



Preventing and Addressing Eviction Through Community Partnerships

Transcript for the November 10, 2021, Webinar

>> Good morning. Welcome to our webinar today, Preventing and Addressing Eviction Through Community Partnerships. We received very high demand for this webinar, and we are grateful that you are taking time out of your morning to join us today and discuss this important topic.

My name is Fay Gordon, and I am the regional administrator for the Administration for Community Living in region 9. And I am happy to be serving as your facilitator for today's discussion. As a regional administrator, I represent ACL and coordinate with the aging and disability networks in the Department of Health and Human Services region 9. This means that I work closely with Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, [unknown], Guam, American Samoa, and one of today's presenters California.

Today's webinar is a continuation of our September 30th presentation, Emergency Rental Assistance Programs: Tools to Assist the people You Serve. That webinar's recording, slides and transcripts are all available on ACL.gov. Our goal is to explore two models of advocacy partnerships, working to stabilize for people at risk of or currently facing an eviction. This webinar is being recorded and by staying for the webinar you consent to the recording. We want you to know what the people that you are working with are going through. We will set up a poll on the side of your screen. And while that is being set up and the questions appear, I will do a little bit of housekeeping.

Let's bring that poll up. I will read the questions. In the last two months has the number of your clients that are at risk of eviction or have already been evicted and then you have a few options. Has it increased a lot, increased some, stayed the same, has it decreased? Do you not currently work with clients that are in eviction or is this question completely not applicable to you?

While you answer that, let me do some housekeeping. The microphone and phone are muted. Please send an email if you are having technical problems. That email address will be in the chat box if you have any trouble finding it. You can engage

with the speakers today by clicking on the chat, and we will answer all the questions at the end. And you can also send in any questions that you have to the email. That link is in the chat box also.

So now that we've gone over most the housekeeping issues, I do want to go back to the poll. And we can see what the responses are. So this is very telling. Looking at this poll, one fifth of you are seeing clients with an increase, significant increase in evictions. 37% say that you have seen some increase in eviction in your clients and another fifth say things have stayed relatively the same. This means that only about 25% of you are actually seeing it decrease or you are not interfacing with clients that are facing eviction, or it doesn't apply to you. For the vast majority of you are seeing an increase, and this topic is particularly relevant today.

So going back to our presentation, just one brief other housekeeping piece that I wanted to touch on. There is going to be a lot of information shared today and a lot of questions. We will develop a FAQ and it will be on the website at ACL.Gov. So let's get into an introduction to our topic.

As all of you know clearly from the poll results and your interest in this seminar, we have an affordable housing crisis in this country, and that is a crisis that began well before the COVID 19 pandemic, but one that significantly increased under COVID. We know that currently there is no county in the country that has enough affordable housing for the lowest income residents. So as a result of this, half of renters are paying over 30% of their income in rent. And one quarter of them are paying over half of their income to rent. This means that they are living with housing instability and the threat of eviction every day.

The other challenge that we know is that evictions are notoriously difficult to track. Prior to COVID 19, they thought there was 1.5 million evictions. We also know that this housing and eviction crisis is much bigger than the tool that we discuss today. And it will need a large-scale change beyond the scope of this today. We must be aware of that work, and connect today with that work in partnership together.

Recognizing the magnitude of this challenge, we are very excited to hear from two organizations, Disability Rights California and Disability Rights Texas and their partners and services to protect housing rights. They will introduce themselves in just a moment, and I will briefly introduce the Administration for Community Living.

ACL funds and oversees networks of disability and aging in all 50 states and in the US territories. These networks are over 20,000 organizations and collectively provide direct services and legal advocacy and work on systems change for older adult, people with disability, and their families. ACL's networks play an important role in helping people access housing and assisting people from institutions back to the communities.

At ACL we know how critical it is to keep people stably housed. And the number one issue is how to get help with the affordable housing? Many people with disabilities and older adults are often having to live in an institution or they face homelessness. In recognizing that this is a critical goal, we want to work to increase access to information and prevent this and avoid legal actions. To this end they have elder justice and disability rights, and this includes those that we'll hear from today, and there are others including the National Center on Law and Elder Rights and more.

