



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

# JUSTICE WORKS



**WHEN JUSTICE WORKS, OHIO WORKS BETTER—FOR EVERYONE.**

**Justice is the cornerstone of a thriving Ohio.**

It helps people work, live, and contribute fully to their communities, and it strengthens our great state. Justice works to eliminate barriers and create opportunities for families, neighborhoods, and future generations. Justice works to ensure Ohioans can pursue better jobs and build lives shaped by purpose and possibility. The Ohio Access to Justice Foundation funds civil legal aid and justice initiatives throughout Ohio to strengthen the workforce, assist veterans in receiving the benefits they earned, provide critical legal support to rural communities, improve housing and neighborhoods, and stabilize individuals and families so they can move forward with confidence.

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**WHAT WE DO**

We are the state's access to justice entity. Our mission is to ensure that Ohioans who are low-income or who lack access can fully and fairly participate in civil systems that produce just outcomes.

**HOW WE DO IT**

We steward statutory funding to support civil legal aid and access to justice. By building relationships and fostering collaboration, we work with partners to achieve systemic change and build a better civil justice system that benefits all Ohioans.

**WHY WE DO IT**

When Ohioans are able to fully and fairly participate in the civil justice system, they can achieve brighter and more financially stable futures, making their lives, their communities, and Ohio better.

# 5,776

Legal aid helped 5,776 Ohioans seeking to seal or expunge criminal records or reinstate driver's licenses to improve employment prospects.



Beatrice Lewis and Justice for All Fellow Colin Kolodziej at Ms. Lewis' home in Cincinnati. Photo by Sarah Snyder.

## Returning Hard-Working Ohioans to Financial Stability

Reliable transportation is essential to maintaining employment. For Beatrice Lewis, a healthcare worker and mother of four, purchasing a used car was meant to make life easier. Instead, it triggered a financial crisis.

Shortly after purchasing the vehicle, it broke down. Unable to afford repairs and unable to get to work, Ms. Lewis fell behind on her car payments. The dealer repossessed the car and later began garnishing her wages, pushing her family further into hardship.

After turning to legal aid, Justice for All Fellow Colin Kolodziej discovered that the dealer had violated Ohio's consumer protection laws. As a result, he negotiated a positive resolution for Ms. Lewis and halted the wage garnishment. With her full paycheck restored, Ms. Lewis was able to buy another car and continue to support her family.

**Justice works to strengthen Ohio's workforce, clearing pathways to better jobs, supporting second chances, and helping Ohioans contribute their highest skills and talents for their families and their communities.**

### Justice Works for

# OHIO'S WORKFORCE



In Ohio, cars are vital to keeping a job and maintaining economic stability. My Justice for All Fellowship helps ensure that low-income families receive the help they need to recover from predatory practices in auto sales and lending."

**Colin Kolodziej**  
Justice for All Fellow, Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

## Supporting New Business Owners

Leonard Smith\* is an ambitious self-starter with an entrepreneurial spirit. After completing trade school, he launched a small business and quickly built a loyal customer base. Yet despite his success, Mr. Smith faced an all-too-familiar barrier: a criminal record stemming from mistakes he made years earlier as a young man.

With support from the Foundation, a specialty legal aid organization represented Mr. Smith in multiple courts across several counties to seal his criminal records. The process took more than two years, but the specialty legal aid persisted until each record was resolved. Today, Mr. Smith is no longer defined by his past. Free from legal barriers, he is growing his business, supporting himself, and contributing to his local economy.



## Clearing the Way to Better Jobs

The Ohio Justice Bus is helping to transform second chances into real economic opportunity. Through a partnership with Ohio affiliates of the National Urban League, the Ohio Justice Bus connects individuals seeking record sealing or expungement with volunteer attorneys who help remove barriers to employment.

With 30 reentry clinics held across the state in 2025, 232 Ohioans received legal help to improve job prospects, retain employment, and pursue advancement. Each clinic represents renewed access to work, dignity, and financial independence.



Volunteer attorney Lauren Chisner helps a client at an Ohio Justice Bus record sealing clinic in partnership with the Columbus Urban League.

