Cover Photo: SEOLS helped David Bewes and his stepson, Ancil, when a flood destroyed their apartment.
Inside Cover Photo: Designed by Alan Jazack, the JUSTICE mural honors Ohio's social justice legends. It is located at Washington Gladden Social Justice Park in Columbus.
Our Mission:
SEOLS provides civil legal aid and advocacy to combat unfairness and injustice and to help people rise out of poverty.
Friends:

Across 30 counties in Appalachia, Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) provided direct legal representation and advocacy that improved the well-being of our clients, their families, and the community. Legal services are essential in the fight against poverty, leading to housing stability, enhanced family safety, and increased financial security.

We continued to represent tenants in eviction court, helping more individuals and families maintain stable housing. We were also able to expand other housing efforts, like ensuring that landlords were held responsible for poor housing conditions that threaten the health and safety of clients like David Bewes and Sherry Summers. In addition, our Fair Housing work protected individuals from barriers to safe and affordable housing due to their race, disability, or gender.

Representing survivors of domestic violence remains a high priority across our rural service area, where those in need often live 40 miles from a shelter. We strive to provide holistic support by working with partners like victim advocate Mary Tom and Alison Morton, an AmeriCorps empowerment specialist.

Advocates also focused on helping people break the cycle of poverty by relieving debt, allowing for long-term financial growth. And our reentry work provided opportunities for those with prior criminal records to pursue financial self-sufficiency.

Unresolved legal problems like these are costly, often causing people to miss work or school. Legal issues impact housing, job prospects, and household income. Through this work and more, SEOLS continues to help our clients reach financial security.

We are so grateful to our funders, our community partners, and our staff for all that they contributed in 2022 to support our mission, and we look forward to our continued work in 2023.

Sincerely,

Kathleen McGarvey
Executive Director

Sandra Anderson
Board Chair
Board Members

Sandra J. Anderson
Retired Attorney
Franklin County

John Biancamano
Retired Ohio University Faculty
Franklin County

Thomas Bonasera
Dinsmore & Shohl
Franklin County

Judge David Branstool
Licking County Court of Common Pleas

Suzannah Crowder
Community Representative
Licking County

Charis Davis
Community Representative
Scioto County

Debera Diggs
Community Representative
Franklin County

Rita Fuchsman
Rita S. Fuchsman Co.
Ross County

Helena Jones
Community Representative
Jefferson County

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Mears Law
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Retired Judge
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Epstein, Becker & Green, P.C.
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Belmont County

John Stevenson
Law Offices of John Stevenson
Scioto County

William J. Taylor
Kincaid Taylor & Geyer
Muskingum County

Melanie Tobias
Columbus City Attorney’s Office
Franklin County

Lisa Tomes
Community Representative
Licking County

Phyllis Violet
Community Representative
Ross County

Christopher S. Williams
Cafée Halter & Griswold
Cuyahoga County
13,126
PERSONS HELPED IN 2022

5,182
CHILDREN

7,944
ADULTS & SENIORS

35 PERCENT
CLIENTS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A DISABILITY

9 PERCENT
CLIENTS WHO WERE VETERANS

30 PERCENT
CLIENTS WHO WERE SENIORS
I understand my rights and my options now. Your help relieved my stress. SEOLS is great, and all the people that work there are wonderful."

— SEOLS client
Rural Renters Face Lack of Safe, Affordable Units

When her landlord illegally began requiring her to pay the electric bill for her rental unit, our client agreed because she had nowhere else to go. She had spent months searching for a home and knew that Southeastern Ohio offered few choices for rentals. In another rural county, David Bewes, who had happily rented a unit in a small complex for many years, discovered how limited rental options are when he and his stepson were forced to find temporary housing due to a flood in their apartment. They spent four months living in a rodent-infested motel while the management company refused to address their situation.

“The lack of affordable housing in Ohio’s rural communities often leads low-income tenants to endure unsafe or unfair conditions,” said SEOLS Advocacy Director Kristen Lewis. In many small communities, a handful of landlords own most of the rental properties. If these landlords do not maintain their properties, it makes it harder for tenants to find suitable housing.

