

Kentucky Equal Justice Center

September 21, 2023

Staff Report Highlights

Food Justice — Tyler Offerman

Kentucky Food Action Network: We continue to work with the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, Community Farm Alliance, and Feeding KY to support the Kentucky Food Action Network (KFAN). Just last week we hosted the KFAN Steering Committee Retreat and the KFAN Member Summit in Louisville. We welcomed two new SC members and had 34 members attend the Summit. As a part of the Summit, we looked back at what we had accomplished over the last year:

- Hired a full-time coordinator: Welcome Robin!
- Our listserv has nearly doubled since last year, now reaching over 250.
- KFAN hosted 15 different advocacy trainings, with hundreds of members and allies trained around critical advocacy skills and our policy priorities.
- Staff and KFAN members had over 30 meetings with state legislators during the 2023 General Assembly, and we were instrumental in removing the worst parts of House Bill 7 (a bill that could have taken Medicaid away from at least 200,000 Kentuckians and would kicked over 100,000 SNAP/food stamps).
- We had almost 100 (91) meetings with state agency administrators from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Education to name a few
- Had 8 meetings with our Members of Congress around KFAN Farm Bill priorities

Legislative Advocacy: working on an infant and maternal health bill that would strengthen the safety net across Kentucky

Legal Impact Network (LIN) Partnership: Katina Miner (KLA) and I were invited to be panelists on a webinar hosted by LIN titled *Collaborating for Systems Change: LSC & Unrestricted Legal Advocates Working Together*. We were able to lift up our SNAP Intentional Program Violation (IPV) work to end discrimination and rights violations in the ways the state accuses people of fraudulent activity in the program. We presented to 242 participants, with representation from at least one legal aid program in every single state in the nation. [Here's](#) the recording.

WIC CIAO: KEJC recently secured funding to work on WIC outreach and program improvements. This 18-month grant will focus on identifying and removing program, policy, and language access barriers that might be preventing Latinx, mixed-language, and kinship care families from applying and receiving WIC benefits. We also secured funding for each of the LSC-funded programs to receive \$30,000 to assist in creating a pipeline of WIC referrals and clients.

Health Justice — Chloe Atwater

Medical Debt: Chloe and Ben (alongside Ed Krugman at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice) continue to represent UK HealthCare patients in *Alexander v. Miller* and are preparing for an October 24 trial date. In anticipation of the end of the UK HealthCare case, Chloe and Raaziq recently [revised the KEJC team project](#) for the Shriver Center on Poverty Law Racial Justice Institute to focus on medical debt.

Public Health Emergency (PHE) Unwinding: Tyler brought national partners from Justice in Aging (JIA) and the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) to meet with KEJC staff, state partners at legal aid organizations, and Kentucky Voices for Health to discuss systemic issues leading to procedural disenrollments in Medicaid broadly and barriers to coverage and care for the dual eligible population. This resulted in:

- ongoing communication with JIA
- both JIA and NHeLP submitting issues to the federal government on our behalf
- several meetings with NHeLP, both with and without state-based partners.

KEJC recently submitted a [letter to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services](#) (CHFS) seeking a pause in Medicaid terminations and termination notices as well as reinstatement of coverage for certain groups. While the situation is always evolving, Chloe and Ben are in close collaboration with NHeLP and are carefully considering next steps.

Advocacy: In addition to advocacy around the PHE unwinding, Chloe has submitted organizational comments to CHFS ([Medicaid dental/vision/hearing regulations](#)) and, with help from Miranda, the U.S. Dept. for Health and Human Services ([health coverage for people with Delayed Action for Childhood Arrivals](#)). Chloe also serves on the [All Payer Claims Database](#) working group in advance of the legislative session.

Maxwell Street Legal Clinic — Allison Hight

Staff Updates: Last month was a significant moment for our organization, as two of our staff members, Abigail and Gaby, successfully obtained accreditation from the Department of Justice (DOJ). This accreditation represents a major step forward, enabling Abigail and Gaby to meet with clients autonomously, further streamlining our processes and allowing us to serve our community more effectively. Benji also has scheduled his oath ceremony and will be sworn into the bar and fully licensed in November. This will further augment our team's capabilities, allowing us to reach and assist a larger number of individuals.

However, we continue to face challenges in filling the vacancy left by Michelle. Despite our best efforts to find a suitable replacement, we have encountered difficulties in identifying a candidate who aligns with our organizational values and possesses the necessary skills and dedication. We have only received two full applications since posting the position in June, and neither has ultimately been a viable candidate. I have recommended that we close the posting until we update our salary scale next calendar year.

