



Invisible & Inaccessible: Young People's Perceptions of Civil Legal Aid

September 2021

LCYC

Legal Counsel for
Youth and Children

Executive Summary

The *2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update* found that more than 70% of the state's low-income households experience at least one civil legal problem each year. Civil legal problems are those that are non-criminal in nature that impact significant areas of daily life such as education, housing, employment, and healthcare.

The civil legal aid system exists to address these issues to ensure access to basic necessities, safety and stability. Though civil legal aid intends to play this critical role in the lives of low-income households, it is uncertain if communities that most need access to civil legal aid are aware of its existence or identify their barriers to safety and stability as legal issues. Further, when communities are aware of civil legal aid, their ability to connect with these services calls into question civil legal aid's accessibility.

This report highlights the perceptions and experiences of young people of color in King County regarding their knowledge (or lack thereof) about civil legal services. Young people of color are the focus of this report specifically because they are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing instability in King County, and more likely to experience civil legal problems. As learned through a survey and focus groups, this report highlights the major issues youth have encountered with civil legal aid and their recommendations on improving its accessibility and cultural competency.



Key Findings

The author disseminated a survey to and hosted two focus groups with young people of color in King County who had experienced homelessness or housing instability with the goal of learning about their experiences interacting with civil legal aid and attorneys, in general. Through both platforms, young people offered important insight on their feelings on civil legal aid.

- Most young people do not know about civil legal services and are unaware that attorneys can help them with everyday situations to remove barriers to housing stability.
- When young people do interact with attorneys, the communication between them and the attorneys serving them is frustrating and problematic.
- The strained interaction between young people of color and the legal support system is heightened due to young people's perception of attorneys' internal biases and the existence of systemic racism.

Recommendations

The young people who participated in the survey and focus groups proposed changes that they believe would improve the perception of civil legal aid, including expanding outreach, advancing cultural competency, and creating a more accessible system.

- Make civil legal aid more visible and accessible to young people by increasing community engagement and partnerships.
- Strengthen community knowledge around civil legal issues and resources.
- Increase intentional learning for white attorneys.
- Fund more civil legal aid attorneys of color to work with young people.

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Introduction & Background

Civil legal aid is a crucial resource available to low- and middle-income people who have civil legal problems—issues that are non-criminal in nature, including, for example, access to health care, housing, government benefits, employment, educational services, and more.¹ Civil legal aid is free legal assistance that helps people navigate and overcome barriers to these basic necessities.



The *2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update* found that more than 70% of the state's low-income households experience at least one civil legal problem each year "on matters affecting these fundamental aspects of their daily lives, including accessible and affordable health care; the ability to get and keep a job; the right to financial services and protection from consumer exploitation; and the security of safe and stable housing."² Encountering a barrier in

these core aspects of life can be detrimental and are often catalysts for housing instability and homelessness.

Civil legal aid exists to lessen the harmful consequences of these civil legal issues. It can reduce the impact of a criminal record by resolving open warrants, sealing records, and settling legal financial obligations. Civil legal aid can assist people in accessing stable housing in many ways, including settling disputes with landlords and securing domestic violence protection orders. Civil legal aid can help people unravel the damage caused by identity theft, consumer, or medical debt, and can help them access public benefits for food and health care. For people who identify as LGBTQ+, civil legal aid can help them change their name and/or gender markers so they can feel safe applying for education, housing, and employment programs.

For youth and young adults—typically defined as 12-17 years old (youth) and 18-24 years old (young adults)—in addition to the issues above, civil legal aid can address their unique circumstances. Youth can utilize civil legal services to leave unsafe home environments through processes such as an emancipation or a guardianship, receive help navigating the

¹ See <https://www.justice.gov/olp/civil-legal-aid-101>.

² 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, Washington State Supreme Court (October 2015), available at https://ocla.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CivilLegalNeedsStudy_October2015_V21_Final10_14_15.pdf.

complexities of Child Protective Services, and assistance accessing medical care without parental support.

