



2020 Community Report

Stepping Up

How technology and service innovation
positioned us to serve an unexpected need

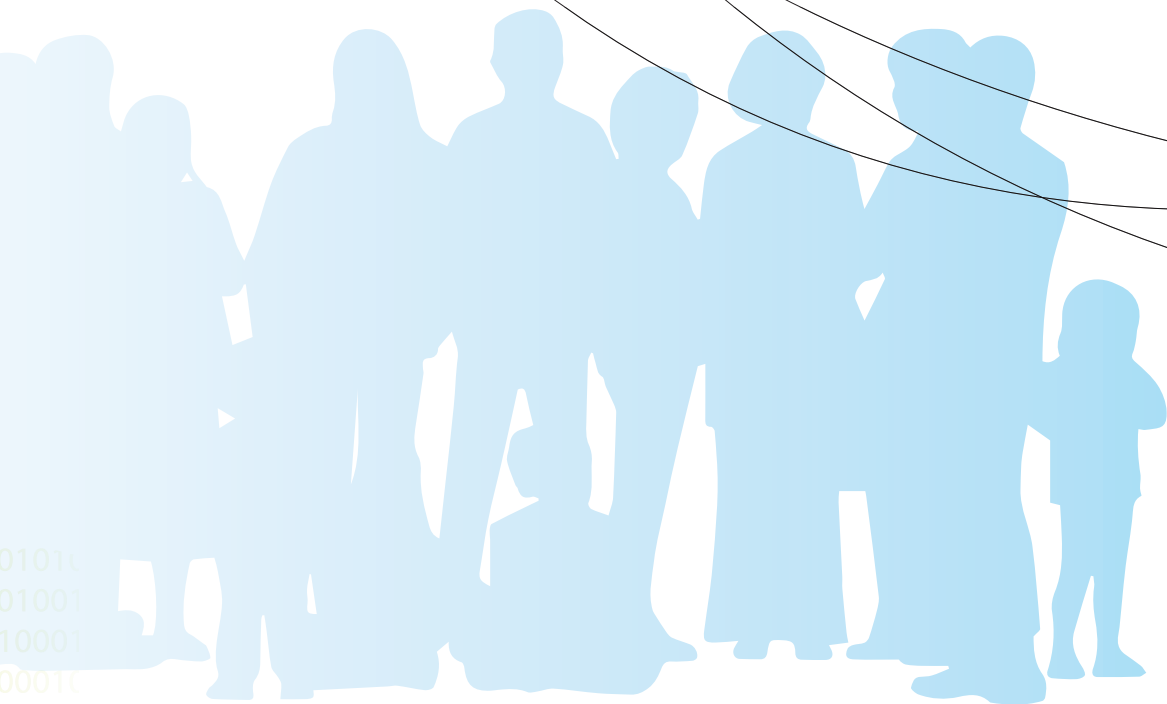


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Letter From the Executive Director and Associate Director

In 2020, the world witnessed things that most of us could never have imagined. There were challenges like overflowing hospitals, lines to purchase toilet paper, and virtual schooling; and rewards like car parades celebrating birthdays, more time with family, and a slowed-down lifestyle for many who were moving too fast in the pre-pandemic times. We also saw remarkable achievements in science, novel and creative thinking, and resiliency.

2020 also marked Step Up to Justice's ("SU2J's") fourth year of service to the Tucson community. From the beginning, SU2J has sought to innovate through technology and community partnership. Although SU2J could not have predicted the world would face a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic only four years after its inception, SU2J's early investment in technology and partnership put it ahead of the curve and positioned the organization to respond seamlessly to the rapidly changing needs of the Tucson community.

To accommodate SU2J clients and volunteer attorneys, SU2J staff converted all in-person client appointments to secure video and tele-conferencing meetings. SU2J also increased secure confidential language line services for all non-English speakers; created e-signature options and new writable online forms; gained secure access to court documents remotely; and expanded services in new legal areas, including eviction prevention and end-of-life care planning – areas where people's needs were exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. Notably, SU2J accomplished this shift without any interruption to its legal services.

SU2J believes that civil legal rights are essential human rights and strives to close the justice gap for those who need, but cannot afford, an attorney. While SU2J faces new challenges each week, it continues to respond creatively and efficiently leveraging technology and volunteer support from our homes and office. Fortunately, SU2J's nimbleness as an organization has enabled, and continues to enable it, to adapt quickly to the changing civil legal needs of our low-income neighbors, including those facing barriers to justice in housing, employment, family law, end-of-life decisions, and other critical areas.