So today we are very excited to hear from two states and their protection and advocacy systems, Disability Rights Texas and California. They are dedicated to the ongoing fight for personal and civil rights or people with disabilities. They are independent service-providing agencies that work at the state level, and they work to advocate and help people with disabilities on their behalf. Housing is one of the areas in which they are supporting the disability community. With that I will want to turn the floor back to Disability Rights California for us to learn more about the work that they are doing to stop the evictions. We cannot wait to hear from you today. Thank you.

>> Good morning. My name is Christian, and I am the legal director of Disability Rights California. Are we going to do introductions or just go to the presentation?

>> Good morning everyone, I'm Jia Min Cheng, a supervising attorney from Disability Rights California.

>> And I am Alisa Neary, a licensed consultant, and I am working with the Disability Rights California.

>> I think a little background so that everybody can understand what Disability Rights California does. Disability Rights California is one of the largest legal service providers in the nation and we have around 300 employees. We provide a variety of services throughout the State of California.

The perspective that we are presenting to you today is the lawyer's perspective. I think that is important for the audience to understand that is our perspective. We have a lot of lawyers. The organization is led by lawyers, and our primary goal is to be a law firm to provide legal representation. One of the key things of this though that early on we realized was that our perspective was not sufficient. That lawyers alone could not tackle these problems of eviction, homelessness and housing instability, and that is why a part of our presentation is an explanation and collaboration with social workers. And that is why Alisa is the consultant in working with us so that the lawyers and social workers can work together to battle this issue. Should we start the slides please.

>> You've already presented the horrible statistics pre-pandemic about homelessness. And COVID has made things worse which is terribly depressing. Just so you know I have been a legal services lawyer, and it was pretty depressing when

COVID hit after many years of the housing and homelessness crisis is worse. I think that is the main theme of this presentation.

We are in a crisis and COVID has made it worse and that doesn't mean that we give up. That means that we need to work together. We need to partner, and the best way to help our clients that are facing homelessness is in partnership with other agencies and other types of service providers, so that we can tackle some of these issues and make some progress. Next slide please.

So these are the three key partnerships, right? And this presentation is going to be very broad, very big picture from a 1,000 miles up high because the eviction process, and the housing process, the services are so very local. There is no national law on evictions. Each locality and state has different rules, and the services each state provides varies, and each locality has different services. So we are taking this as broad as possible so that it is applicable for everybody.

What we found is that three key partnerships matter. A lot of you actually are either legal service providers or social service providers so if one of these apply to you, then you need to find the other partners to help you tackle this issue.

The first one, the big issue because of the COVID crisis, is that a lot of evictions are based on a lack of funding. So financial assistance and funding partners that have financial assistance to provide rental assistance is key, and finding them in the statewide or local level. And there are many types of financial assistance out there, and the key is finding them and developing them so that you can get clients access to financial assistance.

The second one is social services, workers, case management. A lot of housing crises are created because of social issues. Because you've lost your job or depression etc., mental health issues. It is important that you have specialists that stabilize, with case management to create some stability, so when you provide financial assistance, the problem doesn't recur and then you can create some stability. What Disability Rights California does is evictions are a legal process, and there are local, state, and federal nuances that can be very difficult for our clients to understand. Can be very difficult for us to understand. As a part of the process when you are creating a strategy, it is very important that you get yourself a legal service partner and that you have developed some basic understanding, because that will be a primary driving issue when you are dealing with clients; they come to you with papers saying that my landlord is evicting and you want to be able to give them good advice. That is it, next slide and we will go to the next speaker.