“Too often, families have no choice but to continue to rent a home that has faulty electric or plumbing, poor insulation, or issues with pests,” Lewis said. “In some cases, tenants knowingly overpay or put up with unfair practices because their community lacks affordable rental properties.”

In rural areas, three out of four homes are owner-occupied, and multi-unit apartment buildings are rare, which makes it a challenge for would-be renters to find suitable choices. SEOLS works to improve tenants’ circumstances by challenging landlords who provide substandard living conditions or fail to follow Fair Housing laws. Every year, we assist about 100 clients with issues related to the condition of the properties they are renting.

Through a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant, SEOLS also helps clients with disabilities get needed accommodations like a designated parking spot close to their apartment, a first-floor unit, or permission to install a ramp. Our attorneys also represent people who are victims of sexual harassment, subjected to discriminatory charges or fees, and targeted by other forms of illegal housing discrimination.
I was able to leave a building filled with three types of mold without extra fees. Peggy Lee did a great job."

— SEOLS client
Landlord Unlawfully Forces Tenant to Pay Utility Charges

After months of searching for a HUD rental, Sherry Summers* was delighted to find a residence on a beautiful lot in Athens County. Summers, pressed into disability retirement due to a medical condition, was looking for a place to rest and write her memoir.

During the required HUD inspection of the property, the landlord said she wanted Summers to put the electricity in her name. The HUD inspector rejected the request because multiple buildings—including some that would not be occupied by Summers—were connected to the electrical box.

The landlord put the electricity in her own name. However, shortly after Summers moved in, the landlord said she was traveling out of the country and that Summers would need to pay the bill. The landlord did this even though she had signed a HUD contract stating electricity was included in the rent. Summers started paying the bill, believing it was a temporary request.

When her landlord returned, she refused to take over the electric payments and told Summers, “If you don’t like it, leave.”

The landlord continued to add buildings to the property and connect them to the existing electric box, causing the monthly bills to increase. During this time, Summers’ medical condition worsened. She required multiple surgeries on her jaw that made speaking difficult. The condition also created financial challenges. “I could not afford to be paying the HUD landlord ‘on the side’ for electricity while meeting my urgent medical needs,” said the 55-year-old. “But I was afraid if I did not comply with the landlord, I would end up homeless.”

On the advice of her HUD caseworker, Summers called SEOLS. Senior Staff Attorney Peggy Lee advised Summers of her options, including filing a lawsuit. “Without their help, I can’t imagine what would have happened,” Summers said.

Lee filed a False Claims Act complaint on behalf of Summers in federal court. After months of litigation, the landlord agreed to reimburse Summers $7,500 for unlawful expenses that she had required Summers to pay. The landlord also agreed to pay $4,500 in attorneys’ fees.

“It was a relief to have such capable guidance and representation,” Summers said. “Since speaking is such a difficult activity for me, I will be eternally grateful that they could be my voice.”

*Name changed at the client’s request.
Flood Displaces Family for Months

Ancil Lambert and his stepdad, David Bewes, with attorney Matthew Bockey.

David Bewes panicked when he saw water gushing from under his door as he approached his Lawrence County apartment in May 2022. He called the manager and got no help. “They said there was nothing they could do and told us to go to a hotel,” the 67-year-old recalled. “I didn’t know what to do.”

Bewes, who supports himself and his stepson, Ancil, with his disability payments, could not afford an extended stay in a motel. Members of his church loaned them money for the motel while Bewes dealt with the apartment’s property management company.

The flood, Bewes learned, was caused by an unaddressed plumbing issue in the bathroom. His requests for help were ignored and the damage got worse as items began to mold. The pair spent about four months living in a pest-infested motel that did not have a kitchen or accommodations for Bewes’ wheelchair. “It was unbearable,” he said. “Nearly everything we owned was ruined.”

Bewes, a long-term tenant, said the company made promises but never addressed the damaged apartment or his losses. At the suggestion of a friend, Bewes called SEOLS. “It made all the difference,” he recalled. “Things started turning around when SEOLS got involved.”