While civil legal aid plays a critical role in addressing barriers to poverty and homelessness, it is unclear whether communities that most need access to civil legal aid are aware of its existence or can identify the barriers they face as something that needs legal support in the first place. Additionally, whether civil legal services are as accessible as they should be given the crises people seeking those services are facing is another question altogether. These questions are especially relevant when thinking about the specialized needs and challenges youth and young adults face.

This report highlights the perceptions and experiences of young people of color in King County regarding their knowledge (or lack thereof) about and accessibility of civil legal services. The focus is specifically young people of color because they are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing instability in King County. The King County 2020 Count Us In report found that Black, Latinx, and Native young people made up 25%, 15%, and 15%, respectively, of the number of young people experiencing homelessness though only 7%, 10%, and 1% of the Seattle/King County population.³

This report also makes recommendations about how to improve the access to, as well as the cultural competency of, these services. Ultimately, this report's recommendations speak to the need for civil legal aid to build a more responsive and inclusive system so that young people can access legal aid and overcome barriers that may contribute to or perpetuate their housing instability or homelessness.

Report & Focus Group Development

This report was developed as part of a two-year project led by Candice Dundy, J.D., M.P.P., through the Equal Justice Works Fellowship program. With the goal of reducing the number of youth of color experiencing homelessness in King County, Candice's project sought to learn from and give voice to minority youth's experiences with legal services to advance race equity within the legal community through direct legal representation, community partnerships, and youth engagement.

Using the knowledge gained from engaging youth, Candice is developing training materials to further the inclusion of race equity in civil legal aid. Among these items are educational materials aimed to increase legal literacy among young people of color, and this report which relays youth identified strengths and opportunities for growth in the equitable delivery of direct legal services.

To inform this report, young people were consulted—through an online survey tool and focus groups—about their knowledge of and experiences with civil legal aid.

The online survey and virtual focus groups both focused specifically on the experiences of young people of color because they are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing instability in King County. Because people of color are disproportionately affected

³ 2020 Count Us In, All Home (July 2020), available at https://regionalhomelessnessystem.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Count-Us-In-2020-Final_7.29.2020.pdf.

by homelessness, people of color, specifically Black, Latinx, and Native people, face more civil legal needs that affect their quality of life and future opportunities, and it is critical for civil legal aid to be responsive to this population and their civil legal needs.⁴

To connect with young people of color, the author intentionally sought partnerships with King County-based community organizations that are Black and/or Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) led or work primarily with BIPOC youth, including Atlantic Street, Community Passageways, Therapeutic Health Services, and Seattle Public School's Interagency Academy. Given their deep knowledge of working with youth and young adults, these community partners provided guidance on how best to reach young people for the survey and focus groups, and they provided feedback on draft survey and focus group questions.

The survey was circulated to the partner organizations to share with the young people they are connected to and similar networks. Young people were given a \$20 gift card for completing the survey, to honor their time and expertise. Partner agencies who helped craft the survey and engage young people in the project were provided a \$200 stipend.

“When I left home at 16, I went through a lot, so much at that time because I didn’t know anything. I heard about emancipation, but it sounded so hard. I could never do it. I really struggled. I wish I would have known there was help.”

The survey received 59 responses from young people aged 13-24 in King County who were experiencing or had experienced homelessness. 54 of the 59 respondents identified as a youth of color. The respondents ranged in their interactions with attorneys—some had never worked with an attorney, some had prior experience with a civil legal aid attorney, but most had only been exposed to attorneys pertaining to criminal matters. 65% of the young people surveyed had never worked with an attorney outside of the criminal legal system. Key findings from the survey are below.

To engage in the survey results more deeply, each young person who responded to the survey was offered a chance to participate in a focus group. Two focus groups were held with Atlantic Street's weekly young parents' group.