>> Good morning again everyone. So prior to working at Disability Rights California I worked on a medical/legal partnership through a Legal Aid organization. And what I realized in my work doing medical/legal partnership is that the role of attorneys isn't really well understood in the broader community, so I wanted to start first with

what a lawyer can do in housing situations and specifically with evictions. What a lawyer can do is negotiate with the landlord and help resolve the legal issues and represent in court and enforce settlement. For some of these things, tenants are able to do on their own. And I think because of the scarcity of legal services and lawyers available to do this type of work, a lot of times we provide advice, and we provide tools to enable our clients to be able to handle some of these things on the front end on their own. And it is when things have completely fallen apart with the landlord, and they are not responsive or very aggressive and harassing that we step in. Next slide please.

As Christian mentioned we cover all of California and so there are many counties and cities in California, and evictions are handled pretty differently in each jurisdiction. And each court has different rules. So one really vital partner for us is the local Legal Aid because they have experience with the landlords in the area, and they know how the courts work and what the court clerk are like and what the judges are like. And that specific knowledge is really crucial to the resolution of these types of cases.

So one recommendation for you and certainly something that we work on as well is to find trusted Legal Aid providers in order to provide trainings to the staff and demystify what the process is like to engage with a Legal Aid attorney. I recognize that a lot of people either don't know that they can access for Legal Aid or they are too intimidated to call an attorney. So it is really, I think, one role, crucial role that you all can play: it is to help demystify that process and basically help usher people in through the door for their local Legal Aid.

It is important to screen the Legal Aid provider to make sure that they are reliable and free. Googling lawyers may be full of traps, and you don't know what you will end up with.

I will talk a little more on how to find a reliable Legal Aid partner to work closely with and also to refer the clients to. It is also important to make sure that it is kind of an ongoing relationship rather than just one-off referrals. I find it is important to do cross-training with each other so that we cross-refer to each other. And then, of course maintaining the relationships are really crucial in order to have the very valuable tool of warm hand-off referrals as opposed to giving your clients a phone number to call which they may or may not follow up on. And I found in the past that they frequently did not follow up on.

The Legal Services Corporation [(LSC)] funds Legal Aids throughout the country. To find the local Legal Aid provider and to find out who they are and what their contact information is, I recommend going to the LSC website. (That is The Legal Services Corporation). And outside of that network of the LSC-funded organizations there are smaller Legal Aids depending on which area that you are in. In the major metropolitan areas there are more options for free Legal Aid providers, and in the

rural areas there are fewer. Your state will have a Law Help website that you can go to. So ours is LawHelpCA.org. And if there is a caller that we need to connect with their local Legal Aid, and I don't know who it is, I would typically go to Law Help to figure that out or to the website. This will be Legal Aid and will cover your area and provide services for and you can go to the Disability Rights network in order to find out who the local P&A [Protection and Advocacy provider] is. I see that the link is in the chat as well.

This is a brand new project that we are still working on developing and we're focusing on finding legal service providers that are local because, as I mentioned, it is important to have that local knowledge and also because our offices are all over California and someone might live close to one of our offices. It might be easier transportation-wise for them to get to the local Legal Aid.

What we realized would be very crucial for the success of our projects is to have in-house social workers because as legal services attorneys we frequently end up playing this hybrid role of attorney and social worker. And as an attorney I'm really not equipped to do that piece of work. So we decided that the social workers would be the crucial in house resources that we would need. So we are working on developing that, and Alisa is working on helping us develop that.

We had a client who had received an eviction notice; she had received eviction court papers, and she had burned bridges with the local Legal Aid and was very reluctant to go to the local Legal Aid, but they were really the only one that could help her avoid a default in the eviction. We called them up and arranged for a warm hand-off as well as did a lot of persuasion with our client to make sure that she would go and get connected with them. And they did do that and avoided the default eviction as a result. I will turn things over to Alisa.

>> Thanks. Next slide please.

So I want to just highlight a little bit about the benefits of collaborating with social services or a case manager around these issues. Our goal whether we're working from the legal side or providing the financial assistance or providing case management support, our goals are kind of twofold. The first is to resolve the immediate housing crisis. Meaning to stabilize housing in the moment. Our second goal is to identify what are the factors or the circumstances that contributed to this housing instability so that we can address those and ideally prevent future instances of housing instability or risk of homelessness.

