a million people could benefit from SMRLS legal services.

The top 10 legal issues that potential clients said they experienced are related to housing, consumer issues, and public benefits. Eight of 10 are the same as in 2015; however, several public benefit issues ranked higher this year

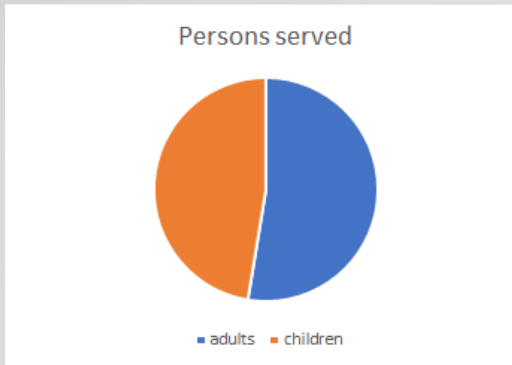
1. Finding affordable housing
2. Evicted or been threatened with eviction
3. Difficulty applying for public benefits for any reason*
4. Utilities shut off or threatened with a shutoff
5. Landlord is not making repairs
6. Targeted by harassing bill collection practices
7. Problems borrowing money for making a large purchase
8. Threatened with losing subsidized or Section 8 housing*
9. Homelessness
10. Denied or terminated from cash assistance or food support

client survey response and focus group locations

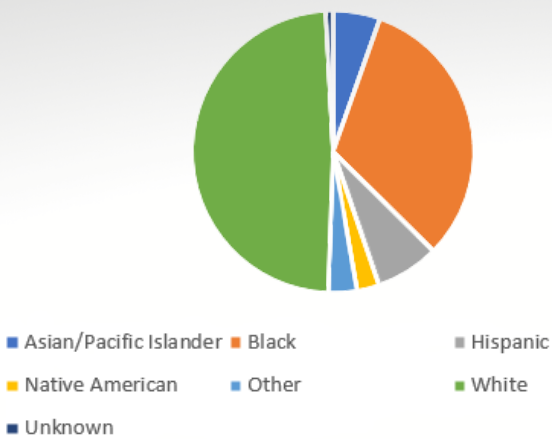


Clients Served in 2020

Total number of people in households served 20,126

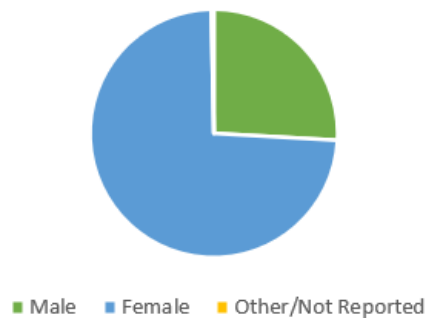


English 6757
 Spanish 112
 African languages 206
 ASL 12
 Arabic 2
 Chinese 3
 French 3
 Creole 1
 Hmong 50
 Korean 2
 Cambodian 9
 Other Asian Languages 140



Asian/Pacific Islander 451
 Black 2670
 Hispanic 612
 Native American 211
 Other 275
 White 4054
 Unknown 70

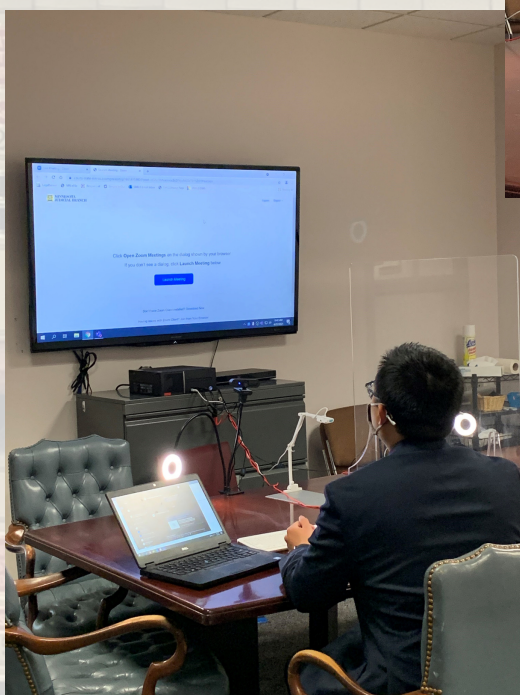
Staff Cases - Gender



8,343 people helped

From a volunteer—"Volunteering for SMRLS during the pandemic, I've faced the challenge of advocacy at a distance. The normal practices of meeting a client at the start of a case, sitting in the mediation room or the courtroom with them, and being there with them in both tough and fulfilling moments, just have not been possible. Instead, my pre-court consultations over the phone or videocall have taken on preeminent importance, exploring the nuances of clients' plans, positions, and circumstances. Building trusting relationships clients, assuring them of case progress, and responding to client concerns remains the core of my pro bono and Judicare advocacy. It's been a longer and often financially more difficult journey to reaching the end of a case."

Many of our clients have limited resources to participate in virtual court proceedings. To meet this challenge, SMRLS built virtual courtrooms in our Rochester, Mankato, and St. Paul offices to allow our clients and attorneys to safely be present in the same space during remote hearings. These virtual courtrooms provide microphones, better lighting, plexiglass, facemasks, and the ability to share documents in a meaningful and safe way during the hearings. We've already seen improved client representation, and we have three more virtual courtrooms on the way.