\*To respect privacy, some names in this report have been changed.

Justice Works for

# OHIO'S VETERANS

# 4,503

Legal aid helped 4,503 veterans with legal challenges.

**Justice works to serve those who have served, helping ensure Ohio's veterans receive the benefits they have earned, achieve housing stability, and maintain the dignity and respect they deserve.**



## Maintaining Generational Wealth for Veterans and Their Families

When George Petterson\* became chronically ill, his thoughts turned to his family. A proud veteran, Mr. Petterson wanted to ensure that the home and the modest wealth he had worked a lifetime to build would pass to his loved ones.

Through the Foundation's veterans grant program, a legal aid attorney helped Mr. Petterson draft a will that reflected his wishes and protected his family's future. With his affairs in order, Mr. Petterson gained peace of mind, knowing that his service, sacrifice, and hard work would continue to benefit those he loved.

\*To respect privacy, some names in this report have been changed.

## Meeting Veterans Where They Are

Civil legal challenges can directly affect health outcomes. At the Dayton VA Medical Center, a new medical-legal partnership supported by The Department of Veterans Affairs Legal Services for Homeless Veterans and Veterans At-Risk for Homelessness Grant, and the Foundation's veterans grant program, integrates civil legal aid into veterans' healthcare.

Through the partnership, legal aid attorneys train VA staff to identify legal issues affecting patients' stability, from housing and consumer debt to family matters. With legal aid staff on site twice a week, veterans can access help simply by walking down the hall. By resolving civil legal problems early, this partnership improves long-term health outcomes for veterans and lowers costs to the healthcare system.



**We're going to where veterans are already receiving services to increase access and visibility rather than waiting for them to come to us."**

**Lanese Layne**  
Supervising Attorney, Legal Aid of Western Ohio



# Justice Works for OHIO'S VETERANS



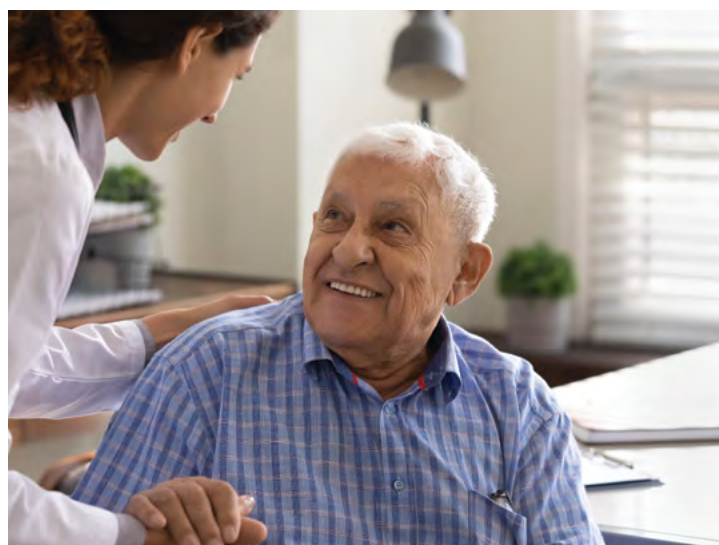
As a veteran, I understand that the challenges of service don't end when the uniform comes off. It is a great honor to provide service and support to other veterans in appreciation of their sacrifices for this nation."

**Scott Kovach**  
Staff Attorney, Ohio Justice Bus

## Ensuring Veterans Receive the Benefits They Have Earned

Vietnam Army veteran Walter McBride\* was exposed to Agent Orange during his service. Over time, he developed debilitating medical conditions linked to that exposure. Believing he had applied for disability benefits, Mr. McBride waited.

After hearing nothing from Veterans Affairs, Mr. McBride reached out to legal aid. An attorney from the Foundation's veterans grant program determined that his application was incomplete. The legal aid attorney helped Mr. McBride gather medical records, secure evaluations, and properly submit the claim. The result was life-changing: the VA awarded Mr. McBride more than \$1,300 per month in benefits, along with over \$30,000 in back pay.



\*To respect privacy, some names in this report have been changed.

