



East Palo Alto Baylands. December 2023.



COMMUNITY
LEGAL SERVICES
IN EAST PALO ALTO

2023 Impact Report

Published May 2024

from the executive director

2023 was a year of resets and restarts. I got back to doing some things that were normal before the pandemic, but seemed new again last year, like attending meetings in person or seeing my brothers, who are both musicians, perform live. In my first full calendar year as Executive Director, I settled in, and dug into new work, and old work that seemed new again - as did our team.

We saw a staggering number of evictions filed in San Mateo County - a 35% increase from pre-pandemic eviction filings. We also re-engaged with partners, in-person outreach, and coalition work across the region.

We finally saw some cases move forward in immigration court, after years of pandemic delays, and worked with over 1,300 clients seeking immigration assistance.

We filed 52% more record dismissals compared to 2022 and we recovered \$190,296 in unpaid wages and other damages for low-wage workers.

We established a comprehensive social work program that is integrated with each team and prioritizes serving our clients with the most urgent needs. And we had 621 volunteers contribute 20,237

hours of critical legal assistance.

As our clients and communities continue to navigate systemic challenges like the lack of affordable housing, the growing wage gap, criminal record-related barriers, and a broken immigration system, CLSEPA will continue to stand with them in the fight for the future that they deserve.

Thank you to our supporters, donors, and volunteers for your unwavering dedication to our mission. We would not be able to make the impact we've made without the support and work of people like you.

Thank you for taking the time to read our report, and I hope you continue to join us in working towards transformative change.

Sincerely,



Katrina Logan,
Executive Director



mission

Our mission is to provide transformative legal services that enable diverse communities in East Palo Alto and beyond to achieve a secure and thriving future.

Founded in 2002, Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto remains rooted in East Palo Alto and also serves communities across San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, including individuals who may still work here but have been displaced.

Marginalized communities face complex, intersectional barriers to justice, so our solutions must be multifaceted. We specialize in immigration, housing, workers' rights, records clearance, and consumer protection. Taken together, our services seek to provide our community with immediate tools to fight an unjust system and to transform the system itself.



Pictured: Two of our founders, William Webster and Elizabeth Jackson (circa 2015).

impact model

LEGAL SERVICES



- > Advice
- > Brief Services
- > Full scope representation
- > Outreach

IMPACT



- > Housing stability
- > Increased income
- > Secure legal status

CHANGE



- > More inclusive and stable communities
- > More equitable laws

who we served

In 2023, our services impacted **5,370** household members, including **1,042** kids.

61% identified as having limited English proficiency.

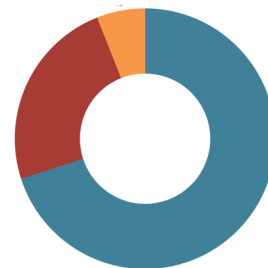
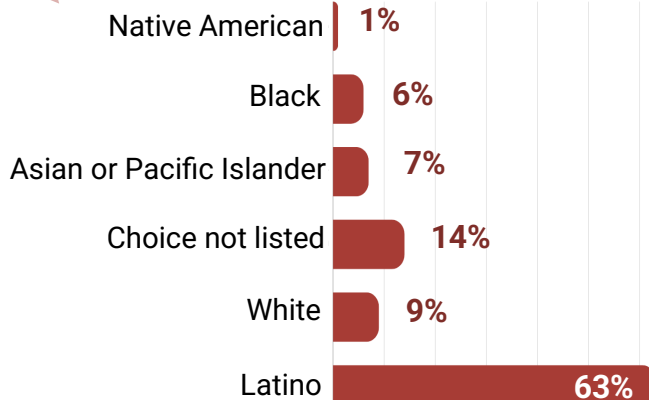
22% identified as having a disability or disabled household member.

\$2,456 was the average monthly income.

Pictured below: A client with his pro bono attorneys from Greenberg Traurig, LLP.