That is sort of why social services comes in. Not only can we serve as a spokesperson and a conduit to some of the services, but we can do a thorough assessment of what puts them at risk of the situation happening again. What can we do to address it? I worked with a couple some years ago, an aging couple and they were living on Social Security and just barely making ends meet. And they

were playing catch up because they somehow got behind and eventually they could not catch up. They were at risk of losing housing and we were able to stabilize the housing, and we were also able to understand the income needs and what resources that they had. And we recognized that they were eligible for some additional benefits through the VA [Veterans Administration] that they had never tapped into. So their case manager worked with them to fill out paperwork and to connect with the VA and to go through that lengthy and sort of complicated process of applying for the benefits, which then led to much more stable housing in the long term because of their income change.

And so that's what social services can bring: it's ongoing contact and identifying issues and then monitoring and supporting through the longer term resolution of those issues that could contribute to future housing instability. Next slide please.

Financial assistance ...we can also sort of broker and connect people to financial assistance in the community. There is a fair amount of support out there right now in the form of rental arrears and rental assistance and utility assistance to help people stabilize. It is just a matter of figuring out who in your community provides those services. But when someone is facing eviction in addition to all the various supportive service that is we can provide, it's often very necessary to get them caught up on the rent. Sometimes in the solution or process of getting stabilized is going to take a number of months. Sometimes we can get rental assistance moving forward for a designated period of time while the household and everything is stabilizing in the household.

So the next slide gives you a resource or a link to a site where you can go to find out who in your community might be providing financial assistance in the form of rent and utility support. I would encourage you to check those out and see what exists in your community that you can connect with. I will turn it back over now.

>> Actually, this should be Christian.

>> Okay. I'll take it. So let's probably repeat this. Hopefully through our presentation you can see sort of the benefits of partnership. It is holistic and wrap around and taking care of all the issues of the client. There is efficiency and benefit of coordinating the resources. The more that you can coordinate the partnerships that you have, I think is ultimately better for the client. Ease of access for clients is very important. And sometimes giving a phone number is not enough.

In moments of crisis, calling another service provider can be overwhelming. So ensuring easy ways and warm referrals and co-locating etc., making it as easy as possible for them to get services is of utmost importance. Benefits of partnership, resolution of multiple and related issues.

And there is a beauty with social workers and case managers and all of these services working together in that the lawyers can focus on the legal issues, and

social workers can focus on their area in addition to stabilizing for the long term not just the short term. Those with the benefits of partnership. Next slide please.

So just some basic tips, and a lot of this is just a common sense approach, but it is worth repeating. I call it a toolkit for developing partnerships. Most of them will develop informally, and a lot of it is just calling people and introducing yourself. A lot of organizations and legal service agencies and social agencies have similar values and goals. And that is important.

One way to escalate and make deeper commitments is by entering into written agreements, memorandum of understanding or contracts to provide joint services for the clients. And then one of the cool things about this, that historically I have done successfully, is once you start formalizing, and you figure out that you are a good fit with another organization, you can start to seek funding. Joint collaborative services does require more time from the staff, right? Because it does require more investment. So that is a next stage of those partnerships where you seek funding to fund this collaborative team that you have developed.

One key thing in developing these relationships is that you have to have dedicated staff that are good at networking and maintain the relationships for you. Warm hand-offs are better than phone numbers and cold referrals so the clients are not going to get lost. Here is the tip that I love. Co-locating social services so that clients can go to a one-stop shop where lawyers and financial assistance and social workers can take care of all of these issues. I realize in rural communities this is impossible to have. And this co-located environment probably favors the urban environments, but is sort of a dream where everything is handled in one space so that the clients are not going back and forth looking for assistance. I think that is the dream. I think that is the last slide. Cool, I will hand it off to our friends from Texas.

>> Thank you my name is Rachel Cohen-Miller, and I'm the supervising attorney for the disaster team in Disability Rights Texas, and I will give it over to Casey to introduce herself.

