

THE SUMMIT



The official newsletter of AppalReD Legal Aid



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Dear friends,

It is with great enthusiasm and gratitude that I write to you today as the newly appointed Executive Director of AppalReD Legal Aid. Every day, I meet new staff and learn about program accomplishments that make me proud to be at the helm of this historic and vital organization.

We have an amazing team of dedicated and talented staff who are committed to our mission. Our attorneys, many of whom were born in this region, exemplify a commitment to their community that is nothing short of inspiring. Choosing to return home after pursuing a legal education, they embody the essence of giving back, making a lasting difference in the lives of the people they serve.

The outpouring of support and gratitude from former clients, volunteers, and community members has been heartwarming. As I engage with individuals during my visits to our local offices and outreach events, they express their appreciation for the outstanding work of our staff and share stories of how AppalReD Legal Aid has played an instrumental role in their lives or organizations. It is a testament to the lasting impact we have had and continue to make in the lives of countless individuals throughout our community. (Cont. pg 2)

From the Executive Director's Desk



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Our dedication to the safety and wellbeing of families and vulnerable members of our community is at the core of our values at AppalReD Legal Aid. Within my initial days as Executive Director, I was privileged to provide welcoming remarks at the prestigious 20th Annual Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse Conference. This event gathered nearly 400 attendees. I was impressed with engaging speakers and substantive topics as well as the compassionate community of professionals who gathered from across the Commonwealth.

October serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of raising awareness about domestic violence and providing support to survivors. At AppalReD Legal Aid, this mission is part of our daily work. In September alone, we opened 105 cases related to domestic violence, profoundly impacting the lives of over 150 adults and 160 children. These numbers underscore the critical need for our services and the depth of the issue in our community.

As I reflect on the first 30 days, “recovery” emerges as a theme that profoundly impacts our community. The devastating 2022 flood left lasting scars, and through engaging with survivors and our dedicated Disaster Response team, I gained firsthand understanding of the immense need for legal assistance in the aftermath. We are diligently expanding our team to meet these needs and provide comprehensive support to those affected.

Furthermore, the pervasive reach of substance use and the opioid epidemic cannot be overstated. Nearly everyone I meet has a connection to someone in recovery or has been affected by this crisis. Witnessing the dedicated efforts of our Project Renew has been nothing short of inspiring. This initiative is instrumental in assisting individuals in active recovery, helping them overcome barriers to secure housing and employment, and paving the way for a brighter future.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming weeks. If you are near Prestonsburg, please attend our open house on November 15 (*details on page 7*). Don't hesitate to reach out by email or phone at anytime.

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly into the AppalReD Legal Aid family and to the mountains of Appalachian Kentucky.

Angeleigh Dorsey

Executive Director
AngieD@ardfky.org



Lunch with Barbourville staff, attorneys, and board member

AppalReD Commits to Providing Disaster Legal Services for Three Years

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) announced that it is awarding \$1,345,226 to AppalReD Legal Aid over three years to support the delivery of legal services to low-income Kentuckians impacted by the severe storms, flooding, and mudslides eastern Kentucky faced in Summer 2022.

AppalReD is one of 14 organizations around the country receiving grants for this purpose. After extreme weather events, victims often require immediate legal assistance to file for FEMA and insurance benefits, deal with landlord/tenant issues, access unemployment benefits, or apply for replacements of important documents needed for education and medical benefits. Legal issues caused by disasters can persist for years.

Cases involving FEMA appeals, bankruptcy, public housing, and domestic violence can emerge, and disaster victims are vulnerable to predatory scams and fraud.

AppalReD will use this grant to add two attorneys and two paralegals to its disaster response team. The organization will continue to conduct outreach to those impacted by flooding, and will contract Appalachian Citizens' Law Center to enhance services in the most severely affected regions.

Evan Smith, Advocacy Director, says, "Over the past year all of us have become very aware of the long-term nature of our region's recovery. Many of our neighbors are struggling to find affordable housing

or continue to work on FEMA appeals. They are living proof of the maxim 'recovery takes years not weeks.' AppalReD looks forward to the opportunity to be an even bigger part of the ongoing response towards a better future for disaster survivors. The needs of survivors and our region will evolve over the next three years and this grant will allow us to play an even bigger part in the ongoing response towards a better future for disaster survivors and evolve and respond effectively to changing needs."



In response to the flood, AppalReD Legal Aid and its partners launched a Flood Survivors Legal Hotline last year to address the legal needs of flood survivors and contribute to the long-term improvement of the Appalachia region. Grant funds will be used to support this resource and to update the AppalReD and KyJustice.org websites, which include information for flood survivors and a simplified intake form.