Client Demographics



70% of clients live or work in San Mateo County, and approximately **24%** live or work in Santa Clara County. The remaining **6%** of clients are people who have moved or been displaced, but still have ties to either county, which means they have family here, they may have history here, or we took their case when they did live here.

the fight for housing justice

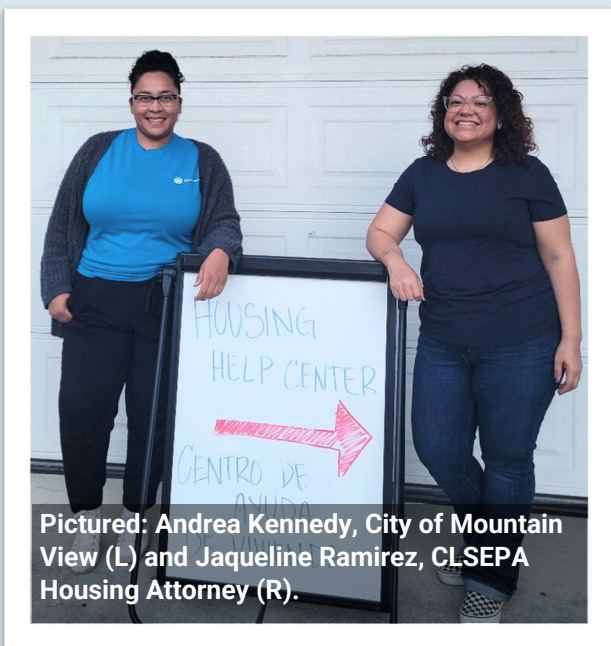
Putting Rent Stabilization to work in Mountain View

Housing justice in Silicon Valley means safe and affordable housing for everyone. As rental prices soar and income inequality grows in Silicon Valley, CLSEPA, with our decades of experience, fights for a community where everyone has access to safe and stable housing. CLSEPA maintains strong ties in Mountain View, one of only two cities in our service area with strong local tenant protections.

The fight for tenants rights in Mountain View started over a decade ago when residents organized to disrupt the displacement of low-income communities of color caused by skyrocketing rents and unsafe housing conditions. After years of hard work from community members with legal support from CLSEPA and the Stanford Community Law Clinic, **the Mountain View Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act was passed by the voters in 2016.**

Among many important protections, this law established an administrative process for tenants to challenge illegal rent increases and demand necessary repairs in their homes. Throughout the years, CLSEPA attorneys and volunteers have supported tenants through this process in asserting their rights to safe and stable housing.

Protections and laws require enforcement, and CLSEPA has always been willing to put the law to work.



Pictured: Andrea Kennedy, City of Mountain View (L) and Jaqueline Ramirez, CLSEPA Housing Attorney (R).

Belem is a single parent who cares for her elderly mother and son. For over 16 years, the family has lived in an apartment in Mountain View that is close to Belem's job and her support system. Over the years, the home fell into disrepair due to landlord neglect, but the family remained because there were no other affordable options in the area. Despite repeated requests and the growing seriousness of the problems, including unsafe electrical wiring and appliances that didn't work, the landlord offered nothing more than inadequate, surface level repairs that did not fix the ongoing health and safety issues in her unit. **Belem paid rent, she was a good tenant, and her request was reasonable. She simply wanted her home to be safe and healthy.**

After the landlord tried to unlawfully raise her rent while still failing to make necessary repairs, Belem sought CLSEPA's help asserting her rights. CLSEPA represented Belem at an administrative hearing where our attorneys stood by her side to present her story and extensive evidence as she sought justice for the years she lived with her family in dangerous and unsanitary conditions. **She was ultimately awarded over \$9,000 in damages,** and her landlord was ordered to fix the outstanding problems in her home and rescind all of the illegal rent increases he tried to impose.

Now, Belem's landlord finally started the process of making repairs and her rent will be discounted until her home is restored to safe and healthy conditions. Belem reflected that she was satisfied with the hearing process and the result she achieved. Throughout her case with CLSEPA, she felt heard and supported "en todo" ("for all of it") after years of feeling frustrated and hopeless.