The focus groups were scheduled to last one hour, and all respondents were paid a \$30 gift card to their choice of Target or Fred Meyer's for their time and expertise.

The author had hoped to reach more young people through the focus groups, but as with many things during the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement in non-essential activities proved challenging to recruit for and, unfortunately, only four young people participated in the extended conversations.

⁴ See 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update.

Key Findings

There are three key findings from the survey responses and focus groups with young people, including that:

Most young people do not know about civil legal services and are unaware that attorneys can help them with everyday situations to remove barriers to housing stability.

When young people do interact with attorneys, the communication between them and the attorneys serving them is frustrating and problematic.

The strained interaction between young people of color and the legal support system is heightened due to young people's perception of attorneys' internal biases and the existence of systemic racism.

Knowledge of/ Access to Legal Support

As highlighted above, a majority of the state's low-income households experience at least one civil legal problem each year.⁵ All of the survey and focus group respondents identified themselves as being a part of a low-income household. Yet, 73% of respondents said they had not heard of civil legal services.

“I didn’t know [civil legal aid] could help me. It doesn’t feel like a good thing when you have to reach out to an attorney.”

The survey asked the 27% who *had* heard of civil legal services what they knew about it. There were a range of answers—some respondents stated that while they had heard of the field, they were not sure what services could be provided. The remaining answers were a mixture of correct services provided, including: “expungements,” “helping with Social Security and other identification documents,” “citizenship,” and unclear answers (“just getting your case across,” “clearing up legal cases,” “informing you about legal proceedings,” “when there's unfair treatment”).

Both those who had heard of civil legal services and those who had not were asked what day-to-day situations they wished an attorney could help them with. 100% of the answers were situations that could be addressed through civil legal services, including wishing that attorneys were available for issues regarding: unemployment, housing/landlord-tenant relations, sexual harassment, debts (medical and consumer), court fees, gathering legal documents, harassment, and discrimination.

⁵ *Id.*

Ultimately, the young people who participated—many of whom are actively experiencing homelessness or housing instability—could benefit from free civil legal services, but do not know that it exists.

“I have no choice but to put my trust in these people because they know the law, and I didn’t understand what was happening.”

In addition to not knowing about the existence of civil legal aid, young people reported not knowing how to connect with an attorney if they knew they needed one.

In general, young people heavily rely on relationships with trusted adults and their communities to connect with resources and information.⁶ The survey reflected this theme with 21% of respondents saying they would turn to family for help seeking an attorney, and 10% asking their friends. However, it is often hard for young people who are experiencing instability to find and maintain these connections long enough to receive assistance.

The most popular response among those surveyed, 33%, said their main source of assistance in finding an attorney would be looking one up on the internet. Yet, stable internet access and connections are amongst the barriers faced by young people experiencing homelessness. 27% of respondents stated they would have no idea where to start the search for an attorney.

Attorney / Client Communication and Relationship

Though survey and focus group respondents differed in their level of exposure to attorneys, all respondents who previously worked with them expressed a similar sentiment—their attorneys' style and level of communication needed to improve. In their answers, respondents expressed that their attorney did not bother to get to know them past their case details, and this impacted the young people's level of engagement with their attorney.

“There was no relationship. They just came to do a job.”

When it came to sharing back about how attorneys have interacted with them, young people of color said they historically do not have positive experiences with attorneys. Attorneys usually encounter young people during negative and traumatizing times of their lives—when their freedom is at risk, when they have been taken from their parents, when they or someone they know have been harmed. Because legal issues can be incredibly

⁶ Lippy, Carrie; PK Sydney; Hsieh, Emily; Perez-Darby, Shannon, Burk, Connie. King County Youth of Color Needs Assessment, The Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, & Gay Survivors of Abuse (May 2017), available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566c7f0c2399a3bdabb57553/t/597fd3ed893fc098807bb872/1501549553222/Youth+of+Color+Needs+Assessment_+Final+Report.pdf

personal and sensitive it is important that young people feel comfortable reaching out for help, and that their attorney centers their needs. However, young people noted that this is often not the case with attorneys failing to spend adequate time listening to their perspectives and goals, and using complex legal language that is assumed to be understood.