Day by Day: Hope Despite Flood Fatigue

A little over a year ago, Whitney Bailey packed up her shingle in Lexington and moved to eastern Kentucky with her husband, originally from Hindman, and their toddler. Whitney expected to serve AppalReD as a medical legal partnership attorney, but, instead, with calls coming into the Legal Helpline for Flood Survivors, we asked her to pivot. She's never looked back.

What have you learned from working on so many flood related cases over the past year?

Every situation is unique, despite the overall shared experience of identifying as a disaster survivor. Offering clients compassion and hope is vital, especially for those facing “flood fatigue” from their disaster recovery process.

I have learned the importance of providing a safe space for disaster survivors to share their stories. Many clients need an opportunity to be heard and know that the person sitting across from them is invested in their recovery process. I begin every initial meeting with “Tell me about your experience with the flood.” Then I ask about FEMA. It's not uncommon for everyone in the room to tear up at the beginning of an appointment.

My clients' physical, mental, and emotional resilience is incredibly humbling and inspirational.

What kind of barriers do your clients face?

The main obstacle my clients face is providing supporting documentation necessary to include with their FEMA appeal letter. For example, due to lack of availability and accessibility, it has been difficult for many disaster survivors to obtain a timely itemized home or vehicle repair estimate from contractors and mechanics. Survivors also did not know to save receipts for purchases related to replacing personal property that were damaged or destroyed by the flood.

However, even after a client obtains FEMA financial assistance, it can still be challenging for them to secure a trustworthy contractor to perform necessary repairs within a reasonable amount of time. The threat of mold continuing to spread and a harsh winter emphasizes the need for speedy, satisfactory work.



Whitney Bailey, Disaster Resource Attorney

What kind of housing conditions do flood survivors find themselves in now one year out?

One-year post-disaster, many survivors are still living in damaged homes due to lack of alternative affordable housing. Clients will attend meetings coughing from living with black mold or bring photos of holes in their roof and floor. Some clients are still living in state-provided campers or FEMA trailers and have limited time to find a permanent housing solution. Other clients have been successful with repairing their homes to a safe, sanitary, habitable condition, but that situation is unfortunately not as common.

What do you wish potential clients knew about AppalReD's disaster legal services?

I want potential clients to know that it is still not too late to submit a FEMA appeal! Even if the 60-day appeal window has lapsed, a FEMA applicant can request a waiver of the appeal window and provide the necessary supporting documentation to be considered for additional financial assistance. FEMA financial assistance is currently set to close on January 29, 2024.

I also wish potential clients knew that AppalReD's disaster legal services extend to areas like title and ownership/heirship issues, insurance matters, contractor fraud, and almost any other civil legal issue arising from the disaster.

What kind of patterns are you seeing in your work?

A pattern I have noticed is the general need for disaster preparedness and community education. Some of the topics I aim to address during client meetings and through outreach events are storing important documents with up-to-date information

in a safe place, knowing the risks associated with living in a floodplain, understanding the FEMA appeal process, identifying properties with prior flood insurance requirements, and providing resources and contact information for unmet needs.

What are some of your biggest successes?

Some of my biggest successes are clients who receive the maximum amount of Home Repair/Replacement Assistance and Transportation Loss Assistance after we submit an appeal letter with supporting documentation. It's always motivating to hear the excitement and relief in a client's voice when the heavy burden of financial strain is lifted! Effectively assisting clients with other civil legal issues like mortgage and insurance matters, getting out of collections for a flooded vehicle, and seeking justice from shady mobile home dealers has also been a positive experience.

What are some of the most pressing challenges?

One of the most pressing challenges is the looming January 29, 2024 deadline for FEMA financial assistance. I am hopeful that the financial assistance window will be extended, but there is no guarantee.