Ultimately, when tenants like Belem share their stories, they can stand up to the growing forces of displacement, demand landlord accountability, and assert their rights to safe and affordable housing. And like with Belem and her family, CLSEPA will be there to provide tireless advocacy and support in the fight for housing justice.

housing

Our Housing program believes everyone should have a safe, stable place to call home. We partner with working class tenants to fight the housing crisis, prevent homelessness, improve living conditions, and end displacement.

key strategies



Individual Legal Services. We fight to preserve sustainable tenancies through:

- Eviction defense
- Enforcement of local tenant protection laws
- Advocacy for tenants in subsidized housing



Community Lawyering. We are driven and guided by the people we serve. We:

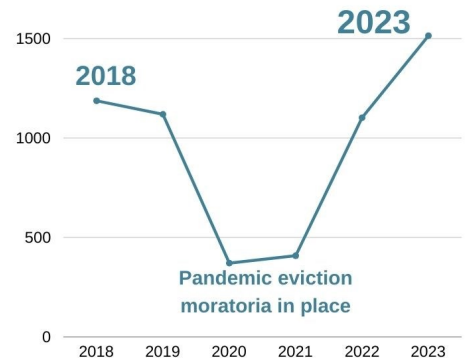
- **Partner** with organizations, coalitions, and organized tenants to build power
- **Build knowledge** in the community to increase awareness of tenant protections
- **Advocate** for more inclusive policies



Safety Net. We supplement our legal services with:

- Emergency rental assistance to prevent eviction
- Social work case management to navigate community resources and build self-sufficiency

2023 Impact



1,514 evictions were filed countywide in San Mateo, a **35%** increase from pre-pandemic years



We closed **750** matters, reaching **2,090** community members. We reached over **800** people with outreach events

We negotiated the waiver of over **\$1.1 million in rent debt.** Pre-pandemic our yearly average was around \$250,000.



In 2023, we resourced efforts to build relationships with key partners to support and strengthen groups of tenants to work towards collective change.

We met regularly with the **Housing Leadership Council, the San Mateo County Anti-Displacement Coalition, Faith in Action, Public Advocates, Youth United for Community Action, and El Comité.** To stem the tide of evictions in our communities, we know it takes collective efforts across the region.

Change should be imagined by those most directly impacted.

CLSEPA strives to hold space for community, facilitate learning and engagement, support capacity building, and provide legal guidance for all of us to work towards transformative change.



Pictured: CLSEPA Attorney, Stacy Townsend, shares information on tenants' rights with Daly City tenants.

economic advancement

We break down barriers to economic equity and advancement caused by past contact with the criminal legal system; workplace challenges like wage theft, harassment, discrimination and retaliation; and unfair consumer-related practices. We work with our community members to take affirmative action to increase access to resources, sustainability, and advancement.

key strategies

Reentry. We work with clients to overcome barriers to employment, education, housing, and other needs created by past contact with the criminal legal system.



Workers' Rights.

We stand with workers and help build knowledge of their rights, reclaim stolen wages, keep their jobs, assert workplace rights, and remedy workplace wrongs.



Consumer protection. We share know-your-rights information to empower consumers to make informed decisions about their finances and protect themselves against unfair and deceptive practices.



2023 Impact

96% of all cases filed were cleared (dismissed) or reduced by court order



Provided over **100** free live scans to facilitate access to records



\$190,296.57

in unpaid wages and other damages were recovered in 12 cases



145

people reached when providing know-your-rights outreach to consumers

As a member of the statewide Coalition of Low-Wage and Immigrant Worker Advocates ("CLIWA"), we are currently engaged in advocacy to address the massive delays in resolving cases with the Labor Commissioner's wage theft and retaliation units. We are also actively exploring new and innovative methods to address wage theft.

For our clients, **justice delayed is justice denied**. Our client, Juan spoke to KQED about his case where CLSEPA filed a claim for unpaid wages, overtime, and penalties. He waited three years, only to discover that the employer moved away and could not be located. **CLSEPA will continue to fight for a system that works for all workers.**

