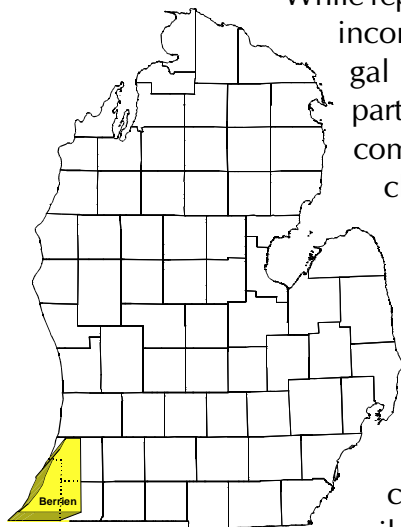


BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

BCLS Office Locations: Niles and St. Joseph

BCLS Service Area: Berrien County

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

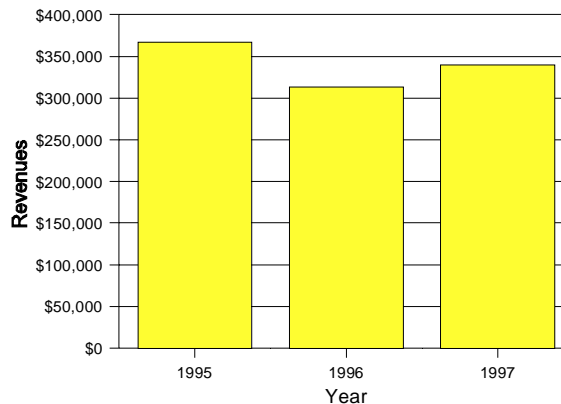


While representing nearly 1,000 low-income people in individual legal matters, the program also participated in a wide variety of community activities involving clients and other providers of services to clients. In 1997, BCLS expanded access and outreach and increased the efficiency and quality of services through the use of technology. This effort included implementation of a pilot project providing centralized telephone intake through a joint "helpline" with the Legal Services Organization of Southcentral Michigan.

A mother who had successfully turned her life around and regained custody of her children was suddenly fired from her job, in which she had received excellent performance reviews only weeks before. Statements of the employer and other employees disclosed that the firing was timed to avoid payment of unemployment benefits if she were laid off due to lack of work. When she was threatened with the loss of her child care and other public assistance because she had been fired, a BCLS attorney convinced an administrative law judge that these sanctions should not be imposed. This young mother obtained temporary assistance until she found another job, and her eligibility for child care was preserved.

A BCLS pro bono attorney taking incoming "helpline" calls determined that the caller, who had attempted to obtain a personal protection order by herself, needed legal assistance to file a divorce, modify the protection order, and see that an improperly entered order for custody and exclusive occupancy was set aside. She volunteered to take the case and, with some help from a BCLS staff attorney to address the low-income issues, obtained the court orders to protect the woman from violence and return to her the home and custody of her children.

BCLS Funding



BERRIEN COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES BUREAU, INC.

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

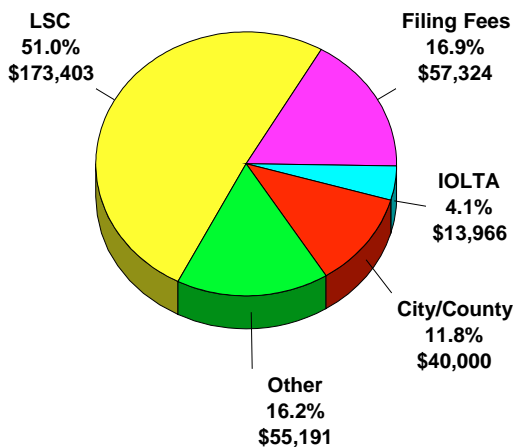
Community Outreach and Collaboration. The program helped low-income individuals and seniors resolve problems involving the most basic needs for income, shelter, and family security. The program also worked to improve understanding of the problems and concerns of low-income people through continuing involvement with the courts, the bar, and other agencies serving the client community. A BCLS staff attorney continued to work with a program designed to teach third and fourth graders at a Benton Harbor school about the American legal system. BCLS also made presentations to Grandparents Raising Children, Alzheimer and stroke victim support groups, and the Women's Roundtable. BCLS continued to provide brochures on topics such as evictions, housing repairs, and Supplemental Security Income overpayments.

Client Age	
18 & Under	1
19-59	578
60 & Over	405
Groups	0
Total	984

Pro Bono Support. Almost 20 percent of the county's active bar participated in BCLS's efforts to involve private attorneys in service delivery to low-income people and senior citizens. Private attorneys handled 34 cases ranging from trusts to divorces involving domestic violence. In addition, six attorneys spent time in the office screening calls and providing advice on the helpline. Others gave money; in 1997, contributions amounted to nearly \$3,000, more than any previous year. BCLS concentrated on developing pro bono services in a broader range of areas, including referral of more Supplemental Security Income and landlord-tenant matters. More effort also has been placed on involving pro bono attorneys in services to senior citizens, such as wills, real property, and consumer law, in which BCLS attorneys are not experienced, and in taking "helpline" calls.

Client Ethnicity	
White	537
Black	435
Hispanic	7
Native American	2
Asian	3
Other	0
Total	984

BCLS Sources of Funding for 1997: \$ 339,884



BCLS Cases Closed in 1997: 984