## Partnering to Support Veterans' Financial Wellness

The Veterans Financial Wellness Program is a collaboration among the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Ohio, the Ohio Justice Bus, the Federal Bar Association, and legal aid. The program provides veterans with trusted legal information and one-on-one legal assistance.

Held in Columbus and Cincinnati this year, the program offers both an educational component and legal services. Veterans received guidance on consumer and financial matters tailored to their needs, followed by legal help to prepare wills and end-of-life documents. With plans to expand, this partnership ensures justice reaches those who served.

Volunteer lawyers Matt Kline and Sue Fauber at the Columbus Veterans Financial Wellness Program.



Judge Mina Nami Khorrami of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Ohio with volunteers at the Columbus Veterans Financial Wellness Program.

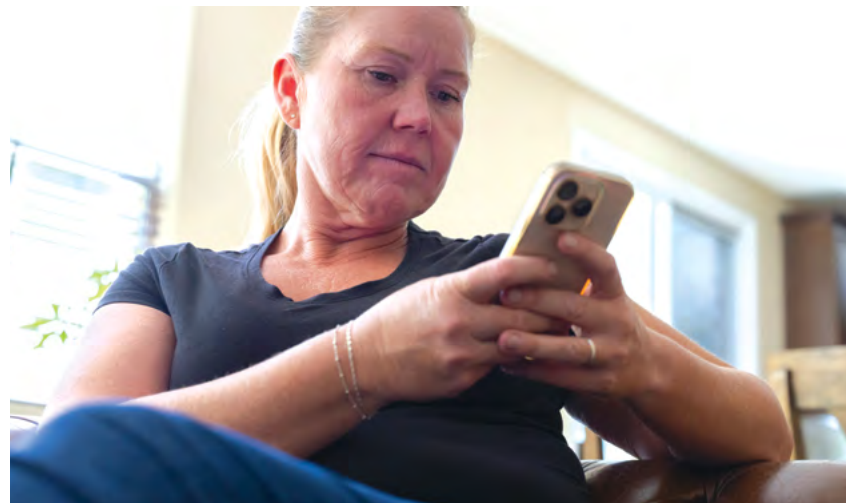


# Justice Works for RURAL OHIOANS

## Finding New Ways to Solve Rural Housing Issues

For rural Ohioans who lack transportation and internet access, the telephone is helping to close the justice gap. Legal aid's Rural Housing Hotline connects Ohioans with a legal aid attorney for a scheduled phone call during the hotline's twice-weekly office hours. The legal aid attorney offers quick counsel and advice on a wide range of landlord-tenant issues, including rent escrow, poor housing conditions, and other common concerns.

Through streamlined access to legal guidance, the hotline helped more than 600 rural Ohioans in 2025, increasing legal aid's ability to address housing requests by 27 percent. By helping Ohioans solve their housing issues early, the hotline strengthens housing stability for vulnerable renters and prevents eviction.



# 270,000

Ohio Legal Help served 270,000 rural Ohioans.

Legal aid attorneys and community members gather at the groundbreaking of a new homeless shelter in Tuscarawas County.



## Setting Rural Communities Up for Success

In rural communities, legal aid plays a critical role in economic and community development. Funded through the Foundation's Neighborhood Stabilization Grant Program, legal aid attorneys partner with local groups to advance transformative projects.

In Tuscarawas County, a legal aid attorney worked with a faith-based organization for more than three years to navigate the zoning and regulatory requirements to build a homeless shelter. Approved in 2025, the shelter will open in 2026 and provide housing and addiction recovery services to the community.

## Justice works to support rural communities, ensuring that rural Ohioans can access legal services, that rural businesses receive the legal support they need to grow, and that rural life is preserved.

# 188,864

Legal aid helped 188,864 Ohioans live safer, more secure, and financially stable lives.

## Aligning to Support Rural Practice Growth

In 57 Ohio counties, there is less than one private practice attorney for every 1,500 residents. While this presents a challenge in meeting the legal needs of those communities, it also offers new and exciting opportunities for lawyers to build rewarding careers and make a difference.

