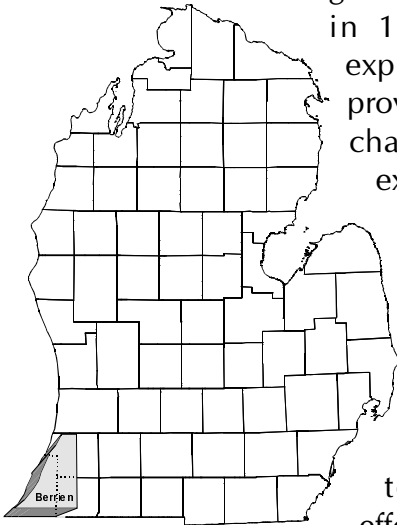


BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

BCLS Office Locations: Niles, St. Joseph

BCLS Service Area: Berrien County

Service Population: 30,241 individuals living at or below 125% of the poverty level

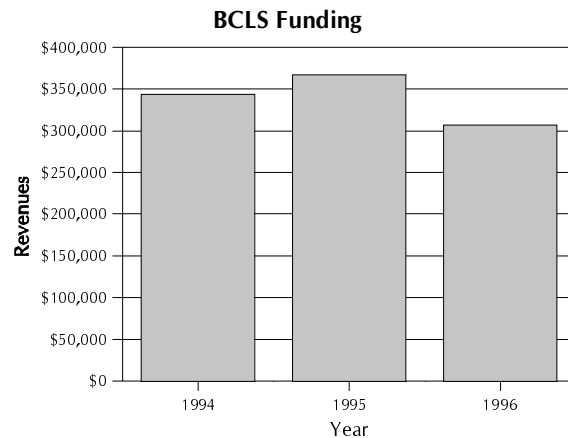


In light of large federal funding cuts in 1996, BCLS focused on exploring ways to continue to provide quality services in the changing environment. For example, a plan was developed for a joint pilot centralized telephone intake project with the Legal Services Organization of Southcentral Michigan after meetings were held with three other programs to pursue cooperative efforts.

An elderly woman bought new carpeting and hired an installer from a list provided by the retail store. The installer demanded additional money for routine tasks and would not continue work unless paid in advance for all of them. The BCLS attorney successfully convinced the retail store to provide another installer to finish the job properly with no added cost to the customer.

Also, anticipating staff reductions in 1996, the attorney position in the Senior Law Center was restructured so that the Director, Deputy Director and a staff attorney are sharing responsibilities to better address supervision and efficiency issues. Both IOLTA and Filing Fee funds have been important to providing additional access to client services through maintaining staffing and by supporting costs of technological improvements such as computer upgrades, fax machines and toll-free phone lines to improve access to BCLS services, especially for rural clients.

Three children were placed in foster care after living in a car with their single mother. The mother had suffered a mental breakdown and could not overcome the obstacles of lack of housing, employment, and support to provide a stable home. The BCLS attorney persuaded the community health agency to reopen her file so that she could participate in mental health services. BCLS also worked with the public housing officials to obtain a priority placement in order to avoid homelessness for this family. The mother is now employed full-time and her children have been returned to her custody.



BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

Contact: Mary Ellen Drolet, Director • (616) 983-6363

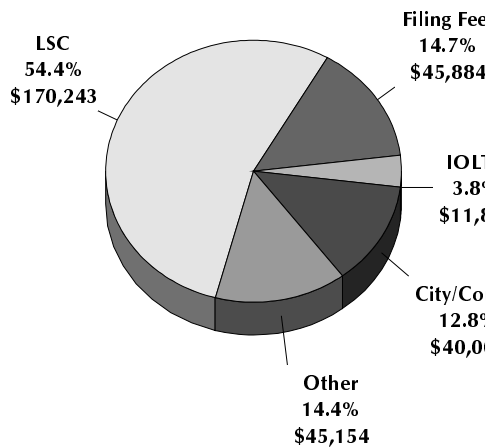
Community Outreach and Collaboration. BCLS has a long history of cooperative efforts with the Senior network in the tri-County area and uses multipurpose Senior centers and congregate meals sites for outreach and intake. During 1996, BCLS worked with the domestic violence shelter, the Prosecutor's Office, the Circuit Court, and others in establishing procedures and implementing requirements on recent domestic violence legislation. Staff attorneys have participated in Career Awareness Day at local community colleges and have also made presentations to community groups. For the second year, a staff attorney worked with a third grade class through the Lawyer/Teacher Partnership program to provide information about the legal system, teach basic legal concepts, and work on skills for conflict resolution.

Client Age	
18 & Under	7
19-59	432
60 & Over	394
Groups	0
Total	833

Pro Bono Support. In the past year, BCLS concentrated on expanding pro bono services to a broader range of services, including referral of more Supplemental Security Income and landlord/tenant matters. The BCLS pro bono coordinator has worked with several newer members of the local Bar Association to organize a "new" lawyer's group by preparing an orientation packet which included BCLS pro bono recruitment materials. Working with BCLS, the Berrien County Bar Association created a position on its executive committee to serve as a liaison to the BCLS pro bono program; it has also included articles in its publications encouraging members to support the pro bono activities.

Client Ethnicity	
White	471
Black	344
Hispanic	11
Native American	3
Asian	4
Other	0
Total	833

BCLS Sources of Funding for 1996: \$ 313,1



BCLS Cases Closed in 1996: 845

(Number of Clients Served: 833)