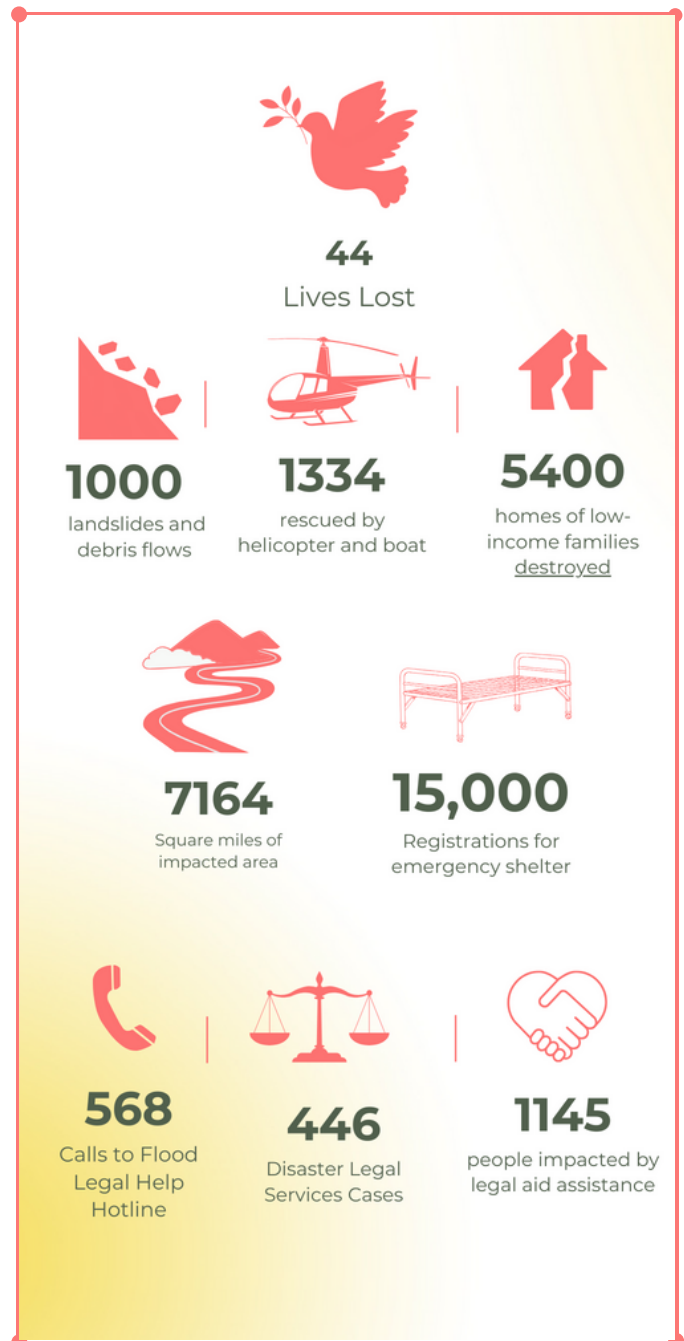
Another challenge was identifying disaster response and recovery stakeholders. Eastern Kentucky was wholly unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude, so it took some time to not only pinpoint which local, state, and national organizations are able to offer assistance, but also to connect groups with each other to share survivor resources. The County Long Term Recovery Groups, Disaster Case Management organizations (like CORE, LKLP, BSCAP, Cajun Navy, etc.), elected officials, and other organizations ranging from hospitals to churches, have pulled together quickly to develop open lines of communication with each other.

If you had a magic wand that could grant one wish, what would you wish for?

If I had a magic wand, I would wish for an immediate affordable, safe, and sustainable housing solution. Eastern Kentucky was already facing a housing crisis prior to the July 2022 disaster; the matter has only been exacerbated with many homes completely destroyed or so heavily damaged as to be uninhabitable without repairs. While there are several housing organizations like HDA, ASP, HOMES, etc., working tirelessly to repair and build homes, the pressing need for additional funding and skilled labor remains high.

The clients' physical, mental, and emotional resilience is incredibly humbling and inspirational.

Impact of July 2022 Flooding and Mudslides



Too Strong to Quit
**FLOOD SURVIVOR
APPEALS**

SHARON BEAVER



Sucked out of her home by raging flood waters, Sharon was separated from her husband and mother-in-law. Debris thundered past Sharon and broke her legs and a vertebrae. She went under and came up, went under again until she finally grabbed on to a utility pole. In pain, freezing, and terrified, she clung to the pole for hours praying and hoping the water would recede. Several hours later she was rescued.

Sharon lost nearly everything the night Troublesome Creek raged: her vehicle, home, mother-in-law, and the love of her life, Bobby. She thought with all this loss filing a FEMA appeal would be easy. So when she received a denial letter she knew she needed help figuring things out.

How would she verify her identity? How would she prove she owned her home when most bills were in her departed husband's name? Had she been required to have flood insurance even when she didn't believe she lived in a flood plain?

She called AppalReD Legal Aid's hotline for flood survivors. She soon met with her attorney who explained the documents she needed and found answers to her questions. They connected her with the Red Cross as well. Sharon is still healing and is grateful to be alive. She tries to spend as much time as she can with her four children and six grandchildren.

Sharon is still fighting her FEMA appeal. But she's too strong to let go now.

“I was drowning, going under and I just thought I have to make it for my kids. They have lost enough.”



1-844-478-0099

Flood Survivors Legal Hotline

APPALRED LEGAL AID Open House and Lunch

12:00 P.M.
November 15, 2023
120 N. Front Ave.
Prestonsburg, KY

Register using the QR code or at ardfky.org/lunch



- ▶▶ Meet Angeleigh Dorsey, new Executive Director
- ▶▶ Chat with the team
- ▶▶ Learn about our mission
- ▶▶ Ask questions about new programs
- ▶▶ Lunch from Sugar Magnolia's Bakery

**Join Us.
RSVP Now.**

