

The Commons Law Center

ANNUAL REPORT

2
0
2
1



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Over the last year, I am proud of the progress The Commons has made expanding its programs to support Oregonians in legal need. This year, our team is focused on doing our best work – not the most work, not the biggest work – the work that sustains, elevates, and empowers the people we serve and those working in public service.

Our organization has continued to adapt to changing needs of the region, from finding different ways to manage relationships with clients, coworkers, other attorneys, and mentors, building new partnerships, to learning new tools and processes to avoid service gaps.

As we complete our fifth year of direct service, we hope to engage more broadly in community-wide conversations about the future of the legal profession, from bar exam reform to licensed paralegals, to share our real experience, innovative ideas, and emerging expertise.

To all our supporters, thank you for your continued commitment to revolutionizing legal access.



Amanda Caffall
Executive Director

CHARITABLE SUPPORT

At the end of 2020, The Commons set out to increase the ratio of our charitable support to 30% and are thrilled to report that we surpassed this goal by a margin, growing our charitable support to nearly 32%.

2021 Goal for Charitable Revenue

\$150,000

2021 Actual for Charitable Revenue

\$184,321

2021 Goal for Earned Revenue

\$484,500

2021 Actual for Earned Revenue

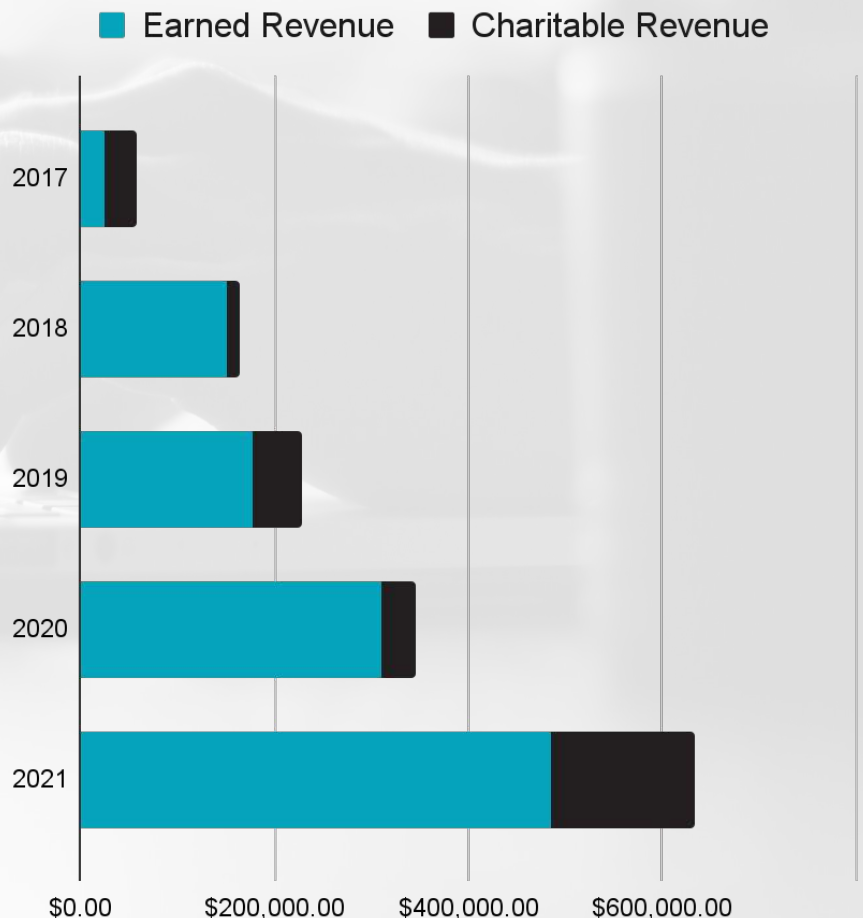
\$582,697

50.25%

Growth in charitable revenue from 2020



Earned Revenue and Charitable Revenue



WHO WE SERVE

The Commons' legal services are not limited to those who live below the poverty line. That matters because most Americans are unable to access the legal help or information they need. Whether clients receive flat fee or hourly help, services are available on a sliding scale across six income tiers; clients just need a household income that is under 400% of the federal poverty level.