“Talk to me! I didn’t speak with my attorney until the day of court.”

When asked what they would like to see from attorneys, respondents’ answers indicated showing them basic decency: being patient, showing empathy, not being dismissive, helping to motivate and guide them through their legal situations.

In addition to attorneys’ style of interacting, survey respondents said it was hard to get their attorney to regularly communicate with them. Some young people noted they only spoke to their attorneys surrounding court dates, while others said their attorneys would not return their attempts to connect for one or two weeks. When contact did take place, the attorneys rarely initiated it.

“Everything went so fast. Court moves so fast, I wished someone would have just talked to me.”

Absent consistent communication, respondents did not feel supported by their attorneys, nor that they could trust or confide in them. Young people spoke about how fast the court processes move and how confusing and scary this is when you are young and without a legal background. Due to this dynamic, respondents said they were left in situations where they could only hope their advocate was accurately relaying information to the court and opposing parties and fighting their case to the fullest, but they did not feel confident that was happening.

Further, for respondents whose advocacy included in-court representation, they reported that the already scant communication with their attorney immediately became nonexistent after court dates were completed. Sometimes after these court dates, respondents still struggled with legal consequences or barriers to housing stability, but now without any help from an attorney. Respondents expressed a desire to have substantive interactions and build trust with their attorneys, but felt the sentiment was not shared because of the lack of effort from their attorney.

The Impact of Race

Prevalent among the issues impacting the communication between attorneys and young people was race. 83% of survey respondents had not worked with an attorney who shared their race—62% of them wish they had. Those who wished they had worked with an attorney of their race, did so for several reasons: they wanted to be understood by their attorney, to

work with someone who had a similar life perspective to theirs and who they could relate to and feel more comfortable with.

“I don’t have a problem. They’re uncomfortable. We make White women uncomfortable.”

One respondent highlighted a common belief amongst young people of color: that working with an attorney who shared their race was the only way to assure their attorney would not let them fail. Respondents commonly disclosed a comfort that an attorney of their race would be more likely to understand their worries and fears around systemic racism and how it impacts the choices presented to them. Young people did not feel that their situations could be understood and sympathized with by attorneys without shared backgrounds.

Black youth need empathetic, culturally responsive legal services. This need is not consistently met, as 24% of young people of color surveyed said their experience receiving legal services was negatively impacted due to racism. A Black respondent spoke about their experience working with an attorney who assumed that “Black people are always criminals.” A Latinx respondent was dismissed by an attorney claiming that “Hispanics are over dramatic.” Summing up the consensus among the respondents, one young person noted that “because [attorneys] see people that look like me in these situations all the time, I just felt like he [was] uninterested in my situation.”

“I do feel like my race impacted things. Everybody was white. Nobody understood me.”

Respondents said that in their interactions with attorneys, some would assume their guilt because of their race and not put effort into helping them in their situations, or respond to them extremely slow, if at all. A respondent felt they “[were] not seen as a person, only a color.” Respondents noted that their experiences were also tainted by racism because of a lack of a basic understanding of racial harassment and injustice.

There were also respondents who faced the opposite issue: attorneys who understood racism and its harms, but that was their entire perspective of the client. These attorneys were also described as only seeing the respondents as “a color,” but instead of displaying ignorance, asserting excessive sympathy that young people felt bordered on inauthenticity.

“[White people] move with guilt. They want to feel bad for me instead of just feeling for me. I’m not asking for a pity party. Let’s fix [the problem.]”

While the survey responses above were shared mostly in response to the young people's interactions with the criminal legal system, it is important for the civil legal aid system to take note because of the rampant racial disproportionality statistics reflected in civil legal issues.