Attorney Matthew Bockey negotiated for the landlord to provide a temporary apartment for the family. Bockey also filed a lawsuit seeking damages to refund Bewes and Ancil for the cost of the motel, replace their destroyed property, and cover the emotional distress of their ordeal. Shortly after the suit was filed, the landlord agreed to a settlement that included repairing the property and compensating Bewes and Ancil for their losses.

The pair were able to return to their unit in December where they enjoy cooking meals together in their comfortable kitchen.

“I am just so grateful for everything SEOLS has done for us,” Bewes said. “Everyone who works there is so wonderful. We would never be in this position if it weren't for you helping us.”
When an emergency shelter opened in Chillicothe in the winter of 2021, officials expected the facility would provide a temporary place for people to sleep during the colder months. However, Ross County Community Action (RCCA) staff who ran the shelter quickly realized a more long-term solution was needed. Many people returned to the shelter night after night, and it became clear that better facilities were necessary, said Julie Bolen, the executive director of the agency.

Job loss, domestic violence, unmet mental health needs, medical debt, and a lack of affordable housing are some of the most common reasons people experience homelessness. “We know that many of the people who come to the shelter need more than a place to sleep at night,” she said. “They need to be connected to services that can help them.”

Bolen engaged with other local agencies that could help shelter residents find permanent housing. She also asked her board for help to open a year-round facility. She and board chair Baylee Butler, the SEOLS Managing Attorney for Pro Bono and Community Outreach, began looking at the feasibility of opening a more permanent homeless shelter in Ross County. They discovered that local laws and a lack of community support would make the project difficult.

In 2022, the shelter moved three times. The first move was because they were unable to secure a zoning change for the location. The second location was only meant to be temporary as it was further away from necessary resources like public transportation. The third move was to its current location, a shared space with the Salvation Army. But even here, the zoning variance is only temporary and RCCA must decide whether to shut down the shelter entirely or secure another location and move.

Organizations in several SEOLS counties are dealing with similar issues. In New Philadelphia, the Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County have faced opposition to several proposed locations for a new homeless shelter. A new facility is needed because the current building is more than 100 years old and requires extensive upkeep,
which diverts funds from staff training, maintaining and replacing equipment, and programming for the guests of the shelter, said SEOLS Senior Attorney Jesse Moses, who serves on the board.

New Philadelphia officials have rejected several proposed locations, citing zoning concerns. During city meetings on the topic, some residents also have opposed a new shelter. The shelter, which opened in 2005, has served more than 4,100 individuals, including children. Friends of the Homeless has a sound record of successfully helping guests find permanent housing, Moses said.

Residents, who must undergo a background check, are connected to social services and other local resources. “Given that 85 percent of the people who use the shelter are Tuscarawas County residents, the shelter is a wonderful example of how our community works together to help neighbors in need,” Moses said. “We really need a safe, modern facility to house people until they get back on their feet.”

In Chillicothe, Bolen and Butler want the same thing. The RCCA shelter’s current location is a multi-purpose room in an older Salvation Army building. On a typical night, 70 people sleep there. In 2022, 400 people sought shelter at the facility. “People think we are a small community, and we don’t have any homeless people,” Butler said. “That’s just not the case.”

SEOLS attorneys also try to prevent families from becoming homeless by representing them in eviction hearings, partnering with organizations that offer rental assistance, and helping clients overcome barriers to employment, said Advocacy Director Kristen Lewis.

“Our advocates know the best solution is to provide legal help before a family loses their home,” Lewis said. “That’s why our offices offer so many types of legal assistance. We can help them ask a landlord to make repairs, stop an unfair wage garnishment, connect them to food and health benefits, reinstate a driver’s license, and address other issues that make maintaining a home a challenge.”

**Homelessness by Location Type**

Unsheltered people who are experiencing homelessness have drastically shorter life expectancies. In rural areas, a greater percentage of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered.