The Commons also serves emerging legal professionals, who receive the training they need to work in "people law," or law that serves the basic needs of everyday people (as opposed to businesses and other organizations). A few decades ago, most lawyers (52%) focused on people law. Today, just 25% do, which is why training students, paralegals, and lawyers to serve basic legal needs is so important.

Meaningfully addressing Oregon's access to justice gap will require a lot more ideas, teams, organizations, and institutions to help.

By the Numbers

9,610 Phone Calls

from people looking for legal help

67% Increase in Web Traffic

including 27,000 visits from over 18,000 unique users

7,005 Hours

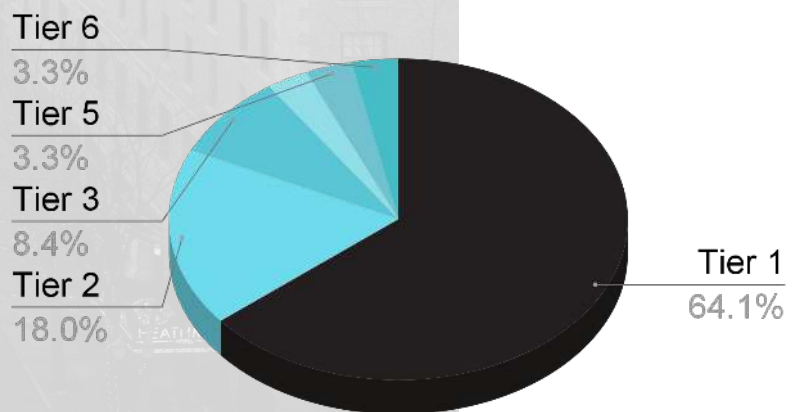
clocked of legal services

1548 Consultations

provided basic legal information

451 New Matters

direct legal services



The Commons serves six income Tiers up to 400% of the federal poverty level, with Tier 1 encompassing those who are below 125%. The vast majority of clients continue to be those who qualify for legal aid but still can't find help.

It's been BIG!

As we reflect on work in the past year, our most notable milestones were the launch of our Tenant Eviction Defense (TED) program and the expansion of our Homeownership Asset Preservation Program (HAPP)

We launched

an eviction defense program, hired a team to staff it, and worked with other nonprofits and legal service providers to adapt to shifting needs.

Portland Housing Bureau

extended its support for the Housing Asset Preservation Program, enabling our team to continue creating pro bono estate plans for the historic African American community.

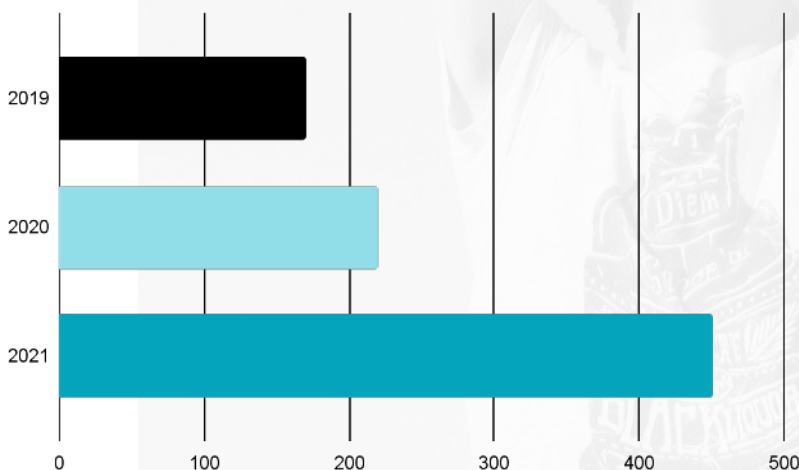
We doubled down

on unbundled, or limited scope, legal services to break the mold of expensive, time-intensive, and traumatic family law trials.