“There’s so much ignorance. They assume the worst.”

While 33% of the general population has at least one civil legal problem with employment, over half (56.7%) of low-income Native American households and close to half (44.7%) of low-income African-American households face an employment issue.⁷ The core issue of housing instability has similar numbers—while fewer than one-third (27.8%) of all low-income households suffer at least one problem with rental housing, 42.9% of Native American households [and] 41.5% of African-American households...have rental housing problems.⁸

Ultimately, young people shared what the data reflects—the legal system is inherently racist. Without a basic understanding of how racism impacts the young people of color they serve, attorneys—criminal or civil—remain complicit in the perpetuation of the harm it causes.



7 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update

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Recommendations

Below are four recommendations addressing the themes that arose from the survey responses and focus groups with young people:

Make civil legal aid more visible and accessible to young people by increasing community engagement and partnerships,

Strengthen community knowledge around civil legal issues and resources,

Increase intentional learning for white attorneys, and

Diversify civil legal aid with attorneys of color.

Make Civil Legal Aid More Visible and Accessible to Young People

A key finding of this project was that young people of color are not aware of civil legal services—legal services must be intentional about creating a strong community presence so that young people know when and how to reach out for help.

To improve the visibility of civil legal aid, the field must engage with trusted community-based partners and conduct outreach in youth-friendly ways. Community-based engagement could include having more robust presence at youth resource fairs and tabling events. In-person events would provide young people with an opportunity to meet staff involved with legal organizations who can demystify the idea of connecting with an attorney, including outside of the criminal context or when in crises.

In addition, it is critical to increase the legal presence at places where young people are already located, including in schools, youth-focused service provider agencies, community centers, and healthcare centers. Young people specifically recommended that legal services expand partnerships with more unconventional spaces that young people frequent, such as banks and grocery stores.

Alongside improving the knowledge of the existence of civil legal aid, civil legal aid must make services accessible and attractive to young people. Civil legal aid cannot rely solely on a “come to us for services” model. Services that require young people to come to them during inflexible times—like when young people are most likely at school or are working at low wage jobs—fail to consider the realities of young peoples’ lives and transportation challenges, especially those who are experiencing homelessness.

Young people who need civil legal services often have trouble engaging in the rigid structure of traditional services—legal aid must build a model that considers the unique circumstances and developmental realities of young people. Young people expressed that the move to remote services during the COVID-19 pandemic has been beneficial to their ability to access services and should be more commonplace.

Ultimately, civil legal aid should take bold steps to embed itself in places where young people are already accessing services and ensure that those services meet the real-life needs of young people who are often navigating multiple and complex public systems.

Strengthen Community Education

Along with expanding the partnerships and outreach for civil legal services, there needs to be regular opportunities for general community-based legal education and self-advocacy.

Once partnerships are identified and created, the civil legal aid community should work with those partners to share relevant and up-to-date legal information so that young people and their most trusted community supports are empowered with legal knowledge and civil legal aid resources.

“I don’t need the dancing. You all are talking about my real life, serious things, but make it friendly and easily understood.”

Young people identified social media as a great tool to share information because virtual tools and resources can be accessed on their time. Social media platform, TikTok, came up multiple times as a helpful resource. TikTok’s platform is made of short videos created by users—young people stated this is helpful because attorneys could clearly explain concepts, act out scenarios, and walk-through steps, which is easy to understand.

Young people pointed to how many organizations they are involved with, like Atlantic Street, have recurring scheduled meetings that they can rely on to connect with each other, talk through issues, and learn about available resources. Young people requested a similar set up for legal education. Though most young people were initially unaware of civil legal services, they identified a range of civil legal issues they want to receive education around, including expungements, parental rights, unemployment, emancipations, identification theft, obtaining legal documents, immigration, issues with police, and debts.