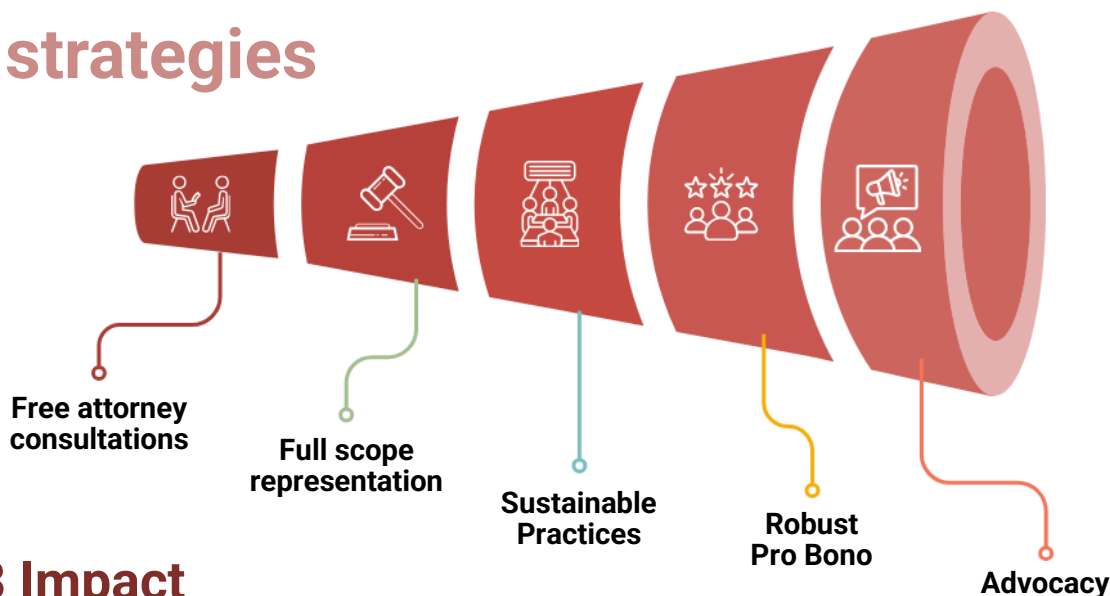
"If we work, we have the right to get paid for that work."

Juan A., former CLSEPA client.

immigration

We provide high-quality legal services aimed to keep families together and promote economic resilience. We advocate for inclusion and belonging for immigrants, particularly those who are working class and from historically marginalized communities.

key strategies

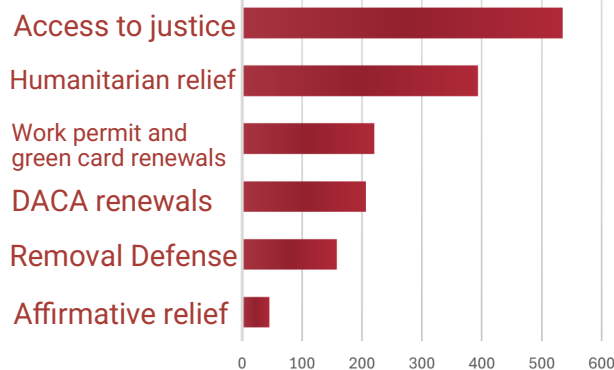


2023 Impact

We concluded matters for over **1,380** clients; **109** clients were under 18, and **44%** of clients supported kids in their households.



Types of Matters



6 out of 10 people seeking immigration assistance were asylum seekers.