To address the attorney shortage, the Foundation partners with the Supreme Court of Ohio, the Ohio State Bar Association, and many other organizations through a Rural Practice Alliance. In addition to hosting events at law schools, the group coordinates outreach at Ohio Farm Bureau and Ohio FFA events in rural communities around the state to encourage high school students to consider legal careers.

“The Court supports the Rural Practice Alliance by encouraging careers in law through civic education, making a lasting impact in Ohio's legal deserts.”

**Sharon L. Kennedy**  
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio



Supreme Court of Ohio Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy and attorney Chris White participate in a panel discussion on rural legal practice at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. Photo by Ely Margolis, Supreme Court of Ohio.



Caroline Bossa, Jeremy Williams, and Cara Snider, law students at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, attend the Foundation's petting zoo event to learn about rural practice.

# 4,750

Legal aid helped 4,750 Ohioans with legal issues related to substance use disorders.

**Justice works to stabilize Ohio's families, keeping families intact and children out of foster care, helping kids succeed in school, and maintaining the family unit as the bedrock of our great state.**

**Justice Works for**

# OHIO'S FAMILIES



## Keeping Children in Safe, Caring Homes

Parental substance use can make it difficult for children to have what they need most: safety, consistency, and care. For much of their childhoods, siblings Cara\* and Kyle Stewart\* lived with grandparents and other relatives as their mother struggled with addiction.

When their grandparents' health declined and they could no longer serve as caregivers, a cousin of their mother, Hope Dawson,\* stepped in to help.

Through state General Revenue Fund dollars, the Foundation's substance use disorder grant program funded legal aid to assist Ms. Dawson in obtaining permanent custody of Cara and Kyle, while preserving supervised visitation for their mother. Today, Cara and Kyle have the stability they need to grow and thrive.

# \$9,818,673

Legal aid put \$9,818,673 back in the pockets of low-income Ohioans.



The Ohio Department of Children and Youth understands that many Ohio families struggle to know where to turn when they are faced with legal issues. Having the ability for Parent and Youth Ambassadors to connect the families we serve every day with legal resources when needed can make a tremendous difference in their lives."

**Kara Wente**  
Director, Ohio Department of Children and Youth

## Supporting Families Before Crisis Occurs

Early legal intervention can make the difference between family stability and foster care placement. A new partnership between the Foundation and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth is designed to intervene before legal issues escalate into crises.

Through the Parent and Youth Ambassador (PYA) program, ambassadors support families navigating complex challenges and connect parents directly to legal aid when unresolved civil legal issues threaten a child's stability.

Susan Cartwright,\* a mother of two, was referred to legal aid by her PYA when the threat of eviction put her family at risk. Because of the expedited referral and rapid response, a legal aid attorney intervened in time to prevent the eviction. As a result, Ms. Cartwright and her children were able to remain safely housed together.



# 78,566

Legal aid helped 78,566 children.

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## Helping Families Address Chronic School Absenteeism

In Clark County, legal aid and the Juvenile Court are partnering to help chronically absent students and their families return to a path of stability and school attendance through the SUCCESS Program.

The program intervenes early with families facing challenges that make consistent school attendance difficult. A multidisciplinary team, comprised of a legal aid attorney, a parent peer advocate, and a court social worker, works collaboratively to address legal and social barriers, including housing instability, disability-related needs, and other legal challenges.

By stabilizing the family as a whole, the program supports improved school attendance and helps keep children out of the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems.

Justice Works for

# OHIO'S HOUSING

**Justice works to build and preserve homes, fund initiatives that support Ohio renters, create and sustain long-term affordable housing, and help homeowners stay in and pass down homes to build generational wealth.**

## Preserving a Senior's Home and Stopping Financial Abuse

In Ohio, neighbors look out for one another. When Roger Blendon's\* neighbors learned that Mr. Blendon's son, who struggled with substance use, was financially exploiting him, they helped Mr. Blendon contact legal aid. Mr. Blendon was experiencing cognitive decline, and because of his son's abuse, his home of many years was at risk of foreclosure.

