Impact Report

Expanding Access to Eviction Defense

» De Novo’s Housing and Disability Unit has grown to eight staff members, including six attorneys, a paralegal, and an intake specialist—up from just a single staff attorney in 2018.

» In addition to Cambridge residents, tenants in Arlington, Belmont, Medford, Newton, and Somerville are now eligible for De Novo’s housing services.

» In new colocation partnerships, De Novo places a housing attorney at Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC) and Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), two local anti-poverty agencies, to provide real-time legal advice and assistance to low-income tenants.

In January 2021, just two months after the state eviction moratorium had ended, Julie came home to the apartment she shared with her elderly mother to find a notice of eviction. She had fallen behind on rent months before after losing her job as a housekeeper because of the pandemic. Eventually, Julie found another job, but her pay barely covered their monthly expenses, let alone the past due rent balance.

"The threat of eviction... particularly during these scary, unprecedented times, has been one of the most difficult challenges I’ve ever had to face,” said Julie. “Going up against a legal system on your own can feel daunting and overwhelming.”

Nine days before they were to be evicted from their home, Julie and her mother were referred to De Novo for legal assistance. After evaluating their case, a De Novo attorney quickly filed a motion for protection under the federal CDC Eviction Moratorium, which was still in effect, and a second motion to reverse the eviction order, arguing that it had been improperly issued. The judge granted both motions, enabling Julie and her mother to stay in their home.

Additionally, De Novo secured more than $39,000 in rental assistance for Julie and her mother to eliminate their past due rent and assist with future rent payments.

Long-time De Novo Clinical Director Retires

De Novo’s beloved clinical director, Dr. Paul Goldmuntz, is retiring after more than 35 years as the head of our counseling program.

A special celebration in his honor will be held in the spring of 2022.

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De Novo Volunteer Wins Prestigious Adams Pro Bono Publico Award

In a virtual ceremony on October 26, volunteer attorney Samuel E. J. Bryar, Esq. was honored with the 2021 Adams Pro Bono Publico Award. Attorney Bryar was among three Massachusetts attorneys recognized by the Supreme Judicial Court’s Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services for their exceptional dedication to providing pro bono assistance to persons who cannot afford an attorney for their essential legal needs.

Sam Bryar first came to De Novo as a volunteer attorney with our family law unit in May 2018. During his two and a half years as a volunteer, Sam provided an extraordinary 3,300 hours of pro bono legal representation to low-income domestic violence survivors and their children in complex, highly contested family law matters.

Sam began his career as a legal fellow with Timap For Justice in Sierra Leone in 2009 where he represented over 40 village farmers in a dispute with one of Africa’s largest mining companies. He went on to serve as a law and democracy fellow with the Mitigating Land Disputes Program in Liberia and the USAID Access to Justice Program in Iraq.

More recently, Sam was the Legal Director and Country Representative with Justice Defenders in Kenya and Uganda where he represented prisoners in sentencing appeals and wrongful conviction cases. He was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Chinguetti, Mauritania.

De Novo provides many of its services through the efforts of over 120 volunteer legal and mental health professionals who together contribute more than half a million dollars in direct services annually.

Raj came to the U.S. from India to live with his father when he was 17 years old. His father was very abusive; once, he even beat Raj with a metal pipe. Raj’s father forced him to work and took all of his pay, and he did not allow him to attend school. Sometimes, his father would threaten to have Raj deported to India where Raj had no family or support system. Eventually, he took Raj’s travel documents and left, leaving Raj to fend for himself. De Novo helped Raj obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, a form of legal protection available to immigrant youth who have been abandoned, abused or neglected by their parents. With SIJ status, Raj is now attending a local community college and working full-time to support himself.

Joanna and her boyfriend had dated many years when they had a child together. Her boyfriend struggled with substance abuse and was physically and emotionally abusive. De Novo helped Joanna obtain legal protection and support to ensure her child’s safety.

Stories of Impact
EMMA ANDREWS is the Vice President for Patient Advocacy at Pfizer Inc. Emma joined Pfizer in 1999 and has held different positions with increasing responsibility in operations, research and strategy. Most recently, Emma was the Senior Director U.S./Global Medical Affairs Team Lead for the Women’s Health Franchise.

Emma began her work in medical affairs as the regional medical therapeutic area lead of the Diversified Portfolio for Latin America where she was responsible for developing medical strategies for Latin America and enhancing medical communication between Pfizer and the region’s stakeholders. Prior to that role, Emma was a director in External Medical Affairs and a member of the Clinical Pharmacology team in New York working in the infectious diseases therapeutic area where her focus was HIV and Malaria.