Case Progress: In the previous quarter, Maxwell Street opened 81 cases, largely due to Benji and Abigail joining the team. We have also had 25 previously submitted cases successfully approved. Notably, among the approved cases are several T visas, underlining our focus on assisting victims of trafficking, one of the most vulnerable groups in need of our support.

Benji worked incredibly hard this quarter to help a family from Haiti. Last month, a client who Marilyn Daniel had originally assisted in 2003 came to our door to ask for our help. She had recently entered the United States through a new Haitian parole program but unfortunately had to leave her children behind as she waited for their applications to be approved. After she left, violence in the country escalated, and she learned that her children were in imminent danger of harm. Even though parole is not typically a case that we take at Maxwell Street, Benji took the initiative to research and learn this area of the law. He submitted a thorough and persuasive expedite request to get the children into the United States sooner and protect them from harm. We are currently waiting on an answer to his application.

Upcoming Initiatives: We are planning a Naturalization Clinic in collaboration with UK Law for next month. Two of Maxwell Street's former summer interns are coordinating the clinic and have recruited a number of students from UK Law's newly formed Immigration Law Society. We anticipate providing assistance to approximately 20 clients during this event. This will be an excellent opportunity to help a number of clients reach the finish line in potentially decades-long immigration journeys and provide valuable experience to law students as they explore different career paths.

Substance Use Discrimination — Jane Connell Young

Hiring: On August 1, 2023, two employees were hired. Jane Connell Young was hired as Attorney. Jane previously worked with Legal Aid Society, Louisville. She has many years of experience as an attorney. Carmen Solis was hired as Outreach and Investigations Paralegal. Carmen works in Lexington with the Nest Center for Women, Children and Families and also as a Youth Advocate with the YAP Program. She is a fluent Spanish speaker.

Activities: Ben Carter and others have introduced Jane and Carmen to numerous community partners. Our group has met with Thrive, Vital Strategies, Dream.org, and Legal Action Center. Our group has also participated in Overdose Awareness Day in Louisville, Kentucky Disability Justice in Lexington, syringe sites in Louisville, Health First in Lexington, People Advocating Recovery in Louisville and Kentucky Movement Assembly in Northern KY.

Continuing Outreach: Our group has developed PowerPoint slides regarding Substance Use Disorder. The initial presentation was September 16, 2023, at the Kentucky Movement Assembly in Northern KY. Approximately twenty-five persons eagerly participated in a discussion accompanying the slides led by Ben Carter. Persons will be contacting us soon for input and consultation.

Outreach and Language Access — Miranda Brown

Networking/Outreach/Communications

- **Outreach:** KEJC staff spoke directly with about 90 people since the last board meeting, not counting the housing outreach. One unique occasion this quarter was tabling at a YMCA Back-to-School Rally for Lexington's Winburn neighborhood.

Direct Service

- **Health Coverage Enrollment Assistance:** Miranda helped three new families with health coverage in addition to previous clients. She is completing annual kynect training and has assisted many previous clients with Medicaid renewal and Qualified Health Plan application and enrollment, identifying and escalating systemic issues along the way, including the fact that some Medicaid members' coverage has terminated automatically at the end of their renewal period even though they submitted requested documents on time that remain pending in the system, yet to be reviewed by an eligibility worker. We just received word from the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky that they will be providing us with additional grant funding sufficient to hire a new full time kynector!

Advocacy Feedback Loop:

- **Medicaid Technical Advisory Committees (TACs):** Miranda serves on the Consumer Rights & Client Needs TAC. In response to reports from the field that Medicaid renewals are impacting individuals receiving Social Security Income (SSI), the committee recently recommended that anyone with SSI not receive a Medicaid renewal packet or RFI (Request for Information) in order to maintain their eligibility and for all who lose SSI to receive two months of ex parte Medicaid coverage when SSI ends to allow time for them to prepare and apply for Medicaid. We discussed logistics and concerns around how individuals locate application assistance, so as follow up, I requested data on the number for kynect Qualified Health Plan enrollments that result from consumers clicking the "Get Contacted" function on the website to get connected directly with an insurance agent.

Language Access

- We have standardized protocols across the organization for interpretation for deaf and hard of hearing clients, written language translations, and a reference list of all KEJC staff and volunteers who can interpret and/or translate for each KEJC program. We set up a new account with our primary interpretation provider, Access Language Solutions, so that we now have eight accounts to facilitate billing and grant allocation for our various programs.
- Miranda is coordinating with the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky to host a webinar on language access for healthcare providers with guest speakers from the city of Lexington's Global Lex office and Access Language Solutions.