Legal aid stepped in and stopped the foreclosure, preserving Mr. Blendon's home. Legal aid also worked with Mr. Blendon's close friends to ensure he was safely placed in a quality care facility, that a trusted person was appointed as his power of attorney, and that the financial exploitation stopped. Thanks to legal aid establishing his power of attorney, Mr. Blendon can benefit from the sale of his home, ensuring his remaining years are financially stable and free of abuse.



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# 11,777

Legal aid helped 11,777 Ohioans facing eviction or foreclosure.



## Ensuring Families Can Live in Healthy, Safe Homes

Roberta Brown,\* a mother of three children, one of whom has disabilities, was a model tenant. For more than six years, she paid her rent on time and maintained her home. Despite Ms. Brown's diligence, her home had multiple health and safety concerns that went unaddressed, even though she made repeated requests for repairs.

When Ms. Brown's stove broke, her landlord responded not with repairs but with a threat of eviction. Fearing displacement and instability for her children, Ms. Brown sought help from a specialty legal aid organization.

The specialty legal aid assisted Ms. Brown with properly escrowing her rent, compelling the landlord to make long-overdue repairs. Improvements included a new stove and washing machine, pest remediation, plumbing repairs, and a new screen door. The specialty legal aid also negotiated a lease renewal at her existing rental rate, ensuring that Ms. Brown and her family remain safely housed in a healthier home.



Attorney Unclaimed Funds demonstrate how collaboration and innovation can create stronger communities across Ohio."

**Akil Hardy**  
Superintendent, Division of Unclaimed Funds

## Creating Affordable Housing for Years to Come

In Greene County, The Cascades is expanding access to safe and affordable housing for low- and moderate-income seniors, now and for decades to come. Funded through Attorney Unclaimed Funds, the Foundation's grant program supported legal aid to develop and implement an innovative community land trust model that ensures long-term affordability.

Working alongside Yellow Springs Home, Inc., the partners concluded more than a decade of collaboration by opening the first eight homes in 2025. By utilizing Attorney Unclaimed Funds, justice worked—creating stability not just for today's residents, but for future generations.



Watch how the partnership between the Ohio Department of Commerce Division of Unclaimed Funds and the Foundation is helping Ohioans build community.

Community members celebrate the opening of The Cascades, a new affordable housing complex in Greene County.

HONOREES, FELLOWS, AND CLERKS

2025 Foundation Honorees



**Voice of Justice Award**

**Matt Damschroder**, director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, received the Voice of Justice Award for his leadership in spearheading innovations that have improved the agency's services to low-income Ohioans.



**John and Ginny Elam Pro Bono Award**

Retired Judge **Mary Jane Trapp** received the Elam Award posthumously for her dedication to pro bono service and legal aid throughout her highly accomplished career, including her efforts to mobilize volunteer attorneys to help homeowners at risk of losing their homes during the foreclosure crisis.



**Denis J. Murphy Award**

**Maria A. Smith**, attorney at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, received the Denis J. Murphy Award for her leadership and advocacy to help ensure that Ohioans can access and maintain safe, affordable housing.



**Rising Star Award**

**Jesse Moses**, attorney at Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio, received the Rising Star Award for going above and beyond his regular job duties to strengthen community partnerships, including serving on the board of the local homeless shelter.



**Presidential Award**

**Thompson Hine Dayton** received the Presidential Award for the firm's ongoing commitment to providing pro bono legal assistance to low-income residents facing complex landlord-tenant issues.

Justice for All Fellows

Justice for All Fellows are new attorneys funded by the Foundation to develop and execute two-year innovative projects addressing urgent legal problems facing low-income Ohioans.



**Sydney Bowden**  
Community Legal Aid

Sydney provides legal services to families of children in a low-income school district through a school-based medical-legal partnership.



**Santiago Garcia-Mata**  
Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio

Santiago provides housing legal services in partnership with a Catholic Social Services community center.



**Katie Schulte**  
Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

Katie addresses health-harming housing issues of low-income communities in rural southwest Ohio.



**Scarlet Bringard**  
Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio

Scarlet addresses the multi-faceted legal needs of people living in Central Ohio homeless shelters.



**Colin Kolodziej**  
Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

Colin provides legal representation to low-income consumers who are victims of predatory and fraudulent auto lending and sales practices.