Born in Uganda, Emma did her secondary education in Cote d’Ivoire and is trilingual, speaking Luganda, French and English. She is a registered pharmacist in Connecticut and holds a B.S. in pharmacy and a Pharm.D. from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy.

HENRY NASSELLA co-founded LNK Partners, a consumer-focused private equity fund, in 2005 and has over 25 years of operating experience and 20 years of private equity experience in the consumer and retail sectors.

Prior to LNK Partners, Henry was a Venture Partner at Apax Partners, where he was a senior member of the U.S. Consumer and Retail Group. Before Apax, Henry led the successful buyout of Star Markets and served as Chairman and CEO of the company until its sale to Sainsbury’s. Earlier, he was the first President of Staples, where he built the company from a startup into a global leader in office supply retailing.

Henry is currently the Lead Director on the Board of Directors of PVH Corp., also on the Board of Schweiger Dermatology, and has served on the Boards of Ariat, Natural Food Holdings, Au Bon Pain, Staples, Panera Bread, Denny’s, Ulta Beauty, Spyder Active Sports, and Blinds-To-Go. He received a B.S. in accounting from Northeastern University, where he served on the Board of Trustees for 25 years and is Chair Emeritus.

emotionally abusive. When the abuse escalated, Joanna attempted to leave, but her boyfriend became violent and would not let her leave with the child. De Novo assisted Joanna in obtaining an emergency protection order and custody of the child. Her attorney contacted the local police to notify them of the court orders, and coordinated with a civilian domestic violence advocate to ensure safe pick up of the child. De Novo represented Joanna at her hearing to extend the emergency orders, and she was awarded a one-year protection order and custody. Joanna received counseling to support her during the difficult legal process, and found a new safe home with the help of De Novo’s case manager.

Ruth is a single mother who struggled with depression for many years. She received SSDI as well as child benefits for her son. When her health improved, Ruth started working again and diligently reported her wages to the Social Security Administration. Ruth continued to receive the child benefits and was told by the SSA that this was proper. One year later, Ruth was shocked to receive a letter from the SSA demanding she repay the child benefits, which by then totaled thousands of dollars. Ruth appealed this decision but was denied. De Novo successfully represented Ruth in her final appeal and the judge waived the entire $7,562 overpaid benefit amount.
2021: Year in Review

In its fiscal year 2021, De Novo provided free civil legal assistance and affordable psychological counseling to 1,557 people, empowering the most vulnerable members of our community to seek justice, find healing, and rebuild their lives.

» 665 immigrants and asylum seekers statewide received legal help to avoid deportation, obtain work authorization, and gain a path to citizenship.

265 families received free legal advice at our monthly immigration clinic, a partnership with the City of Cambridge.

» 51 people living with disabilities obtained or retained SSI and SSDI benefits and other assistance, such as health care access, utility discounts, and transportation vouchers.

» 414 uninsured or underinsured adults received mental health services at little or no cost, including individual therapy, assessments and referrals, forensic psychological evaluations, and advocacy.

» 176 low-income tenants at risk of eviction obtained or retained access to safe and affordable housing. Clients secured more than $215,000 in rental assistance.

66 tenants received legal advice, assistance in drafting pleadings, and, as needed, in-court representation at our weekly housing clinic.

» 225 survivors of domestic violence and their children secured legal protection from violence and abuse, safe custody and visitation, and financial stability through child/spousal support.

» 61 families were supported with case management, such as safety planning, housing navigation, food and clothing assistance, and health insurance enrollment, among many other services.

“I am grateful for the guidance I received. My attorney was such a grounded sense of support and thorough, dedicated professional. I feel blessed to have had her help and am thankful for the work your program does.”

DE NOVO FAMILY LAW CLIENT

Staff News

Lauren Shebairo was promoted to Clinical Director. Lauren joined De Novo as a clinical social worker in 2008 and has been associate clinical director since 2015.

Karen Bobadilla was promoted to Immigration Staff Attorney. Karen has held various positions at De Novo since 2007, most recently as Immigration Paralegal and Dept. of Justice Accredited Representative.

Suzanne Feldman was hired as a Disability Staff Attorney in April 2021 after two years as a legal volunteer with our Immigration and Family Law Units.

Courtney Libon, Housing and Disability Supervising Attorney, was honored as an “Unsung Hero” by Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services for her legal advocacy on behalf of older adults at risk of eviction.

Natalia Medina was hired as bilingual Clinical Social Worker in July 2021. She previously worked with the Brookside Community Health Center in Boston.

Emily Dasey and Erica Leff were hired as Housing Attorneys, and Camila Cardoso as a Housing Paralegal, to our COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP) team, a statewide initiative among legal services providers to expand access to eviction defense.