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<tr>
<th>Location Type</th>
<th>Unsheltered</th>
<th>Sheltered</th>
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<tr>
<td>Largely rural</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>Major city</td>
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<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Largely suburban</td>
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<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other large urban area</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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*Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2018 Annual Homelessness Report*
Advocates in Rural Counties Face Unique Challenges in Addressing Domestic Violence

Living in a rural community can make it more difficult for survivors of domestic violence to seek help. Many small communities do not have domestic violence shelters. Survivors may feel an obligation to stay to care for children, animals, or farm property. They or their abusers may know law enforcement or court personnel. Some have families who would prefer not to involve the authorities.

“Standing up to an abuser is really frightening,” said Mary Tom, the long-serving victim advocate for Morgan County. “My clients are afraid of retribution, losing their support system, and being the subject of gossip in communities where everyone knows everyone.”

For these reasons, helping domestic violence survivors in rural areas can be a greater challenge, Tom said. She’s grateful survivors in her county and 29 others have access to SEOLS lawyers who can help them secure Civil Protection Orders that keep abusers away and assist with divorce and custody issues. The attorneys “are extremely kind and supportive,” Tom said. Clients living in Appalachia need that additional support because of the region’s lack of good jobs and social services, she added.

“I don’t think the majority of my low-income victims would get a protection order or a divorce without legal aid. Once they find out they can get help, they will leave that abusive situation. They couldn’t do this without legal assistance.”

Providing help beyond a protection order has always been a priority, said Senior Staff Attorney Lauren Weller, who leads the Family Law Team and works out of the Portsmouth office. Staff address housing issues, help with securing food and health benefits, and screen clients for credit problems that might prevent them from signing a lease or finding a job. “We understand that helping clients move forward requires more than addressing the situation with the abuser,” she said. “We try to set them up for success by creating opportunities for them to become financially independent.”
Programs Provide Additional Services to Domestic Violence Survivors

Partnerships are essential to providing holistic services to domestic violence survivors. SEOLS works closely with other organizations addressing domestic violence to ensure that survivors are not only supported throughout their interactions with legal systems but that they are aware of additional help their community may offer.

Family Law Team members regularly meet with local advocates to discuss cases, streamline court processes, and share information. The meetings, which SEOLS initiated when we received an Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) grant, have strengthened our relationships with local advocates for domestic violence survivors, leading to better service for clients.

Since April of 2022, our clients have received assistance from Alison Morton, an AmeriCorps empowerment specialist working out of our Portsmouth office. She focuses on helping survivors of domestic violence with housing needs and financial empowerment and identifying special education needs for children. When SEOLS attorneys conclude the legal work related to domestic violence, Morton follows up with clients, offering information about becoming financially independent, balancing a budget, signing a lease, and borrowing money. “A person who has a good understanding of money matters is more likely to be successful in starting over after an abusive relationship,” Morton said. “Connecting clients with critical health and food benefits also makes a positive impact on their future.”

The personalized attention Morton provides is “a wonderful addition to our services,” said Weller, who serves on the OCJS Family Violence Prevention Advisory Council, the Supreme Court of Ohio Subcommittee on Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency, and the Ohio Children’s Trust Fund’s Southwest Regional Prevention Council. “The ability to do more to assist with non-legal but essential issues is so important.”

Rural Statistics

Average number of miles for women living in rural or isolated areas to reach the nearest domestic abuse shelter.

Rural women are also nearly twice as likely to be turned away from services because of the insufficient number of programs and inadequate staffing of community-based health programs.

Source: Journal of Women’s Health
Promoting Advocacy through Partnerships

The breadth of services offered by SEOLS provides us with many opportunities to partner with other organizations to do more to help clients. Working with other agencies allows us to add or streamline services, reach more people, and offer innovative solutions to legal problems.

“Since civil legal problems can impact so many areas of clients’ lives, we look for organizations that can help us provide holistic solutions,” said Advocacy Director Kristen Lewis. “We’re grateful for partners and funders who work with us to do more to address the barriers that keep Ohioans in poverty.”

Belmont County Clinic Helps Pro Se Filers

Concerned by the number of divorces getting dismissed because filers who were representing themselves were missing key pieces of the case, a former Belmont County Common Pleas court magistrate asked SEOLS for help. The Steubenville office responded by providing time at its monthly legal clinic to assist people who represent themselves—called pro se filers—ahead of their hearings. The help offered at the SEOLS clinic made such a difference that the court now requires pro se litigants filing for divorce to attend a clinic ahead of their hearing, said current Magistrate Amy Busic.