>> I am Casey Flancbaum, the advocate supervisor for the housing, transportation and disaster team at Disability Rights Texas, I am handing it off to John.

>> I am John Hasley, the deputy director of Legal Aid of Northwest Texas.

>> Thanks all. I want to take a couple of seconds and give an overview of what we will talk about today. Accommodations and collaboration with local Legal Aid have really been instrumental to the work that we have been doing at Disability Rights Texas to try and serve as many people as possible. And we have, you know, we all have limited resources, and I know that everybody on the call understands that. So we use accommodations to do that, and we also collaborate with local Legal Aids to do that. And this first slide gives a run down what we will talk about.

Accommodations are just the rules, policies, and practices or services to ensure that person with disabilities have the same opportunities as others. Everybody on the same playing field. This is to help them, and in general you will need a letter or note from a provider or somebody that understands the situation. Not necessarily a provider that explains why this person needs a change. And this will come together a little more on the next slide. Or the next couple.

Okay, so Casey and I work together quite a bit. We will talk about staying housed. How we try and ensure that people stay housed, and we talked about accommodations. And so we're talking about a change in policies that potentially could be like the consumer for the client has to pay rent on the first of the month and they are waiting for relief. You can try and have the landlord to change the date and maybe give them a little bit of time if they are waiting on that relief. We developed "generators" and that for us is a web page where you can go or the clients can go and make a letter, right? Fill in a bunch of blanks, and it will give them a letter to give to the landlord and saying here is the policy, and you need to change it. Casey, I will hand it over to you for an example.

>> In practice with the generators and with our work what we found especially on the advocate side is letting landlords know very gently and politely obviously that they are not unique to this housing crisis. Especially during COVID. Finding tenants who are able to pay full rent especially with the really, really significantly high cost in rental prices, is difficult. So retaining our residents and making sure that you don't have empty units has been really helpful. So we've been using our generator and our clients have been using our generator. Specifically, we have a client who was waiting on rental relief, and they are at high risk of COVID transmission should they become homeless. And we were able to appeal to the humanity of the housing provider and saying that there is rent money coming, and they were able to stay. And this has been helpful.

>> One of the other things that we are seeing consistently is people are getting evicted. By the time they come to us, they are already out. So what do we do practically speaking to help get people housed? It is a big deal, right? Everybody is seeing that right now.

The biggest things that we have been seeing -- besides lack of funding which we are all trying to help people with. Because somebody is evicted, it is now on the record. And so when they apply at a new place, they say you have had an eviction in the last year, so we will not rent to you. If, let's say, they owe the landlord money. They could not work because they have COVID, and so they are evicted. It shows up when the potential landlord runs their background, and they see you owe another landlord money, and we will not rent to you. You can ask the landlord, hey, is this the only reason? That this happened to the client is because they have a disability, and they have had symptoms for quite sometime. Can you change the policy? And not look at that one eviction because the only reason it happened is

because they are a person with a disability? And that has been pretty successful. Casey?

>> Yeah, so in this situation, and I'm not an attorney, I am an advocate and I feel strongly that my role in these situations actually is really helpful because it is less intimidating to get a letter from an advocate rather than a letter from an attorney. If you are a housing provider, so when we do these types of accommodation requests, very gently and politely we are bringing it up to the housing provider, that we are in a global pandemic and people are at risk by allowing for this accommodation, you are doing important for this person and it is working and the housing crisis has forced us to become more creative and I think that is good for our work. Because before this we would have never been looking to ask for an accommodation to ignore the eviction or owed debt, I think this has been very helpful. Back to you Rachael.

>> Casey I will have you explain this one because you do a really good job of doing this one.