We took on new matters at an increase of over 50%

We reached a organizational record in 2021, managing to open over 450 new matters! This graph highlights our growth from 2019 to 2021.

New Legal Matters Opened



Program Highlights

The Homeownership Asset Preservation Program (HAPP) is a partnership project with the African American Alliance for Homeownership (AAAH). The program began in 2019 to mitigate the history of displacement in N/NE Portland by providing longtime, low-income, largely African American homeowners that still live in the region with pro bono estate plans.

Over time, we learned that sharing information through trusted organizations, churches, and community groups helps effectively connect people to legal services. Last year, more than a dozen such groups hosted our estate planning webinar. More than 200 people showed up to learn about estate planning tools, like what a Power of Attorney, Will, and Advance Medical Directive do for a person and their loved ones. Access to the information helped 34 individuals decide to pursue estate plans through the program.

Homeownership Asset Preservation Program



HAPP has made some incredible advancements. Initially, the City of Portland funded just an 18-month pilot program. We learned at the end of 2022 the City made the decision to move the initiative out of its pilot phase and roll it out as a city-wide program! That means a lot more legal education and service for more people. The Commons is thrilled to have been a key player in the success of the pilot program that led to this expansion.

Program Highlights

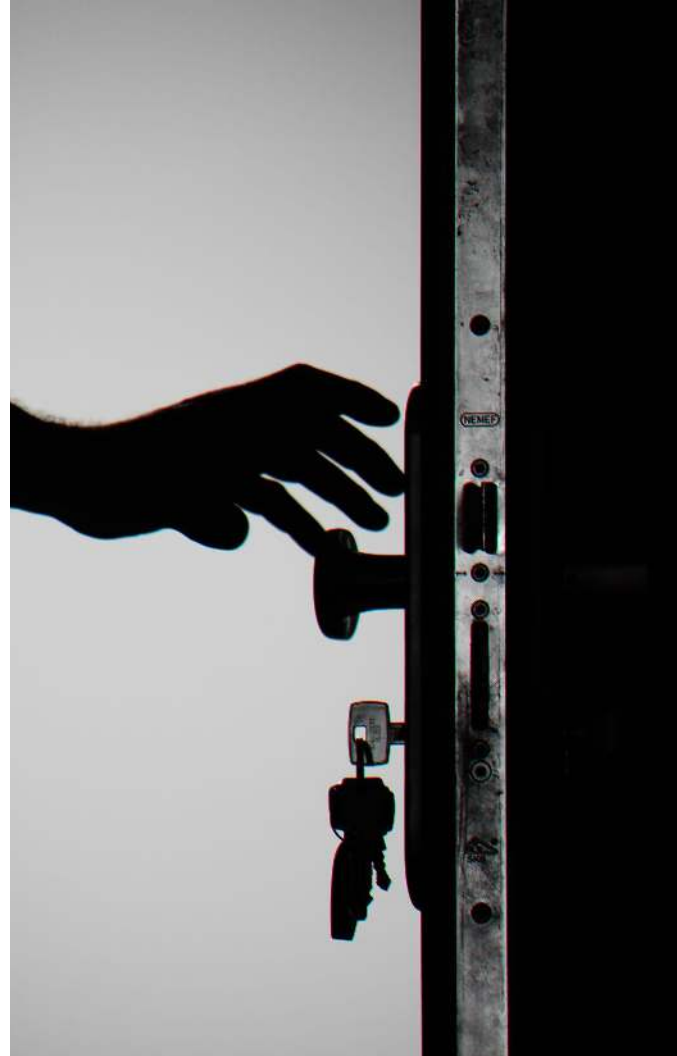
Tenant Eviction Defense Program

Launched in Fall 2021, our Tenant Eviction Defense program served over 160 individuals and provided direct legal representation to 44 in its first three months alone. In addition, we are building the program beyond its initial scope, adding eviction expungement and serving counties beyond the Portland-Metro area for some cases, including Jackson, Hood River, and Marion.