We extend our appreciation to everyone who has continued to volunteer with and support SU2J. Our board and staff deeply appreciate your kindness and generosity during these unprecedented times.

In service,

Michele Mirto
Executive Director

Melissa Spiller-Shiner
Associate Director



Michele Mirto



Melissa Spiller-Shiner

Improving Access Through Technology

A Partner Perspective | Strengthening the Community

In four short years – thanks to major funding from the David and Lura Lovell Foundation and the Shaaron Kent End of Life Grant held at the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona – the Arizona End of Life Care Partnership (EOLCP) has grown from a small coalition of passionate community-based organization leaders into a network of over 350 stakeholders, 18 grantee partner organizations, and 30 investing partners across sectors that include healthcare, community support, culture, faith, small business, and corporate entities. The EOLCP, anchored at United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, is leading the charge to true collective impact with shared mission, vision, data, action, and outcomes. It is also quickly becoming a national model for quality end-of-life care efforts.

In July 2020, the EOLCP welcomed Step Up to Justice (SU2J) as a Grantee Partner, filling an identified gap in the coalition for legal expertise as part of holistic, qualified, and compassionate consultation related to end-of-life care planning. Partnering with SU2J not only benefits low-income individuals and families who need access to end-of-life care planning, but including SU2J also helps connect the dots between experts in the legal field to other sectors, uniting efforts to ensure that people receive quality care at the end of their lives from multiple perspectives. SU2J's EOLCP project, Prep with Tech, augments the legal services provided by the organization's volunteer attorneys by incorporating an online platform that customizes and streamlines end-of-life document preparation. Prep with Tech allows each client to meet individually with a volunteer attorney, receive qualified and compassionate end-of-life consultation and planning, and leave the appointment with personalized, executed documents in hand.

Death, in its impact on every one of us, can be an equalizer for human beings, while the process of dying is currently not. We are honored and grateful to work with SU2J to improve equity and quality end-of-life care services in Pima County. Through true partnership efforts, we can ensure a convergence of high-quality, professional and personal experiences and care. Building networks and coordination of care in our community are key to honoring the wishes of individuals and families at the end of life.



**Sarah Ascher, Associate VP,
AZ End of Life Care Partnership
United Way of Tucson and
Southern Arizona**

A Client Story | An Unexpected Need



Anne, a single mother with two young children, teaches in a local school district. She attended a Prep with Tech clinic, assisted by SU2J volunteer attorney, Jane Larrabee. Anne wanted to create a Last Will and Testament to specify her wishes regarding care of her children and transfer of her assets in the event of her death. Jane and Anne worked together to complete a Health Care Power of Attorney and a Mental Health Care Power of Attorney, allowing Anne to specify her wishes and designate trusted caregivers to make decisions if Anne was unable to do so herself.

Anne described her experience at the Prep with Tech clinic: “I am very grateful and happy for the legal services that SU2J provided. The whole process was speedy and organized, all staff members were friendly and helpful. I was able to meet my volunteer attorney online and discussed my requests/concerns and she answered all my questions kindly and patiently. My volunteer attorney provided example of scenarios to help me understand some of the legal terms which helped me make decisions quickly. She was awesome to work with.”

Student Perspective

Riley Arter, Prep with Tech Leader and 3L Law Student

Prep with Tech: End of Life Care Planning Project (PWT) uses novel document assembly and document automation software to generate individualized and accurate end of life planning documents, based on attorney notes and unique input. As part of PWT, SU2J built six documents from the ground-up related to estate planning and end-of-life care. Volunteer attorneys in the project access these documents through an online guided interview to assist low-income individuals with their end-of-life care planning.



Since inception, the PWT project has been successful because it does not operate solely through the tech platform. Staff work closely with clients and volunteer attorneys to supplement areas where the technology might lack. In other words, what makes the PWT Project successful is human ingenuity and tech flexibility working together to optimize best client outcomes. This “tech-rich” legal service delivery model has put SU2J in a unique position to help low-income individuals receive competent civil legal services. The opportunity to assist with the design and launch of PWT has been so rewarding and I have learned so much. As a second year law student, my experience at SU2J with PWT influenced and truly altered my future legal path in the best way.

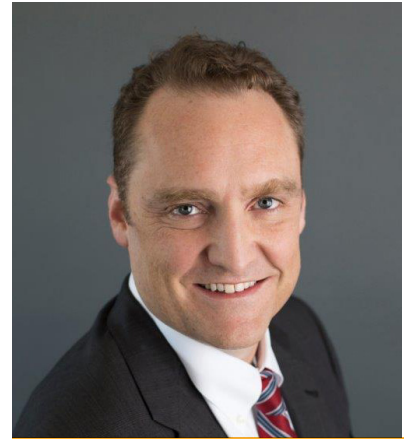
Perspectives | Why I Volunteer

What is it that makes SU2J work? And, how does the idea of constant improvement fit in so well with providing new services to meet new needs? It all goes back to our volunteers and their willingness to pitch in where needed, when needed.