>> Yeah, so as hard as we work, and as tirelessly as we work, our work really benefits from letters of support. And just support in general from healthcare providers and social workers or anybody that knows the client or the person and understands what they are going through. It is great to have something come on our letterhead, and sometimes it is great and sometimes it is okay. The letters of support are really what seals the deal for a lot of the accommodation requests. These letters are really easy. Three or four main parts, how you know the person asking for the accommodation, and what their disability or the symptoms of their disability affects in their daily life activities, and then how the request for accommodation could stop those symptoms. If you have a compliant with severe anxiety, receiving multiple notices to vacate, not evictions, you can say what this action is creating: severe manifestations of my client or this person's disabilities and this is why stopping these notifications, while we wait for financial support or while they move out, will help. These things make a huge difference and really are the reason that we see a lot of success. Back to you Rachael.

>> Thank you. So the next slide please. This one talks a lot about our collaboration with our Legal Aids here in Texas. We are very lucky: we have John with us, to talk about our collaboration and the work that we have done together. John?

>> Thanks Rachel, and I know we're running a little short on time so I will be really quick here. In terms of this collaboration, obviously the goal is to maximize the number of clients and individuals for us whether it is a low-income community or people with disabilities. We have always had a good relationship, but when we got money to do the community redevelopment work, and specifically to our point we have a MOU with them and other providers throughout the state to do work in the affordable fair housing context. So over the last four years our relationship has

strengthening. And we have a very large staff. In California we have almost 300 staff and attorneys, and we have a multitude of expertise. And there is also the expertise that they have on their own in areas that we need assistance in and where our staffs could benefit from that help, right?

So what we do is we partner, and that you will see is the training that Rachel and her team have provided on disability and housing. Whether it is law, issues, or representation during COVID, like they are talking about the form generators to where we can get the information out to the partners and the partner agencies, it is already hard enough where you hear about people trying to obtain the rental assistance. And we are seeing it every day when you go into court. . And as you heard from California, the jurisdiction, every jurisdiction is different, and every state is different in terms of what type of protections they have or lack thereof. Like in Texas, we don't necessarily have a state protection as in some states. And because of that, evictions have been ongoing so it is extremely important for us to be able to work with our local nonprofit partners in the agency to let them know what the state of the law and it is constantly changing.

Our supreme court is coming out with new emergency orders all the time. Stating what the court has to do in terms of informing tenants of their rights. So part of what our relationship with Disability Rights Texas has allowed us to do with the form generators and others is to keep the tenants in the home as long as possible. And it can prevent an eviction and if they are trying to find a new place. Just by providing the letter or getting the support from Disability Rights Texas, it is how we have been able to help a lot of clients find a new place even though they have a negative financial history. So establishing the relationship, I think it is just going, and you heard it before, finding where there might be some correlation between the work that you do or maybe there is a service that you don't provide and somebody else does. Reach out to them. That is how we did it with Rachel and on the Disability Rights Texas team. Hey, we do this and can you do this. And maybe making it a component of a grant, which you also heard that as well. Reaching out to Legal Aid when the consumer has an issue, do it immediately. You don't know if there will be a deadline or an emergency. Send them to us; we have different intake portals and whether it is a phone line, application. And I know that we are running late so I will go ahead and pass it back.

>> Wonderful John, so much that was very impressive. Putting all of that information and to all the speakers for sharing all of this information. We have 15 minutes left, and we have two goals for the last part of the event. First is the conversation with the panelists, and then we will do Q&A from the group. We heard from Disability Rights California speaking about the housing stability project and their model looking at these three prongs. And we heard from Disability Rights Texas and working with the landlords and partnering through the MOU with Legal Aid. I would love to hear from our speakers some reactions to what you heard from each other.

California, did you hear anything from Texas that would apply and work in California? And maybe doesn't work and vice versa? Any new ideas generated? And we would love some discussions. I will keep it very broad if anybody would like to start the discussion. We will do this for about five or six minutes.

>> I love the generator. I think that is a great way of making that accessible to clients. I love the work that they are doing post-eviction because that is the reality. A lot of times we can't prevent the evictions, so we have to find housing for somebody that is about to be evicted or is already evicted. That is something that Texas is doing a lot more than we are. That would be sort of a focus for us for the next stage.

>> Can I go? Can Texas go?

>> Yes, I think Rachel is going to come in.

