

# CASE STUDY LA:RISE

*Integrating legal services into workforce strategies for people facing barriers to employment ensures that jobseekers receive the legal support needed to overcome structural inequities in the legal system and achieve their employment goals.*

## THE JUSTICE GAP

Inability to access legal services is not isolated to LA:RISE participants. According to a report by the [Legal Services Corporation](#), 86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans during 2017 received inadequate or no legal help. This “justice gap” only exacerbates the many economic and racial inequities that exist within the criminal justice system.

By partnering with RLC, LA:RISE attempts to directly address both the justice gap and underlying racial and economic disparities. Information gathered from the partnership, can also inform broader advocacy efforts.



## LA:RISE

LA:RISE is a partnership between the local workforce system, social enterprises, and community-based organizations focused on providing employment opportunities to individuals who have touched the criminal justice system or experienced homelessness. The partnership is co-managed by the LA City Economic Workforce Development Department (EWDD), Workforce Development Aging and Community Services (WDACs), and REDF—a leader in the field of job creation for people facing barriers to employment through investment in [social enterprise](#). The LA:RISE model combines the paid transitional work experience offered by social enterprises with the skills-building and training offered by the public workforce system through integrative strategies like collocation and collaborative case management. Additionally, LA:RISE participants who have been placed in employment are connected to a variety of Personal Support Partners (PSPs) who offer a range of retention services for up to twelve months to help them maintain stable employment.

## THE NEED FOR LEGAL SERVICES

During LA:RISE’s first year of implementation, case managers observed that many of the participants encountered legal challenges that impeded progress toward their employment goals. Unfortunately, options for legal services were extremely limited and difficult to access. Additionally, many participants have experienced negative interactions with the legal system, creating distrust and fear of engaging legal services.



**REDF** HEARTLAND  
ALLIANCE

An investment that works. NATIONAL INITIATIVES

## A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

REDF has funded a pilot partnership with a legal services provider. In July 2017, [Restoration Law Center \(RLC\)](#) joined the LA:RISE personal support network. RLC is a private law firm providing a range of legal services to individuals based on a sliding fee scale. RLC also offers legal services, guidance, and support to nonprofits serving low-income populations.

As part of the partnership, RLC provides free legal consultation and support to LA:RISE participants, which often includes accompaniment to court, if necessary. If formal representation is required, RLC can provide representation on a sliding scale or make a referral to a free or low-fee lawyer with specialized experience. RLC also provides legal education for both participants and staff working at LA:RISE partner organizations.

## INITIAL IMPACT

Since RLC began partnering with LA:RISE in July 2017, about 10% of LA:RISE participants have been referred to legal services. Of those referred, 51% have been retained by RLC or another legal partner for continued legal support. According to interviews with social enterprise staff, the LA:RISE participants served by RLC would not have been able to resolve their legal issues otherwise.

In addition, LA:RISE and RLC have engaged 40 individuals through voluntary legal workshops designed to educate participants and staff about local laws that expand opportunities for people facing barriers to employment. For example, the state of California and LA City recently passed legislation to postpone criminal background checks until after a conditional job offer has been made—but many LA:RISE participants were not aware of these policy changes or how the changes impacted their employment goals and opportunities. To increase knowledge about these policies, REDF and RLC hosted a Fair Chance Employment workshop to train job developers on how to prepare participants with criminal records for interviews and developed a “Know Your Rights” takeaway tool for the broader community.

### COMMON LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDED TO LA:RISE PARTICIPANTS

Resolving past tickets, fines, and fees (often a barrier to obtaining valid driver’s license needed for many jobs)

Record sealing and expungement

Negotiating child support payments

Avoiding eviction and other housing issues

Navigating immigration issues

Criminal Defense (arrests, trials, warrants, felony reclassification, reclassifying marijuana convictions)

Educating and advocating for participants around employment rights

### EXAMPLE: THE COST OF A TRAFFIC TICKET

Receiving a [traffic ticket](#) in California can easily result in fines of hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of dollars. Other penalties include costly classes, community service, jail time, and driver’s license suspension. A valid driver’s license expands transportation options to access jobs and is required for many jobs. Without adequate income to pay the increased fines or legal support to resolve the tickets, some may choose to continue driving without a valid license in order to maintain employment and other responsibilities. This puts individuals at risk of exacerbated economic and legal challenges.

RLC has helped a number of L.A. Rise participants resolve traffic tickets by having charges dismissed or arranging a payment plan, making it easier for participants to reinstate their drivers’ licenses. This support requires minimal legal expertise and effort, but can make a tremendous difference in a person’s life.