Brian Longenbaugh has been a volunteer lawyer with SU2J since we opened our doors in 2017, volunteering in clinics and providing direct representation for clients who need help with end-of-life planning documents, and probate disputes. In 2020, Brian was one of the first to assist with SU2J's Prep with Tech: End of Life Care Planning Project. Brian worked with SU2J's Prep with Tech Leader, Riley Arter, as she customized the software and incorporated the legal templates necessary to create a client-friendly, volunteer approved clinic experience. In the project's development stages, Brian shared and reviewed the information necessary to produce all the end-of-life documents a client may need in the most accurate and efficient manner possible. He helped identify where the software needed some clean-up and reviewed the final guided interviews to ensure that all the required details were included in the four essential estate planning documents—wills, health care powers of attorney, living wills and financial powers of attorney. Brian also encouraged SU2J to incorporate a “beneficiary deed” as a project template because of its importance for many SU2J clients. A beneficiary deed allows someone to transfer, at death, an interest in his or her home to a chosen recipient. For SU2J clients, a home is often their only asset of significant value. And, with an executed beneficiary deed, they can transfer this property to their heirs without a lengthy – and sometimes very costly – court process.

Through Prep with Tech clinics, Brian assists clients with their end-of-life planning documents in a more efficient manner, which allows him to help more clients in less time. And, with video conferencing, the client can watch – in real time – as Brian completes each document, creating an opportunity for instant explanation, clarification, and revisions. This comprehensive experience makes for a relieved, satisfied client.

Brian shared that he volunteers with SU2J because it makes him “feel good while making the community stronger.” Volunteering is how a lawyer can be responsive to the needs of our low-income neighbors by helping people feel heard and ensuring that access to justice becomes a reality for people who may not otherwise be able to access legal services. Brian is always surprised about “how much knowledge lawyers have and how much we can give in a short time. What seems minimal to the lawyer has a huge effect” in our community.



Brian Longenbaugh
West, Longenbaugh, Spanier
& Zickerman, PLLC and
Volunteer Attorney

Step Up to Justice has joined the Arizona End of Life Care Partnership, anchored at United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, to implement the Prep With Tech Project. The Arizona End of Life Care Partnership is supported by The David And Lura Lovell Foundation and the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona. Major funding for the Prep With Tech Project comes from the Shaaron Kent End of Life Grant held at the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona and The David and Lura Lovell Foundation.

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Board Work Groups

Sustainability—As a privately funded non-profit, SU2J is always careful to balance its essential mission-driven services with an equally critical need for ongoing fundraising and development activities. To ensure best fiscal and operational practices, our Board has established four work groups to help support our ever growing donor and volunteer base.

- **Finance and Compliance**—Assists with organizational planning and oversees operational revenues and expenditures.
- **Philanthropy**—Identifies funding resources, manages donor relations, develops corporate sponsorships, and executes grant and fundraising opportunities year-round.
- **Communications**—Oversees publicity and social media and connects SU2J to strategic partners locally and regionally, including the legal community and social service organizations.
- **Client-Eligible Community Action Team**—Comprised of Pima County residents who financially qualify for SU2J assistance, the Action Team meets twice per year to share their perspectives about SU2J programs and services. The Team provides feedback about access points, current services and future programs. These conversations help SU2J further evaluate prospective projects and implementation strategies SU2J is better informed by listening to client voices.

Staff, Fellows and Interns

Riley Arter

Prep with Tech Leader

Briana Hoyos

RENT Leader

Michele Mirto

Executive Director/Attorney at Law

Jordan Paul

HOME Fellow/Attorney at Law

Amanda Rutherford

Director of Outreach/Attorney at Law

Stephanie Shannon

Family Law Fellow/Attorney at Law

Melissa Spiller-Shiner

Associate Director/Attorney at Law

Sam Whitthorne

Intake Specialist/Intern



Top row from L to R –

Jordan Paul, Amanda Rutherford,
Riley Arter, Sam Whitthorne.

