

# Legal Vision for North Minneapolis

By Pat Schmatz

Legal Aid staff attorney Joshua Ladd often meets clients at Breaking Bread, a café and community gathering space on Minneapolis's northside. Ladd is the legal legs of a community partnership in the Willard-Hay and Near North neighborhoods, and networking is a vital part of his job.

"I love finding the niche places where you can meet people and feel the heartbeat of the community," says Ladd, who holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning. "Breaking Bread is where you find urban intellectuals talking about their work and how the community is involved.

Every time I'm there, I find networking opportunities."

Ladd works with Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC) and Stinson Leonard Street LLP in a project modeled after the Adopt-A-Neighborhood Project in Kansas City. The goals are to retain quality affordable housing, improve economic development, and collaborate on long-term planning in the Willard-Hay and Near North neighborhoods.

"North Minneapolis is the celebrated home for many who have created a vibrant, multigenerational community," says Legal Aid Deputy Director Greg Marita. "It's a challenged area of our city for reasons that have little to do with the residents. We bring legal tools to back the cultural stability that already exists, and give residents and business owners the best chance of weathering any legal problems."



Stinson partners in the Kansas City project and has a long history of pro bono commitment in Minneapolis. In 1993 the firm established the Deinard Legal Clinic to provide pro bono legal services to residents of the Phillips neighborhood. The firm had been seeking a way to offer transactional legal support to the northside community when Marita approached them in 2015.

"Greg thought of us because of our neighborhood revitalization work with Legal Aid in Kansas City," says Stinson Pro Bono Director Theresa Hughes. "It's so rewarding for our lawyers to use their legal skills on behalf of local home and small business owners at a grassroots level."

Ladd offices with NRRC two days a week, delivering legal help and advice through an embedded community services model. He identifies legal issues, takes

the cases he can, and refers others to colleagues at Legal Aid. For matters outside of Legal Aid's expertise or funding priorities, he turns to Stinson Leonard Street.

"The firm is available for full pro bono representation of individuals and businesses on a wide range of building management, real estate, zoning and city planning issues," says Stinson real estate partner Eric Galatz.

"Residents need help with a wide variety of housing issues," says NRRC Executive Director Martine Smaller, who places a high value on accessible legal expertise. "An attorney on site fills that need and helps to protect home ownership."

Currently, Ladd is inviting homeowners who are behind on property taxes to come in and talk about options. He also reviews contracts for deed and helps with estate planning. Without a probate plan, title to a family home can become unnecessarily entangled. Legal support helps to stabilize and protect accumulated wealth and resources from one generation to the next.

As the project enters its second year, all of the partners see potential for broader development. Stinson is hoping to increase collaboration with local business owners in addition to work with residents. Ladd will bring his urban planning background to help NRRC develop the neighborhood's assets and envision its future in the city.

"We've only scratched the surface with this partnership," says Smaller. "We are still learning all the ways we can leverage the resources available through Joshua's work."

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Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid provides free civil legal advice and representation to Minnesotans who cannot afford an attorney. Legal Aid serves people with low incomes in 20 counties and people with disabilities statewide.