

TENANT EVICTION ASSISTANCE PROJECT (TEAP)

by City of Phoenix Human Services Department

Region 9 • Phoenix, Arizona
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Housing • COVID Response • Tenant Rights

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Tenant Eviction Assistance Project (TEAP) provides legal assistance, advocacy, and representation to tenants who are residents of the City of Phoenix, affected by COVID-19, and experiencing an eviction crisis. Through a partnership with Community Legal Services (CLS), the City of Phoenix has funded TEAP since August 2020 to provide the following services:

- Legal information about tenant rights and landlord responsibilities;
- Legal information about the eviction process, including applicable federal laws, rules, and requirements for public and subsidized housing;
- Legal advice regarding the tenant's specific case;
- Negotiations with landlords concerning payment options for tenants; and
- Legal representation of tenants at eviction proceedings.

LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

The City of Phoenix ranked second highest in the United States for apartment evictions in 2017. In 2018, Maricopa County saw 65,694 evictions filed. During “normal” times, this results in terrible outcomes for individuals and families and negatively impacts the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these evictions have significantly increased, resulting in potentially deadly outcomes for thousands of tenants. The confirmed cases of COVID-19 continue to plague Maricopa County. The loss of housing contributes to the fragility of the health and safety of those individuals and families directly impacted by eviction proceedings, as well as the community at large. In addition, most experts anticipate additional waves of COVID-19 in the following years.



Evictions can be brought to court for many reasons. Historically, the tenant is unaware of their rights and their ability to defend themselves in the courts. Since the onset of the pandemic, many landlords and tenants are unaware of their rights and responsibilities related to the rental property/agreement and unjust evictions have been taking place. **Through TEAP, CLS has been able to educate both parties of their legal responsibilities and provide mediation between both parties involved.**

ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

As a CSBG funded organization, we are required to invest effort and funding in initiatives that reflect community-based, sustainable improvements. Providing legal assistance, advocacy, and representation to Phoenix residents builds their capacity to directly impact their future housing stability. Housing stability is directly linked to employment stability, educational success, and strengthened economies. CSBG funds assist with paying for the services provided by CLS.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The TEAP program makes available to tenants' legal representation to address issues such as eviction and housing violations by landlords. It is estimated that over 90% of landlords have legal representation while less than 5% of tenants receive any kind of legal assistance. **This initiative attempts to level the playing field for the tenant and prevent the trauma experienced by families when they are evicted from their homes.** It will improve access to resources and empower families while keeping them housed. An eventual goal of this partnership is to deliver enough evidence to pursue legislative changes that can lead to more permanent systemic changes.

It is our belief that the program acts both as prevention and intervention. The number of evictions and the speed in which evictions are initiated will require that the program work simultaneously on both fronts.

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EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

TEAP is a new program and will be gathering information from the first year of the project. Utilizing CSBG National Performance Indicators (NPIs) which relate to the planned activities within communities, a specific data element that will be captured is FNPI 4e "The number of households who avoid eviction."

The TEAP project has been able to assist over 367 cases directly impacting 770 City of Phoenix household members since its inception in July 2020. Outcomes have included eviction complaints being canceled, continued, or dismissed, motions to compel or vacate being filed and negotiation payments plans/options with landlords. Eviction proceeding results are provided each month, along with success stories.

Statistics demonstrate that those persons who are evicted from housing often enter into the cycle of poverty. One eviction can create a lifetime of challenges in obtaining adequate housing and puts these families at greater risk of becoming homeless. The community suffers when these families become homeless or need to obtain additional resources from community agencies. The community suffers when children suffer the trauma of being homeless, an experience that can potentially impact their ability to succeed in the future.

This project continues to impact the lives of the city's residents by continuing to provide legal representation that address issues such as eviction and housing violations by landlords. This initiative is making a real impact in leveling the playing field for the tenants it has served and continues to serve and has prevented many from feeling the trauma of being evicted from their homes. It has improved access to resources and empowered families while keeping them housed.

EQUITY LENS

Although Maricopa County does not keep records on the ethnicity of those being evicted, it is our belief that overwhelmingly it is people of color and persons who are unaware of their rights and least likely to be able to pay for legal representation. This program hopes to level the playing field and prevent more people from entering the poverty cycle through housing instability.

CUSTOMER VOICE

The City of Phoenix Human Services Department's vision statement is "We will build strong foundations for Phoenix residents in collaboration with the community." To date, we have received feedback from numerous TEAP clients thanking Community Legal Services for the services they provided.

Success story:

Client had contracted COVID and then was in a car accident that injured his back causing him to lose

his job. The client had always paid his rent on time and never had any issues with his landlord, until the owner hired a new management company. This company modified his lease without giving proper notice—adding late fees and raising the rent. Client was later evicted based on a balance that never should have been applied to him. He had never received proper notice of his eviction hearing until the day of when he texted his property manager and she told him about it. When he tried to call in, technical difficulties booted him off the call and a default judgment was entered.

Client telephoned the Tenants Eviction Assistance Project a week later and they filed a Motion to Vacate on his behalf arguing that the phone issues constituted an excusable neglect and the various errors in the Plaintiff's own case a meritorious defense. While it is rare for Justice of the Peace to grant these motions, the judge set a hearing on the motion and during the hearing began to take notice of the various errors with the Plaintiff's case. The Judgment was vacated, and the Plaintiff later agreed to dismiss the case. The client avoided a wrongful judgment for \$1,500 will be able to find new housing without an eviction on his record.

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