*For more information about the negative impacts of traffic fines and fees, check out this report from the Insight Center: [Driving Into Debt: The Need for Traffic Ticket Fee Reform](#)*

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

### Trusting Relationships

LA:RISE participants are sometimes hesitant to disclose their legal needs when they first join the program, particularly because of the impact these legal issues may have on their employment. However, LA:RISE social enterprises are built on a model that focuses on providing ongoing support and building trusting relationships. Because of this trust, many participants eventually disclose legal challenges to their case managers. While case managers do not have the legal expertise necessary to resolve these issues, they are able to refer participants to RLC. Social enterprise case managers report that participants are more likely to follow through with a legal consultation, in part, because of the relationship they have built with their case manager. Additionally, prior to the LA:RISE partnership, RLC attorney, Leslie Ivie, was already committed to providing legal services to low-income and disadvantaged communities. Her understanding of the challenges facing many people with barriers to employment has facilitated her ability to build trusting relationships with LA:RISE participants.

### Prompt & Convenient Response

As a part of the partnership with LA:RISE, Leslie not only responds promptly to participant referrals, but meets them at one of three social enterprise or other PSP locations. Leslie makes every effort to schedule a time and location that is most convenient to the participant. In fact, she is often able to meet participants at their place of employment, the social enterprise, during a break or before/after a work shift. As the coordinator of one social enterprise partner explained, “Our participants have a lot of other commitments outside of work, some are taking GED classes,

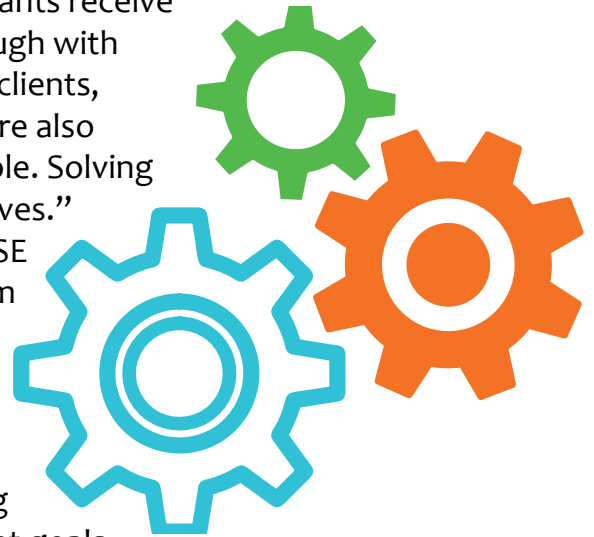
**Over half of the LA:RISE participants referred to legal services have received continued legal support.**

and most are single parents. With [legal services partnership] they don't have to miss work, figure out transportation, or arrange additional childcare.”

### **Valuing Collaboration**

Leslie greatly values the support and trust LA:RISE participants receive and believes that helps them to engage in and follow through with the process of resolving legal issues. As she explains, “For clients, knowing that we can address the legal matter while they are also being supported in their other needs and goals is so valuable. Solving their legal issues, then, has a place in the context of their lives.”

Leslie also explained that when she has represented LA:RISE participants in court, she shares about the LA:RISE program to the judge. In several cases, the judge has reviewed this information alongside the details of the case when determining judgment, and, Leslie believes, has positively impacted the judge's decision. The partnership between LA:RISE and RLC demonstrates a reciprocal and multiplying effect of collaboration—working toward one's employment goals can positively impact the resolution of legal issues, which can positively impact progress toward one's employment goals.



## **HOW TO INTEGRATE LEGAL SERVICES INTO WORKFORCE STRATEGIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

### ***Tips for getting started:***

- 1** Assess the legal challenges and needs of the jobseekers facing barriers to employment in your community and the existing legal services available. Why is increased access to legal services important and needed in your community?
- 2** If they're not already at the table, begin to engage law professionals and legal advocates in your community around this need. Emphasize the value of collaboration and the fact that many of the legal barriers to people's employment goals require a relatively limited level of legal expertise and few resources to resolve.
- 3** Explore national efforts to promote access to legal services to low-income and marginalized communities, including [legal incubator programs](#) and the [Legal Services Corporation](#).

This case study was prepared by [Heartland Alliance National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity](#) as part of the [National Center on Employment and Homelessness \(NCEH\)](#), working to expand access to employment and income for people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

July 2018