The team built a suite of automated tools and documents to onboard cases smoothly and process legal work efficiently. Our first paralegal was instrumental in the process. Taking the initial time to build the program's infrastructure has already paid dividends and we hope to replicate the model across programs.

TED provided a great opportunity to collaborate with other nonprofits, including legal service, advocacy, and universities. Being in touch and working across funding streams has allowed us to better track rapid changes in legislation and local court approaches as well as avoid duplicating efforts.

Eviction case filings increased more than 100% from July to September 2021. The rate of defaults for people facing eviction hovers around 30%, typically for individuals who simply never appear in court for their cases.



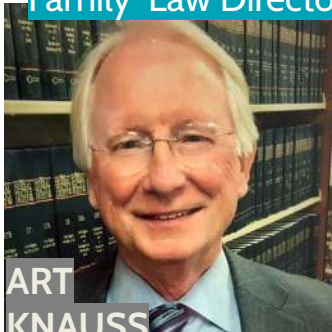
MEET THE TEAM

Senior Advisor |
Tenant Law



CRAIG
COLBY

Family Law Director



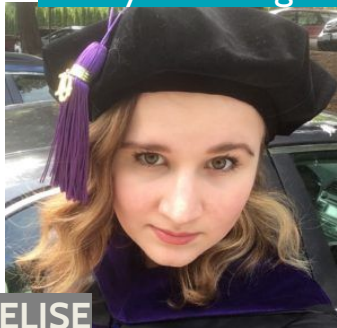
ART
KNAUSS

Attorney Fellow
Homeownership Asset
Preservation Program



EKUA
HACKMAN

Attorney Fellow |
Family Law Program



ELISE
HAMPTON

Attorney Fellow |
Eviction Defense
Program



KENDALL
SPINELLA

Attorney Fellow |
Family Law & Probate



KRISTY
SKALMAN

General Counsel |
Tenant Eviction
Defense



MEGAN
VAN KENT

Estates & Operations
Director



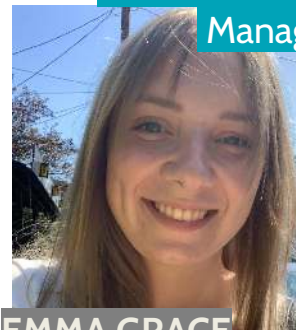
RILEY
GOMBART

Paralegal



TYLER
DILL

Client Relations
Manager



EMMA GRACE
FOX

LAW CLERKS

Thank you to the following students for
joining The Commons Law Center in 2021:

Jennifer Cardiff - Portland Community College, Paralegal Program

Joy Doane - Lewis & Clark Law School

Mayra Gonzalez - Willamette University College of Law

Kyree Hester - Portland Community College, Paralegal Program

Jack Marschke - Lewis & Clark Law School

Alyssa Nguyen - University of Oregon

Abbie Peterman - Portland Community College, Paralegal Program

Whitley Pleas - Lake Forest College

Melvin van Hurck - Lewis & Clark Law School

A Shout Out to Our Clerks

By the close of 2021, The Commons hosted more than **50 student clerks** over just four years of client service, including law students, paralegal students, and undergrads. During the pandemic, we maintained and expanded our clerkship program, and now offer remote opportunities for students across and outside Oregon. A testament to the usefulness of their time with us is that about **33% of law students stay with us for a second, or even third, semester.**

Last year, The Commons was **one of two-dozen nonprofits** selected by University of Oregon to host undergraduates in their Portland Internship Experience program, which offers paid stipends for their students to work in a public interest position for the summer. Our UO intern studied for and took the LSAT during her time with us and was a key member of our client relations team.

Consider us impressed with the flexibility and professionalism of today's legal students. Clerks have helped build the fabric of The Commons. Their fresh energy and ideas and willingness to dig in and learn new things has buoyed our spirits on many a day. Clerks, thank you!. You make doing this work more fun and manageable.

