

ERLS
EAST RIVER LEGAL SERVICES

Volume 1, Issue 1-Spring 2023

Welcome to the East River Legal Services Newsletter!

Hello and welcome to the **FIRST** East River Legal Services Newsletter! We are excited to share updates with you on the work we are doing and the difference we are making in the communities in eastern South Dakota.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter on to those who would find it beneficial. Anyone can also subscribe for our next quarterly newsletter at the bottom of this newsletter as well.

Thank you and enjoy!

The South Dakota Justice Gap

The recently released South Dakota Legal Needs Assessment highlighted the shortage of attorneys and desperate need for legal assistance by low-income individuals. You can read the full South Dakota Legal Needs Assessment [here](#). The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Justice Gap report confirms that this is a national crisis, with as many as 92% of civil legal needs going unaddressed. You can read the LSC report [here](#).

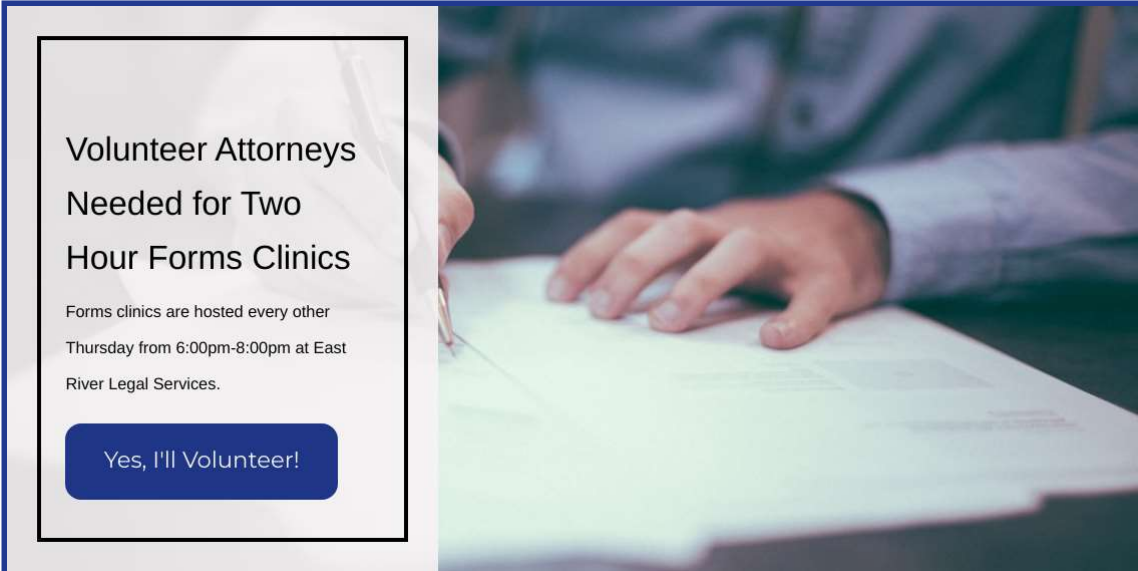
While it's clear that some issues will be difficult to overcome (the shortage of attorneys, particularly in rural areas, doesn't have a clear solution), it was also clear from the South Dakota Legal Needs Assessment that legal aid has not done a great job with messaging. It's discouraging to hear that partner agencies and potential clients don't have a clear idea of what legal aid can do and what our limits are. As part of an effort to market ourselves better, East River Legal Services will be sending a quarterly newsletter to communicate with our partners.

There are three (3) civil legal aid programs in South Dakota and we're all a bit different. East River Legal Services, Dakota Plains Legal Services, and Access to Justice all share an online application at sdlawhelp.org, which routes applications to the appropriate legal aid provider. The legal aid programs share similar missions to provide civil legal assistance in family law, housing, consumer law, and public benefits. With different service areas, priority areas,

and funding it can be overwhelming to clients in crisis to know where to get legal assistance. East River Legal Services, Dakota Plains, and Access to Justice are making active efforts to improve collaboration and communication between our organizations.

East River Legal Services began utilizing the findings of the Needs Assessment prior to the publication of the final report. We've felt the impact of the attorney shortage and created positions such as our Benefits Advocate who can assist clients with Social Security applications and appeals to increase their household income and make them more self-sufficient. We hosted the pilot and then made permanent the Housing Retention Specialist to assist clients in understanding their rights and support clients with landlord/tenant issues, evictions, and foreclosure. We held a webinar for our Domestic Violence Shelter partners to describe the intake process from our side of things and answer questions from shelter advocates helping clients through a crisis. Additionally, we've started a Forms Clinic twice a month to assist people trying to navigate the court system without an attorney. We see the Needs Assessment recommendations as a, "To Do List," and we've already used the findings to support grant applications to demonstrate the need that we would like to address through new funding opportunities.

We have a lot to do and we need your help! Please share our newsletter to improve communication about the work we do and consider a donation of money or time to further our mission to advance equal access to justice for our most vulnerable citizens.



**Volunteer Attorneys
Needed for Two
Hour Forms Clinics**

Forms clinics are hosted every other
Thursday from 6:00pm-8:00pm at East
River Legal Services.

[Yes, I'll Volunteer!](#)

Thank
you



A **HUGE** thank you to the Attorney's who have already volunteered for one of our Forms Clinics! We appreciate you!!

- Trayce Sherrill
 - Olin Clyne
 - Pete Heidepriem
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Recently, Staff Attorneys Ann Knudson and Tillie Bulman met Luci Baines Johnson at the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association / American Bar Association Conference regarding Equal Justice. The Legal Services Corporation, an essential funder and supporter of ERLS, was created as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, an ambitious series of policy initiatives, legislation, and programs with the goals of ending poverty, reducing crime, abolishing inequality, and improving the environment.



or donate online at: <https://erlservices.org/donate/>

Help us close the justice gap!

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