Bottom row L to R –

Briana Hoyos, Melissa Spiller-Shiner,
Michele Mirto, Stephanie Shannon

Stewardship/Financials

Annual Budgets

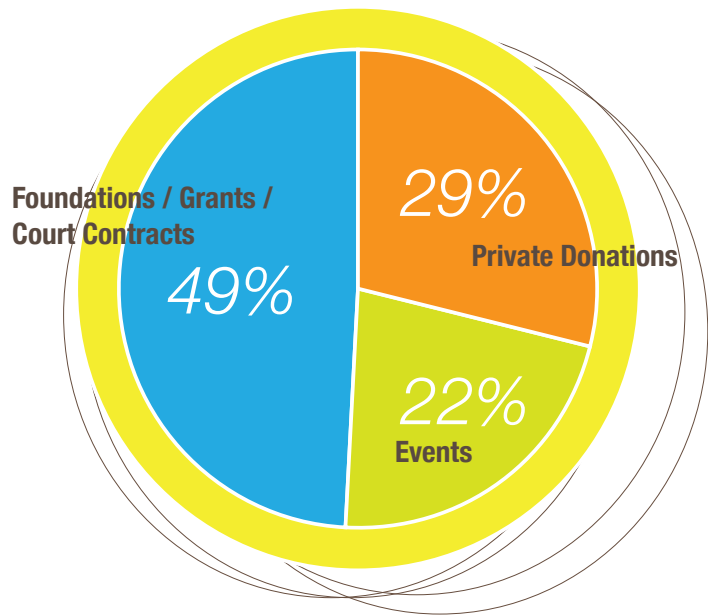
2017 \$229,480.00

2018 \$245,353.00

2019 \$330,000.00

2020 \$394,500.00

2020 Funding Sources



2020

5 Full Time Employees + **3** Part Time Employees

\$1,500,000 in Services Delivered

Services provided to **1,329** low-income residents

\$192 Cost per Case

66% Less than average cost per case for traditional legal aid

Partnerships

SU2J has increased access to justice for low-income residents in Pima County by connecting attorneys, courts, social service providers and the University of Arizona. Our partners include:

Arizona's End of Life Care Partnership – Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education – Arizona Center for Disability Law – Arizona's Pro Bono Network – Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse – Family Housing Resources Cares – Justice for our Neighbors – The Community Foundation for Southern Arizona – Consulate of Mexico – The Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona – The Jewish Community Foundation of Southern Arizona – The Marana Food Bank – Pima Council on Aging – Pima County Administration – Pima County Bar Association – Pima County Superior Court – Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Inc. – Southwest Fair Housing – United States District Court District of Arizona – University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law

Awards, Contracts, & Honors

Beyond strong commitment and support from Southern Arizona's judicial branches and legal community, SU2J has already been recognized nationally, regionally, and locally for its innovative approaches to bridging the justice gap for low-income individuals and families in Pima County:

- 2017 winner University of Arizona McGuire Center for Entrepreneurship Social Impact Competition
- 2017 United States District Court Pro Bono Service Award
- 2017 American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) grant (first in Arizona history)
- 2018 American College of Bankruptcy Foundation grant, to assist low-income families with Chapter 7 bankruptcy
- 2018 winner of the EMERGE! "Answering the Call" award for exceptional service to victims of domestic violence
- 2018 winner of the Meyer & Libby Marmis Humanitarian Award for significant & lasting contributions to human welfare and social reform in Southern Arizona.
- 2018 Finalist, Tucson Metro Chamber of Commerce Copper Cactus awards for Best Non Profit
- 2018 Michele Mirto, SU2J ED, named one of American Bar Association's 10 "Legal Rebels"
- 2019-2020 (2yr) Agnese Nelms Haury Social Justice grant (with University of Arizona's James E. Rogers College of Law) to fund Renter Education for Neighborhoods & Tenants (RENT) outreach project to combat eviction in Tucson's low-income neighborhoods.
- 2019 Arizona Bar Foundation Innovation award
- 2019 American College of Trial Lawyers award to support Family Law Outreach and Technology (FLOAT) Fellow
- 2019 Social Venture Partners Fast Pitch finalist
- 2019 Bigglesworth Family Foundation award for Innovative Technology
- 2020 Women's Foundation of Southern Arizona Founder's Award
- 2020 Arizona Women Lawyers Association, Southern Arizona Chapter, honoree
- 2020 Tucson Electric Power Covid Emergency Relief Award
- 2020 Jewish Community Foundation Covid Emergency Relief Award
- 2020 End of Life Care Partnership anchored at United Way, funded grantee

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We are forever thankful for our amazing network of volunteers, donors, and partners.
If you are interested in helping us help our community, we have ideas!

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We rely on donations for a large portion of our annual budget.

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Please contact us at mmirto@stepuptojustice.org



Step Up to Justice

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