



Indianapolis Legal Aid Society giving makeover to annual holiday fundraiser

Marilyn Odendahl November 5, 2014

This holiday season, potential donors receiving a letter from the Indianapolis Legal Aid Society will not find a dollar bill in the envelope.

Each year, the agency relies on its holiday dollar campaign to bring in a major portion of its funding. The nonprofit had asked the donors to return the dollar and hoped they would include a contribution.

As part of the shift to raise more funds independently instead of relying as heavily on the United Way of Central Indiana, the agency is replacing the dollar with a fake \$100 bill drawn by Indianapolis Star Cartoonist Gary Varvel.

The pitch for donations will play on the legal aid society's ability to help a client using \$100 by asking the potential donors how many people they want to help, explained ILAS General Counsel John Floreancig.

Indianapolis Legal Aid Society has been ramping up its fundraising ever since the UWCI announced it would be reducing its yearly support by almost \$126,000. The decrease was brought on by the [United Way's decision](#) to provide no more than 35 percent of any nonprofit's budget.

United Way had been contributing \$384,541 annually to ILAS, or 51 percent of the agency's budget. Starting in 2013, the United Way began gradually cutting its contribution and, in 2015, it will reach its goal of supporting only 35 percent of the legal aid nonprofit's budget.

For ILAS, which has an annual budget of nearly \$800,000, the reduction from the United Way was a significant blow. Floreancig said ILAS ended 2013 barely in the black with about \$10,000 left. This year, an unexpected donation from the estate of a benefactor has enabled the agency to meet payroll without dipping into its reserves.

Still, the agency has not laid-off any employees and continues to represent 7,500 to 8,000 clients each year, Floreancig said.

ILAS will reap a substantial savings on its holiday campaign since it will not have to pony up the dollar bills which usually totaled \$8,000. Floreancig was quick to point out the money put in the fundraising envelope did not come from the agency's budget. [Board members contributed the funds.](#)

To increase its focus on fundraising, ILAS has hired Anita Ray as its development director. She has experience in the fundraising field, including having served as director of development at the Ruth Lilly Health Education Center, the Humane Society of Indianapolis and the Prevent Child Abuse Indiana organization.

Currently, Ray is soliciting foundations for grants but Floreancig said grant providers want to support new programs rather than fund continuing operations. Moreover, he continued, while philanthropic organizations want to see data and metrics, donors just want to know exactly where their money is going.

“People really want to know they helped a person with their gift,” Floreancig said.