

ED Update: Reflecting on freedom this Independence Day

Everyone loves the 4th of July. And what's not to love? Cookouts, parades, time with family and friends, and the pride that swells in our hearts as Americans for love of our nation.

But each year, I can't help but reflect on another aspect of the holiday - that is, the deeper meaning of independence in our country.

What does it mean to be truly free? Sure, there's freedom of religion and speech, freedom to make our own decisions for our lives. But what about financial independence? What about freedom from violent abusers, stalkers, or harassing collectors?

In 2015, 43.1 million people were living in poverty in the United States, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). While many of these individuals were children or non-working adults, 8.6 million were considered to be the "working poor," according to the [Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#).

Over the last decade, the rate of the working poor has oscillated between 5 and 7 percent of the total labor force in our country. These are individuals who are either working or actively looking for work, but are still living below the poverty line.

And these are the individuals we see every day at Legal Aid.

Many of us can't imagine what it is like to struggle to make ends meet. We've never experienced the tragedy of having to choose between buying groceries and seeking medical attention for a health problem. We don't know what it's like to fear answering our phones, dreading the voice of a debt collector on the other end. And we certainly have never had to wonder how to tell our children that they're losing their home.

But these stories are true, and they happen every day right here in our community. They could be your neighbor, or the women in front of you at the grocery store check-out line, or the child sitting next to yours in class. And

this Independence Day, while they're celebrating with loved ones, they're contemplating a very different concept of freedom.

Our country has laws and regulations designed to protect people from the scenarios I described above. The real tragedy comes when they aren't aware of or can't access these protections. This is why Legal Aid exists. We offer a lifeline to people who have nowhere else to turn. Our dedicated staff, passionate volunteers, and faithful donors provide so much more than legal assistance to these individuals - they provide hope. Thank you to those of you who are a part of this work!

How you can help:

Volunteer: Our Power of 1 Campaign shows just how easy it is to make a difference. It only takes one... One case, one client, one story. Visit www.communitylegalaid.org/vlsp to learn more or sign up.

Donate: Make a difference in someone's life today by giving to our Spring Appeal. Give online today at www.communitylegalaid.org/springappeal.

Get involved: If you feel passionately about helping the working poor, we want to hear from you! We're always looking for people to join committees or our board. Learn more at www.communitylegalaid.org/volunteer.

Spread the word: Help us educate others about the needs of the poor. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter @CommLegalAid and share our posts with your social networks.

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