Civil legal aid should utilize community partnerships and virtual, social platforms to engage in ongoing teaching opportunities to meet the continually growing need for legal literacy for young people in crises who often do not have access to the laws and resources available to assist them.

Increase Intentional Learning for White Attorneys

Given what young people shared about the style and level of communication they experienced with attorneys they did interact with, attorneys—particularly those who are White—must engage in more intentional educational opportunities regarding culturally aware services and responsive client engagement.

“Try to understand why we hurt.”

The respondents who had negative experiences working with attorneys for reasons related to race were not interested in *never* working with attorneys who did not share their race but

wanted to feel comfortable when they did not. Young people noted that while many attorneys undergo trainings around sensitivity and race, this is not a substitute for intentionally showing up to learn and listen directly from youth and POC-led organizations, nor is it a substitution for regularly interacting with BIPOC communities.

Civil legal aid should ensure that, rather than a focus on formal trainings, white attorneys engage in in-person learning and listening sessions with local BIPOC communities and organizations in which they genuinely engage with BIPOC community members to learn how to engage with people of color comfortably and reasonably.

Diversify Civil Legal Aid with Attorneys of Color

Of the respondents surveyed, 14% noted a positive experience because of their race—the majority stated this was because they were the few who received services from an attorney of their race. Attorneys of color are critical to young people of color who need a sense of connection, especially while going through a crisis. Though non-POC attorneys can learn about the issues young people of color experience, there is an additional sense of comfort offered by attorneys who young people can relate to through shared experiences.

“[White attorneys] have to get used to us. I think they should be required to work with at least 10 Black people before [coming into the field].”

The lived experience that attorneys of color, particularly Black, Native, and Latinx attorneys, bring to civil legal aid is invaluable in connecting with and serving Black, Native, and Latinx youth who are historically, disproportionately, and continuously discriminated against and in need of civil legal services. To improve BIPOC communities' access to and service experiences with civil legal aid, Washington must diversify the civil legal aid system with attorneys of color.

“It’s easier to have someone who looks like you communicate with you. I can trust that it won’t be harmful.”

According to the August 2021 Washington State Bar Association's demographic numbers, out of the 27,463 licensed attorneys that provided their ethnic background, only 2.4% were Black, 2.6% were Latinx, and .8% were Native.⁹ The Washington State Bar Association demographic numbers also show that only 1.6% of attorneys work in the nonprofit sector;

⁹ WSBA Member* Licensing Counts, Washington State Bar Association (August 2021), available at https://www.wsba.org/docs/default-source/licensing/membership-info-data/countdemo_20190801.pdf?sfvrsn=ae6c3ef1_134.

most attorneys practice as government attorneys, in house counsel, solo practitioners, and at private firms¹⁰ People of color are overrepresented in the population of people experiencing homelessness, and underrepresented in the legal community that exists to help them. Diversifying the system requires not only recruiting attorneys of color, but also retaining them through effective training, leadership opportunities, and by paying adequate salaries, commensurate to other fields of law, that would allow more attorneys of color to do nonprofit/civil legal aid work.

Civil legal aid must be active and intentional in recruiting and maintaining attorneys of color by creating a more accessible environment for them. While civil legal aid can be inaccessible to young people who need services, without proper funding and connections, it can also be inaccessible to attorneys of color who seek to pursue careers in and improve relationships with communities in need of civil legal services.

Conclusion

Civil legal aid is a vital tool in addressing non-criminal issues that create barriers to homelessness and instability. More than 70% of Washington's low-income households experience at least one civil legal problem each year. Unfortunately, those most heavily affected by civil legal issues, BIPOC communities and young people, have not heard of civil aid. Without knowing what civil legal aid does, youth and young adults are forced to navigate issues that affect fundamental aspects of their daily lives alone, which can be ruinous to their safety, health, and stability.