"I have used the virtual courtroom for an administrative hearing in a case involving two clients. With two cameras and microphones it was seamless in taking both of their testimony for the hearing," SMRLS attorney Tuz Xiong said.

2020 Financials

Statement of Financial Position

Year ended December 31, 2020

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 4,280,706	\$ 2,308,182
Certificates of deposit	2,100,000	2,100,000
Client escrow funds	1,302	1,167
Grants and contracts receivable	810,520	1,792,813
Pledges receivable	108,442	2,403,453
Prepaid expenses	53,534	100,250
Other receivable	23,269	-
Investments	14,515	13,787
	<u>7,392,288</u>	<u>8,719,652</u>
Total current assets		
Property and Equipment		
Furniture, fixtures and equipment	308,472	275,255
Leasehold improvements	223,695	223,695
Vehicle	90,832	-
Law library	382,385	382,385
	<u>1,005,384</u>	<u>881,335</u>
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>(885,032)</u>	<u>(881,335)</u>
Net property and equipment	<u>120,352</u>	<u>-</u>
Total assets	<u><u>\$ 7,512,640</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 8,719,652</u></u>
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable	\$ 272,145	\$ 455,210
Client trust deposits	1,302	1,167
Accrued expenses	954,102	899,393
Deferred revenue	42,316	16,052
	<u>1,269,865</u>	<u>1,371,822</u>
Total current liabilities		
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions	2,081,687	1,097,889
Without donor restrictions - board designated	3,483,867	3,483,867
	<u>5,565,554</u>	<u>4,581,756</u>
Total without donor restrictions		
With donor restrictions	<u>677,221</u>	<u>2,766,074</u>
Total net assets	<u>6,242,775</u>	<u>7,347,830</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u><u>\$ 7,512,640</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 8,719,652</u></u>

2020 Financials

Statement of Activities

Year ended December 31, 2020

	2020			2019
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	Total
Support and Revenue				
Grants and contracts	\$ 8,555,684	\$ 207,501	\$ 8,763,185	\$ 9,693,644
Other support	1,071,389	518,604	1,589,993	1,718,224
In-kind contributions	646,819	-	646,819	834,239
Miscellaneous	37,448	-	37,448	58,343
Investment income	15,354	-	15,354	37,481
Net assets released from restrictions	2,814,958	(2,814,958)	-	-
Total support and revenue	13,141,652	(2,088,853)	11,052,799	12,341,931
Expenses				
Program services	10,172,606	-	10,172,606	10,212,136
Supporting services:				
Management and general	1,673,724	-	1,673,724	1,344,145
Fundraising	311,524	-	311,524	308,870
Total expenses	12,157,854	-	12,157,854	11,865,151
Change in net assets	983,798	(2,088,853)	(1,105,055)	476,780
Net Assets, Beginning	4,581,756	2,766,074	7,347,830	6,871,050
Net Assets, Ending	\$ 5,565,554	\$ 677,221	\$ 6,242,775	\$ 7,347,830

2020 Financials

Statement of Functional Expenses

Year ended December 31, 2020

	Program Services	Supporting Services		Total 2020	Total 2019
		Management and General	Fundraising		
Expenses					
Personnel					
Donated services	\$ 646,976	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 646,976	\$ 834,239
Lawyers	4,008,374	155,921	103,947	4,268,242	4,193,967
Paralegals	716,042	-	15	716,057	745,951
Other staff	1,060,203	587,795	-	1,647,998	1,731,696
Employee benefits and taxes	1,999,104	245,426	142,178	2,386,708	2,130,337
Total personnel	8,430,699	989,142	246,140	9,665,981	9,636,190
Non Personnel					
Contract labor	12,266	283,343	3,508	299,117	113,915
Rent and space	578,636	64,643	31,634	674,913	582,010
Travel and mileage	28,871	1,260	3,128	33,259	111,092
Training, dues and subscriptions	89,560	10,780	3,493	103,833	106,768
Phone, office and postage	246,209	24,273	2,815	273,297	344,866
Equipment, copier and software	168,901	8,234	1,483	178,618	119,416
Events	-	-	19,043	19,043	77,271
Litigation, interpreter and legal research	124,099	441	-	124,540	139,216
Administrative fees and expenses	27,808	120,882	280	148,970	122,692
Depreciation	-	3,697	-	3,697	36,070
Miscellaneous	13,469	167,029	-	180,498	2,177
Contracts	116,892	-	-	116,892	134,113
Coalition support	269,406	-	-	269,406	274,309
County and other support	65,790	-	-	65,790	65,046
Total non personnel	1,741,907	684,582	65,384	2,491,873	2,228,961
Total expenses	<u>\$ 10,172,606</u>	<u>\$ 1,673,724</u>	<u>\$ 311,524</u>	<u>\$ 12,157,854</u>	<u>\$ 11,865,151</u>
Percentage of total expenses	<u>83.7%</u>	<u>13.7%</u>	<u>2.6%</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	

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