>> Yes, I'm good at jumping right in. I love the idea that you were talking about with dedicated people to maintaining relationships. Because that is one of the biggest hurdles that I think we have is maintaining those relationships. John and I have known each other for years now, and that is a pretty easy one. I can text him and say what is going on or do you have a minute? We all have so much on our plate, it is really hard to who is doing what. So I think one of the things that we will do probably next week early is figure out who has what relationships internally and kind of make sure that we're really working on that. And that we are not overlapping, and that they are continued because I think that is something that we can really improve on that. California is doing a great job on.

>> Yeah, and I know Rachel as well you also mentioned the seeking funding, and I think that is something that we probably would look at in the future. Because I think we have gotten to the point where we have such a positive relationship, but I would say with the interconnections between all the work that we are doing that we would probably have a project that we can put together and take the next step. And I think you also mentioned about co-locating offices and warm hand-offs is something that we focus on. But just taking that to the next level, and it could then serve as a model for some of the other agencies throughout the state.

>> Yeah, I will echo John on the warm hand-off that you all were talking about. It is really that we are able to do that with certain groups because we have the relationships. But the more that we work on dedicating people to certain relationships, I think they will go hand in hand, because you will be able to do that a little easier. So that is why, I think, you get more success that way.

>> Can I just ask a question for reflection? If there is something that you want to address, please disregard it. Because which are all together, and both of you represent very large states that are very diverse with very distinct rural and urban needs. I am curious how you think for California you built the housing stability

project, do you have to change it depending on where people are in the state? And how do you make the relationships local when you are dealing with such a large population for both of you? And similarly with Texas, are there certain areas with more of areas of eviction, and how do you prioritize if the need is so great?

>> For us, we are intentional and strategic, it is never ended. We have done GIS mapping to see where the needs are and that is always changing. We have to remain flexible and look at data and modify how we basically allocate our resources. We have offices throughout the state, and we have small offices and large offices, and you know, but we only have like 10 staff dedicated to this. So it is just flexibility. It is basically filling the gaps because there are a lot of resources in the big cities, so a lot of focus is in the rural areas that have transportation, communication gaps. And a lot of our focus is on clients whose language, English is not the first language and they are underserved. So it is just, you know, we have to stay flexible and always focus on where we can have the maximum impact. There is no easy formula for this. It is a struggle right?

>> I'd like to add to that. The pandemic really has made the relationship building with the, especially the rural areas, easier because we are all used to being on Zoom now. Some of the larger organizations that provide technical assistance and do policy work such as the Western Center on Law and Poverty, and they pull together all the different groups for meetings in order to discuss what it happening. And we can connect with the people in those areas in that way as well.

>> I think our approach has been really similar in terms of the ability to be flexible. Because things are in particularly in Texas where we had late last week shut funding down for rental assistance statewide. So you have localities that are manual like cities and counties and maybe nonprofits, but the state is no longer doing it at this point. So you have to be able to be flexible and pivot and go okay, here is what resources we were giving to folks, so let's talk maybe in the valley for a minute. We have a couple of staff locate in the valley and so we have okay, let's real quick, I know that we are getting all of these questions and figure out what resources are down there, and what do we have, and we will put that information out. I think the pandemic for us has really forced us to be flexible and to be looking forward too. That is the other thing that we have looked and done a lot of work on. Looking forward to see what was coming next. We were talking about debt 6 months ago because that was going to be a problem. And then we have to look at what is next for the clients.

>> One thing that I would add to that today, and in terms of leveraging the relationships and in some of the larger cities there are people that might already be doing the work in collection of data. In our DFW [Dallas Fort Worth] area, there is a child poverty lab that has done a lot of work to get all the eviction filing data. And so that we can identify the hot spots and where there is an increase in the evictions. So it is trying to see who is out there, and what they are doing and don't

try to reinvent the wheel. Zoom has assisted, but it has also shown that there is a digital divide and so it is hard. There is a subset of our community that is very difficult to reach. We have had to think through ways of getting out there and figuring out ways to do it. We have a similar situation at the home preservation project where we are hosting clinics in the community. Our rural areas are some of them still doing in person whether it is court hearings or other events and then the nature of what it is like in rural Texas. So that is the way that you can do the outreach. So it is working with the community where you can meet them would be my advice.