Even when young people are aware of available legal services, they are often hesitant to reach out for help due to prior experiences with attorneys, specifically around poor communication, and a lack of racial understanding. To be a system that effectively serves people, civil legal aid must make considerable changes to make the services more visible and accessible. These changes must include increasing community engagement and partnerships and creating legal literacy materials to advance community knowledge around civil legal issues. These changes must also address racial insensitiveness by ensuring intentional learning for white attorneys and funding more attorneys of color.



¹⁰ *Id.*

Absent making substantive changes, civil legal aid will perpetuate existing systems that fail to account for the experiences of youth of color.

Experiential Learning



Candice Dundy's two-year Equal Justice Works Fellowship Project involved two components: a systemic advocacy component (which this report reflects) and a direct representation component.

Candice's direct representation of young people involved partnering with schools, youth shelters, juvenile court professionals, and other community-based providers to reach young people who could benefit from civil legal services.

Some of Candice's community partners included Seattle Public Schools' Interagency Academy, an alternative public school program that embraces a holistic trauma informed approach to support students, and YouthCare's University District Youth

Center (UDYC), a drop-in center for youth and young adults struggling with homelessness that offers engagement services, including case management and transitional living resources. At both locations, Candice held weekly legal intake hours to offer civil legal services, such as public benefits, orders of protection, medical debt, name/gender changes, navigating Child Protective Services, emancipation, and housing law. The extent of legal advocacy provided to young people ranged from consultation to in-court representation.

Having a consistent presence in the community allowed Candice to get to know both the community and service provider staff better.

Having a consistent presence in the community allowed Candice to get to know both the community and service provider staff better. Through this engagement, the staff's ability to spot civil legal issues increased, thus increasing referrals for civil legal services. As more of the young people grew accustomed to seeing Candice every week, the number of young people inquiring about civil legal services grew, too.

The most common civil legal aid issues Candice encountered in her direct representation of youth of color at risk of or experiencing homelessness included obtaining identification documents, negotiating disputes with landlords and employers, and addressing past consumer debts. As found through Candice's engagement and in the 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study Update, these issues can detrimentally harm people dealing with economic hardship, particularly people in Black and Native, and Latinx communities, by creating and maintaining barriers to stable housing.

Her direct representation experience echoed many of the sentiments reflected in this report, including that young people were often unaware of civil legal services and its part in removing barriers to employment, housing, and other means to stability. Without knowing that attorneys can help with non-criminal issues, young people are forced to navigate these

complex issues on their own, often to damaging outcomes. Even if a young person identified their issue as a civil legal issue, they did not know how to find an attorney to assist them.

Through Candice's targeted outreach during peak times in locations already frequented by young people, she was able to create a more accessible legal services model that best worked for young people. As more young people became aware of the available legal help she could offer, they were eager to connect with an attorney about their situations.

Through Candice's targeted outreach during peak times in locations already frequented by young people, she was able to create a more accessible legal services model that best worked for young people.

Candice's direct representation experience also reflected how Black and Brown young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness and civil legal issues. The majority of clients that attended the legal intake hours were Black and Latinx. During intake hours, many of the young people remarked how Candice was the first time they encountered an attorney that looked like them, which alleviated a significant amount of nervousness, and removed their need to explain cultural reasons and covert systemic tactics that were prevalent in their circumstances.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the Raikes Foundation and Greg & Val Gorder for generously supporting this project to improve civil legal services for young people of color through Candice Dundy's Equal Justice Works Fellowship. Additional thanks to YouthCare for providing office space to host Candice, and to Legal Foundation of Washington for their Race Equity Grant to pay for stipends and the creation and dissemination of this report.

Thank you to the community partners at Atlantic Street, Community Passageways, Therapeutic Health Services, and Seattle Public Schools' Interagency Academy for their input in building the online survey tool and facilitating focus groups so that the report was informed by young people regarding their challenges accessing and suggestions for civil legal aid.

Most importantly, thank you to all the young people who shared their stories and experiences to make this report possible.