The preparation that occurs at the clinic is so valuable, Busic said. SEOLS helps people get their paperwork in order so the court can act on their request, which in turn eliminates delays that can cost filers time and money that they don’t have, she said. “It has made a huge difference. Usually, they can come in once and have their case resolved. People also know what to expect. It’s less overwhelming.”

Clients appreciate the service because having a case dismissed due to paperwork issues is frustrating and usually means they must pay to refile it and come back to court another day, said Steubenville Managing Attorney Pam Bolton. “This partnership with the court has made the process more efficient for clients and gives us an opportunity to screen folks to see if SEOLS can help with other issues. It’s been incredibly positive for the community.”
When attorneys noticed an increase in third-party organizations buying tax liens in rural counties, they found a way to connect at-risk property owners with resources. These companies often charge high interest rates and assess big fees and regularly file foreclosure actions.

Senior Attorney Charles Cohara contacted several county treasurer offices and local community action agencies to develop a process to help residents apply for Save the Dream Ohio funds to pay their back taxes. To date, the project has helped rural counties collect more than $1.5 million in owed taxes.

“We’re talking about counties where the median income is around $22,000. There isn’t much money flowing around here,” said Cohara, who works in the Athens office. “Historically, for people living in rural Ohio, the land is their wealth. It is their identity. Helping families preserve their land or a home that has been in their families for decades is so important.”

Samantha Burns spent months trying to work with the third-party debt buyer that purchased her Washington County lien before finally calling SEOLS. “They kept brushing me off. I sent email after email after email,” she recalled. “I had no clue that there were funds available until Charles told me. It was great to have his help.”

Another exciting thing about the project is that it provided an opportunity for SEOLS to work with county auditors and treasurers to achieve a common goal: keeping families housed and directing needed funds to government. “In almost every foreclosure case, the treasurer is an opposing party because they have an interest in collecting the taxes,” he said. “But with these cases, we’re on the same side. The county wants to get paid so it can continue to fund services, and we want to help our clients keep their homes and their land. I’m hopeful that we will continue to collaborate even after the Save the Dream Ohio funding is gone.”

“It would have been bad if SEOLS hadn’t helped me, I don’t know where I would live if I had lost my home.”

— Samantha Burns, who received Save the Dream Ohio funds to pay off her tax arrearage.
A lack of funding, outdated school buildings, and fewer special education teachers can make it more difficult for children with special needs living in rural areas to get needed accommodations. **Thanks to funding through the Licking County Foundation, attorneys in our Newark office can represent children when their school district is not meeting their needs.**

“Parents living in smaller rural communities can find it challenging to work with their local schools to ensure that their kids get the accommodations they require,” said Newark Managing Attorney William Canterberry. “This grant allows us to help those families and set their children up for success at school.”

**The grant allowed SEOLS to help the following students**: *

**Jessie, a sixth-grader** whose father was struggling to enroll her in school. Because the family was facing eviction, he could not provide proof of residency. Staff Attorney Hannah Wagner contacted the district's staff member who handles issues for students experiencing homelessness. Due to Wagner’s intervention, the student, who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to address a learning disability, was enrolled in a timely manner.

**Theo, a seventh-grade boy** facing disciplinary problems. The student, who was diagnosed with cancer as an infant and who had been in remission for six years, experienced many ongoing issues related to the diagnosis. He has difficulty with memory, fine motor and social skills, speech, reading, and paying attention. The school expelled him for coming to school with a pocketknife that he forgot was in his pocket. Wagner attended the expulsion hearing and negotiated an abeyance, which allowed him to return to school the next day as long as it did not happen again. To prevent another incident, his mom agreed to check his pockets each morning and allowed the school to check his bag when he arrived.

**Alex, an 11-year-old transgender student** whose school district was not following his IEP related to developmental delays, eye problems, and anxiety. His mother contacted SEOLS seeking help adding more accommodations to the existing IEP. Wagner attended an IEP meeting, and the school agreed to add several accommodations, including allowing the student to use the boys' bathroom, adding another closed-circuit television so that this accommodation was available in each of his classrooms, and providing homework with less information on each page so his eyes could better focus on the words.