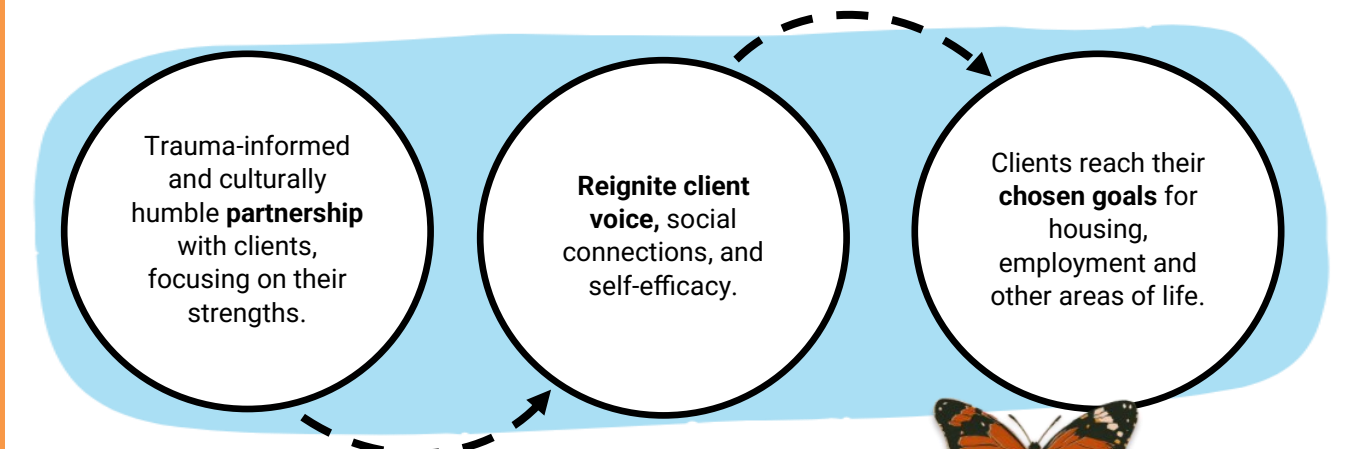
Sanctuary for All

After years of fighting for change, San Mateo County has become a sanctuary county. As a founding member of the San Mateo County Coalition for Immigrants Rights (SMCCIR), CLSEPA advocates for policies that would make our community safer and more welcoming for all. After years of organizing and testimony from hundreds of community members, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors decided to finally join with other Bay Area Counties and adopted a policy of non-collaboration with ICE. This sanctuary ordinance is a huge step towards public safety and equity for immigrants, who will now feel more comfortable interacting with law enforcement should they be a survivor of or witness to a crime.

social work

Our social worker provides case management and service navigation support to CLSEPA clients facing the greatest challenges.

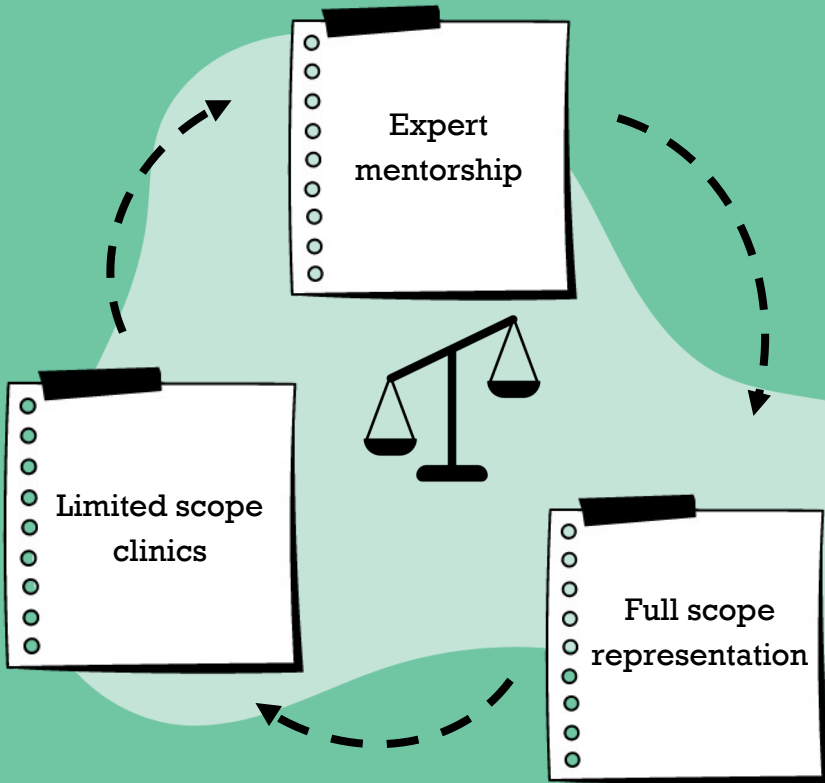
service model



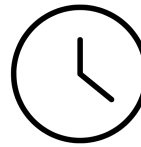
In **2023**, our social worker partnered with clients, who were able to overcome barriers and achieve change.



pro bono



2023 Impact



20,237 hours
contributed by **621**
volunteers

Pro bono attorneys
worked on **114**
ongoing cases,
and opened **15**
new cases.