**Katrice Williams**  
Ohio Legal Help

Katrice creates accessible and user-centered legal content, forms, and tools for formerly incarcerated individuals facing civil legal challenges.



**Kaela Orrell**  
Catholic Charities Corp. (Diocese of Cleveland)

Kaela provides representation and advocacy for children in court.

Justice for All Summer Clerks

Justice for All Summer Clerks are law students funded by the Foundation to expand opportunities to work in civil legal services.

**Neil Agarwal**  
The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

**Joshua Brown**  
LegalWorks

**Hannah Jawed**  
Pro Seniors

**Finn Li**  
Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Foundation

**Phoenix Nash**  
Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio

**Abraham Nassif**  
Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio

**Douglas Pennington**  
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality

**Michele Reynolds**  
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation

**Nina Vaccaro**  
Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati

**Ethan Wigal**  
Equality Ohio Education Fund

GRANTS AND DISBURSEMENTS

Grants and Disbursements to Civil Legal Service Providers

 <b>\$12,389,146</b>	 <b>\$10,554,213</b>	 <b>\$7,792,888</b>	 <b>\$6,553,030</b>
 <b>\$5,879,698</b>	 <b>\$1,173,663</b>	 <b>\$1,092,900</b>	 <b>\$1,019,973</b>
 <b>\$880,069</b>	 <b>\$485,051</b>	 <b>\$471,025</b>	 <b>\$439,721</b>
 <b>\$411,299</b>	 <b>\$276,360</b>	 <b>\$258,250</b>	 <b>\$207,000</b>
 <b>\$182,000</b>	 <b>\$126,000</b>	 <b>\$107,000</b>	 <b>\$75,500</b>
<b>Other Civil Legal Service Nonprofits</b> <b>\$11,999</b>			

**Total Awarded: \$50,386,785**

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2025

ASSETS		LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	
<b>Current Assets</b>	<b>\$10,193,282</b>	<b>Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$3,940,098</b>
Cash and cash equivalents	9,062,004	Accounts payable	61,556
Grants and contributions receivable	1,068,799	Grants payable	1,189,360
Prepaid expenses and other current assets	62,479	Conditional contribution advance	1,994,595
<b>Investments</b>	<b>\$31,470,675</b>	Accrued liabilities	578,398
<b>Property and Equipment</b>	<b>\$54,591</b>	Current portion of operating lease liability	112,081
Vehicles	116,553	Other liabilities	4,108
Furniture and equipment	90,581	<b>Operating Lease Liabilities</b>	<b>\$376,937</b>
Less accumulated depreciation	(152,543)	(net of current portion)	
<b>Operating Lease Right-of-Use Assets</b>	<b>\$469,166</b>	<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$4,317,035</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$42,187,714</b>	<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$37,870,679</b>
		Without donor restrictions	37,394,810
		With donor restrictions	475,869
		<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$42,187,714</b>

Consolidated Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

Year ended June 30, 2025

	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
<b>Revenue, Gains, and Other Support</b>			
Access to Justice Foundation Fund	11,510,524	-	11,510,524
Ohio Supreme Court grant	425,000	-	425,000
Other grants	4,006,455	-	4,006,455
Other income and contributions	527,188	168,973	696,161
Investment returns, net	3,167,723	-	3,167,723
<b>Total Revenue, Gains, and Other Support</b>	<b>\$19,636,890</b>	<b>\$168,973</b>	<b>\$19,805,863</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
Program services			
Pro bono	196,527	-	196,527
Legal services support	12,619,515	-	12,619,515
Public funds compliance	304,767	-	304,767
Ohio Justice Bus	315,208	-	315,208
Grant administration	193,961	-	193,961
Management and general	588,107	-	588,107
Fundraising	60,103	-	60,103
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$14,278,188</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$14,278,188</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$5,358,702</b>	<b>\$168,973</b>	<b>\$5,527,675</b>
Net Assets — Beginning of Year	\$32,036,108	\$306,896	\$32,343,004
Net Assets — End of Year	\$37,394,810	\$475,869	\$37,870,679

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