*Names changed to protect the privacy of the clients.
Awards

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY MORITZ COLLEGE OF LAW
presented Executive Director Kathleen McGarvey with The George V. Voinovich Humanitarian Award in recognition of her work on behalf of low-income Ohioans. The award is given annually to an alum or friend of the college who has devoted significant time and energy to causes and projects that benefit the greater community and the welfare of humanity.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE ACTION NETWORK honored Kathleen McGarvey as an Outstanding Leader for Health Care during the agency’s Lend Your Voice – Health Care for All event. McGarvey was selected because of her commitment and tireless work to keep Ohioans healthy and to protect and provide equity and access to affordable, quality health care for everyone, particularly those who are marginalized.
2022 Revenue

$7,180,000

- Grants: 93.6%
- Contributions: 2.0%
- Investment Income: -7.1%
- Other: 11.5%

100.0%

2022 Expenses

$7,640,000

- Legal Program: 89.4%
- General & Administrative: 9.0%
- Fundraising: 1.6%

100.0%
Thanks to the following people and organizations for providing their time, talent, and treasure to SEOLS. We appreciate every person who made time in their busy schedules to assist our clients and/or who graciously included us in their giving plan to support our mission of pursuing justice and changing lives. Your gifts increase our ability to provide life-changing legal aid to clients.

Muna Abdallah
Yazan Abdolkarim
Judge Peter Abele
Salwa Aberra
James Abrams
Chris Acock
Brandon Adkins
Colin Adler
Kriti Agrawal
Conner Ahler
Irfan Ali Shah Akhundzada
Nicole Albini
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Daleelah Ali
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Jack Clark
Kevin Clark
Shelli Clark
Alexis Cline
Tiffany Strelow Cobb
Madelyn Cobb
Joseph Colburn
Alexis Collins
MacKenzie Smith Compton
Shannon Conroy
Elizabeth Cooke
Magistrate Joseph Corabi
Ellen Cordar
Peggy W. Corn
Jasmine Corrie
Mellicent Costarella
Anna Cotter
Jim Coutinho
Michael Cox
Sydney Crawford

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<th>Cydney Granger</th>
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<td>Robert Patrick Graham</td>
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<td>Leonard Eliason</td>
<td>Katharine Granger</td>
<td>Julie Howard</td>
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In the area I’m from, nobody hesitates to help their neighbor. One way I try to continue that tradition is through volunteering with legal aid. Particularly in civil legal cases, which can be extremely daunting when faced by those who cannot afford an attorney, having someone sit and listen to their concerns and provide guidance on next steps can make a world of difference.”

— Maggie Huck, SEOLS pro bono attorney
When I work as a Guardian Ad Litem for children, I see my parents when they were young—longing for someone to be their voice, to be their positive change. When I work with the elderly, I see my parents as they might have been today, longing for someone to acknowledge that they are important and worthy of protection and autonomy. When I work with the indigent, I see us all.”

– Sue Dostal, SEOLS pro bono attorney
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Luna Navarrette
Rafael Navarrette
Nitya Nekkanti
Nikki Neudecker
Brendan Newcomb
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CareSource  
Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging  
City of Lancaster  
City of Newark  
Coshocton County Department of Job and Family Services  
Equal Justice Works  
Fairfield County  
First Financial Bank  
IRS (Low Income Taxpayer Clinic)  
Legal Services Corporation  
Licking County Coalition for Housing  
Licking County Foundation  
Lutheran Social Services  
Muskingum Valley Health Centers  
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation  
Ohio Attorney General’s Office  
Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc.  
Ohio Federation of Health Equity  
Ohio Housing Finance Agency  
Ohio State Bar Association  
The Schwallie Foundation  
US Department of Housing and Urban Development  
US Department of Justice  
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Designed by Alan Jazack, the JUSTICE mural honors some of Ohio’s social justice legends. It is located at Washington Gladden Social Justice Park in Columbus.
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