CLSEPA volunteers staffed
70 limited scope clinics,
serving **424** clients



Sulma's courage & endurance:

a pandemic asylum win



Pictured above: Sulma, with her pro bono attorney, Aaron Zakem.

Sulma came to the U.S. to flee extreme domestic abuse in Guatemala. She found CLSEPA in 2017, and we placed her case with Aaron. Sulma and Aaron endured law changes *and* pandemic delays.

Her final merits hearing was originally scheduled for March 2020, and then **the Court shut down 3 days before her hearing date.**

On top of that, Sulma's case was caught in the cross-hairs of the prior presidential

administration. When AG Garland overruled prior policy, Sulma's case became more simple. But that did not mean her case was easy. As Aaron put it, "Encouraging Sulma to provide the required level of detail to make her case before the Court was akin to asking her to relive her abuse."

At her hearing in 2023, Sulma did an excellent job of telling her story to the Court. **Sulma was finally granted asylum by the Judge.** It was a happy ending to a long and stressful process.

who we are

Our **staff** includes **34** passionate advocates who believe in our mission and the clients and communities we serve.

We have **18** attorneys, **10** support staff, **1** social worker, and **5** on our administration team (including fundraising).

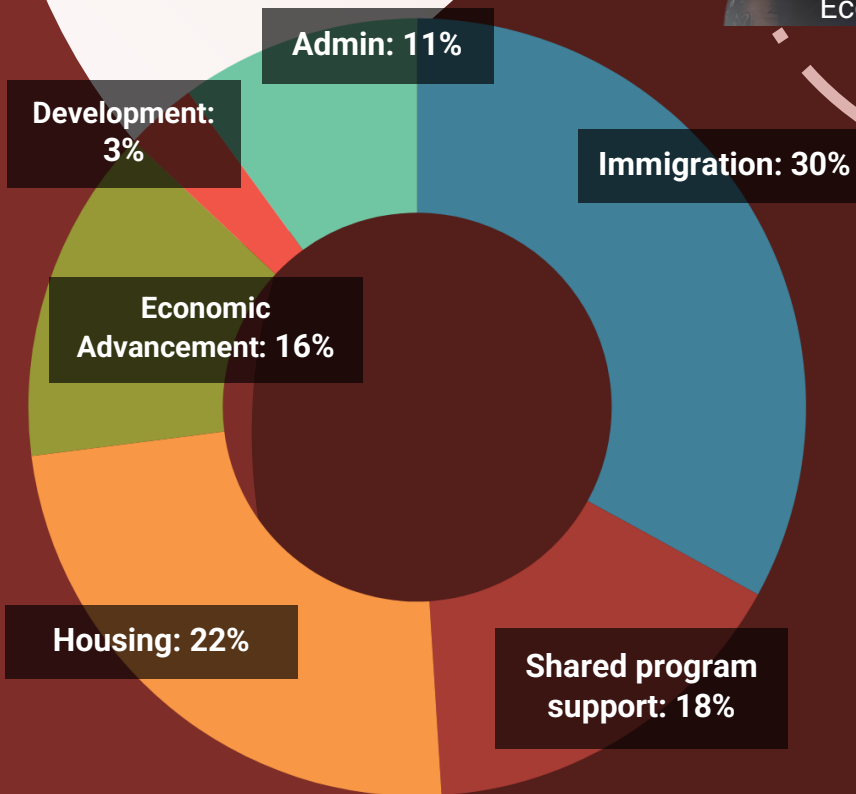
72% are children of immigrant parents

64% raised in low-income households

52% are first-generation college students



Pictured: Staff members from our Economic Advancement team.



Pictured: A staff member from our Immigration team hard at work.

2024 sponsors

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JOIN OUR MISSION

CLSEPA's work would not be possible without you. As a free legal services provider, we rely on government grants, private funds, and people like you to keep the lights on and our programs open. Every donation, regardless of size, can spark change in the community.

Support our work by scanning the QR code on the left and donate.

Web: <https://www.clsepa.org>

Find our financials on: <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/22-3866910>

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