>> Excellent, thanks for working with the community, and I think that is a wonderful place to close the reflection.

We have a number of questions, and just to be clear we will not address all the questions, so we may need to do some follow-up after the webinar. Many of the questions sort of clustered on working with different agencies, particularly HUD. I don't know if there are any comments with HUD vouchers. And also for the California team, there is a question on whether you work with the state housing agency to improve outcomes with the people with disabilities? And is there a particular funding or is that more for the legal partners? So any comments on working with the state or local agencies would be helpful.

>> Through our course on advocacy. We're large. We are always working with all the agencies big picture. But evictions are so crisis-based and individually based that big picture solutions don't apply.

When we have an individual client who is facing eviction, our first thing is if they have a HUD voucher. If they have one, our legal relationships and assistance changes and is modified by that. We have relationships with local housing authorities, if not, we will find a partner. The key thing is that somebody actually receives government assistance and that pays part of the housing. We have to preserve that government assistance and that is the highest priority. Because that actually government assistance for the payment of rental, like permanent or however they can afford, is the best for stability, and we want to keep that voucher and work for the government assistance for that case. We are always working on developing more affordable housing and accessible housing for the clients. We are always working on that.

>> Thank you. We also received some questions that I think sort of explain the scope of this conversation and could be helpful. We are speaking very specifically about civil evictions from you know, people's own landlords and tenants, but we received a number of them on personal care homes and what happens in when somebody is discharged, and they don't have a place to go to. How that is important.

>> So, with the medical/legal partnership it is a fairly flexible model. It is literally what is described. There is a legal and health partner. And as I said earlier, a lot of times people are reluctant to cold call a lawyer or don't know that they can call Legal Aid. They are much more likely to talk to a healthcare provider, and they are more likely to be the first person to hear about an issue. And then it is really helpful for them to channel people over to the legal side. And I think that once people hear a tenant in crisis for example, if they have a mistrust of Legal Aid, which was alluded to in the client story, if the trusted healthcare provider or the social worker at the health center or the primary healthcare provider says this sounds like a legal issue and perhaps you should contact this legal organization. And let me connect you to them; let me send a referral over. That connection is much more likely. And so yeah, for the medical/legal partnership on the legal side, we are really building on the trust relationship that the healthcare providers already have.

Sometimes that has us going and being onsite co-located at the health center or hospital, and other times there is just a warm hand-off relationship and cross-training relationship. But it is a way to take us both, I think, outside of the silos that we are used to working in. And figure out how to collaborate across different disciplines in order to think creatively about how to reach a solution.

My work in the medical/legal partnership made it very easy for me to get this. Because the healthcare providers really trusted me for that reason. And I would explain what was the need for the letter or the form. Compared to, I think, sometimes they are pretty guarded when their patients are the ones that are asking, because they don't quite understand what is the impact of signing off on a letter or form like that.

>> Thank you. That I think kind of closes out some of the things that we really heard here today which is meeting the client where they are and being in the community where they are. And being very aware of all the other things that are going on in addition to the housing and what other financial and social services need they have and connecting with those needs. And you all mentioned different organizations that is you are working with and advocating for systems change and being informed and connected with them. And then also being very clear about the things that you provide with the disability and civil rights, so that your legal partners know to come to you and have those warm referrals with the clients. And then the one stop-shop team.

And we are at an hour. Is there anything that anybody has not had the opportunity to say that you would like to share? We moved through quickly, and I don't want to cut us off if there are any final words that you all wanted to share.

>> Thank you for hosting.

>> Thank you for the work that you are doing. This is a very serious situation, and I know that you have a lot of client need right now. So appreciate the time. And our expertise. There will be a follow up from this on the ACL website with the FAQ and the recording of the webinar. We appreciate you so much. Thank you.