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- In 2021, seven new foundations supported our work, showing the need and the effectiveness of The Commons' work

Oregon Consumer Justice | \$100,000 ·
The Autzen Foundation | \$10,000 · F5 Tech For Good | \$10,000 ·
Spirit Mountain Community Fund | \$7,500 ·
Hoover Family Foundation | \$5,000 ·
Charis Foundation | \$5,000 · PacifiCorp Foundation | \$2,500

In addition, **ACTEC Foundation** again committed to funding our asset preservation work — bringing estate planning to longtime, low-income, African American families in NE Portland — and increased their support by 60%

2021 MAJOR DONORS

Catalyst Law | \$50,000+ (in-kind) · Bridge City PI Law | \$9,000 ·

Gaylord-Eyerman Family Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation |
\$5,000 · Jack Lundeen Fund of Oregon Community Foundation | \$5,000 ·

Rounds Law Office | \$5,000 · Toni Blair Garrett | \$5,000 ·

Ward Greene | \$2,500 · Tom D'Amore | \$2,500 ·

Pacific Cascade Family Law | \$1,500 ·

Construction Law Section of OSB | \$1,500 · Anonymous | \$1,275 ·

Anonymous | \$1,030.18 · Margolin Family Law | \$1,030.18 ·

Bonnie Serkin | \$1,030.18 · John Grant & Katie Gillespie | \$1,000 Wendy

Gerlach | \$1,000 · Business Litigation Section of the OSB | \$1000 ·

Criminal Law Section of the OSB | \$1,000 · Constitutional Law Section of
the OSB | \$1,000 · Susan Gary | \$1,000 · David Wade | \$1,000 · Robert &

Tina Beatty-Walters | \$1,000 ·

Neil Kimmelfield | \$1,000

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!**

2021 DONORS

Leigh Gill · K.R. Olsen · Arnold Wuhrman · Michael Levelle ·
Michele and Christopher Gore · Michaela Gore · Ashley Henry
Doris Burkland · Kimberly Burkland Pray · Sonya Fischer ·
Ted and DaLynn Downen · Tom Brim · William Funk
Jeffrey Nudelman · Robert Klonoff · Disability Section of the OSB ·
Consumer Law Section of the OSB · Isabel Stirling Charitable Gift Fund
Steven Goldberg · Carty Law, Pc · Robert Kusel · June Wiyrick Flores ·
Civil Rights Section of the OSB · Securities Section of the OSB ·
Susan Alterman · Robert Seibel · Laura Schantz · Logan Leichtman ·
Erica Lyman · Emily Miller · Bradley Krupicka · Fallon Niedrist ·
Michael Levelle · Michele Gore · Jordan Furlong · Alexandra
Devendra · Adam Rose · Carlotta Alverson · Kendra Matthews ·
Mellani Calvin · John Parry · Vanessa Nordyke · Gregory Zeuthen ·
Murphy Gary Family Fund ·
Small Firm Section of the OSB

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
SUPPORT!**

2022 ASPIRATIONS

In the coming year, The Commons Law Center is working to...



Redesign

Family Law Program

To leverage Oregon's informal domestic relations trial process, minimize the emotional labor and secondary trauma exposure required of new lawyers, and reduce client costs by providing only unbundled or flat fee services

Define

Career development pathways

for new lawyers and paralegal fellows

Offer

Expungement services

To all clients for either criminal convictions or evictions

Build

Greater awareness

of our work among people who need help and entities we can collaborate with to better serve those who need help but aren't getting it

Finalize

The redesign

of our budget, financials, and performance metrics to reflect individual program costs and varied revenue streams

Invest

Admin and operations

to develop infrastructure needed to sustainably grow.

SUPPORT US

If you believe Oregon's legal system can and should be a force for good in the lives of Oregon's families, please make a charitable gift to support our work at thecommonslawcenter.org/donate.

The Commons Law Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

810 NW Marshall Ste. #300
Portland, Oregon 97209
(503) 850.0811 • hello@thecommonslawcenter.org