

ANNUAL REPORT

2019

Disability Independence Group

www.justdigit.org





Sharon & Edith Osmond ABA Conference



Matt speaking at University of Miami Petty Theft Symposium



Debbie, Stephanie, & Nicole at an FIU Embrace Training



Matt getting the Paul G. Hearne Award for Disability Rights from the ABA



Matt and his mentor Paul Rein



California Pizza Kitchen getting an award from City of Coral Gables



Debbie, Matt, and Max in San Francisco



Marisol, Judge Soto, Debbie, Thelma Gibson, Marlene Bastien, and Avra Jain at the League of Women Voters of Miami-Dade, 5th Annual Women Who Shine Event.



Matt, Greg, and Ralph with baby goats at the FL Bar Conference



Supper Social Club Dinner at CPK



Lucy working at home

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR STATEMENT

2019 was a fabulous year for DIG. We settled several big cases that you will read about in this annual report. Matt and Stephanie both challenged the status quo and fought hard to enforce the rights of persons with disabilities and their families.

Our work on grants is truly having an impact on our community. The wallet card project continues to make cards and share our materials throughout the country.

Our Supper Social Club continues to grow, and more people are joining us for dinner every month.

The MIA or Miami Inclusion Alliance shared our work at the intersection of domestic violence/sexual assault and disability with the community this year.

The Animal Partners Project received a one-year innovation grant from The Children's Trust to embed Facility Dogs in our child welfare and criminal justice system.

DIG is continuing to build on our successes and continues to work to ensure that persons with disabilities can live in the community, get jobs, have a social life, and have every opportunity open to them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped our work. Our offices are open, and we are here if you need us.

Stay Healthy and Stay Safe,

Debbie



ABOUT DIG

DIG is a nonprofit legal advocacy center for disability rights. At DIG, we look at disability from every angle and perspective.

Our litigation department ensures that the laws are being enforced and interpreted correctly so that people with disabilities have choices in all aspects of their lives.

Our programs bring exciting trainings to families, professionals, and the community at large.

DIG is at the forefront of the disability movement and continues to look at cutting edge disability issues.

Our Mission: Expanding opportunities for participation, education, employment, and acceptance of persons with disabilities through advocacy, litigation, education, and training.

Our Vision: Every person is entitled to equal treatment and dignity.



OUR POSITION STATEMENTS

Position 1: Promoting individual autonomy for Persons with Disabilities including the freedom to make one's own choices.

Position 2: Breaking down attitudinal barriers and promoting greater social awareness and acceptance towards Persons with Disabilities.

Position 3: Ensuring the opportunity for Persons with Disabilities to choose their place of residence within the community on an equal basis with others with access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services.

Position 4: Providing equal information access for Persons with Disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities.

Position 5: Ensuring the right to work and education, on an equal basis with others that is inclusive and accessible to Persons with Disabilities.

Position 6: Advocating for justice in Domestic and International forum for the legal rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Position 7: Supporting Families and Care Givers of Persons with Disabilities.

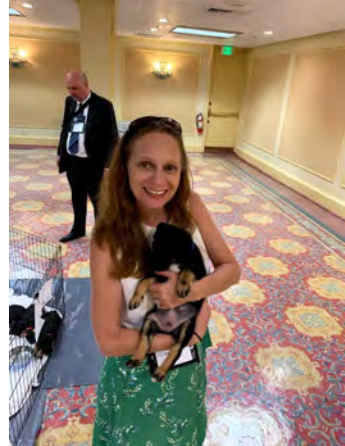


MEET OUR TEAM



Matthew W. Dietz, Esq.
Litigation Director

Deborah Dietz
Executive Director



Sharon L. Langer, Esq.
Development Director



Stephanie L. Langer, Esq.
Staff Attorney



Yarelys Mirabal
Administrative Assistant



Samantha Molina
Client Concierge



Kie De Boehmler
Dog Trainer

Murphee the Dog
Litigation Support

Lucy the Dog
Litigation Support



Andrew L. Sagona, JD
Litigation Assistant



Timothy Taylor
Programs Assistant

Board of Directors
Lawrence Forman, Esq.
Adrienne Gang, M.Ed.
Scott Leffler, CPA, CTP



Mel Giquel
Intern

Andrew Taggart
Intern
Sylvia Salyer
Intern

LITIGATION DEPARTMENT

RIOS V. CITY OF NORTH MIAMI

On July 18, 2016, shortly before 5:00 p.m., a 23-year-old Autistic man, Arnaldo Rios-Soto, left his group home in North Miami with a toy truck. Police officer, Jonothan Aledda, believed the truck was a firearm, shot at Rios, and hit his caretaker, Charles Kinsey.

Rios was arrested, held, and placed in a psychiatric facility for over 30 days.

DIG obtained a settlement for Rios, but more importantly, gave him a voice to ensure that he was afforded the dignity that is the right of any human being. Furthermore, from Arnaldo's experiences, police departments across the country obtained training on not assuming that persons with developmental disabilities pose a threat.



BARTLESON V. MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS

Dr. Jan Bartleson, a counselor and emotional/behavioral disabilities clinician with Miami-Dade Public Schools for twenty-six years, has been unable to perform critical parts of her job independently because her employer requires that she utilize software, web content, and web platforms that are not compatible with screen reading technology. DIG worked in conjunction with Brown,

Goldstein & Levy LLP to represent Dr. Bartleson and the National Federation of the Blind to obtain a consent decree requiring M-DCPS to make all existing websites, forms, and software accessible; to procure only accessible software in the future; and to take other steps to ensure the full inclusion of blind employees in school programs and activities.



CALFAS V. OAK RUN PROPERTIES

DIG successfully represented Vayne Meyers in the rejection of his request for reasonable accommodation for the use of his emotional support duck, Primadonna. Mr. Meyers suffers depression with aspects of suicidal, social isolation, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative identity disorder and required the duck as the duck imprinted on him when it was a duckling. As the duck did not pose a threat to the health or safety of others, DIG obtained an enforceable conciliation agreement through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

SCHAW V. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

In 2006, when Albert Schaw was 20 years old, he fractured his cervical spine in a wrestling accident and became a quadriplegic. Because of his disability, he was not able to get gainful employment and received Social Security Disability Income. In 2015, Albert rented a two-bedroom home for \$ 675 per month, but it was not accessible for him, to the extent that he could not even close the door of the bathroom because he used a wheelchair.

Albert decided to apply for Habitat for Humanity's Home Ownership Program but its minimum income qualification to qualify for a home was more than Albert's income received from Social Security. When Habitat would not accept an accommodation to include a gift from his family, Albert sued. DIG represented Albert and ensured that financial accommodations that are a result of a disability can be obtained under the Fair Housing Act.



LITIGATION DEPARTMENT

KIRK ROOT V. SALAZAR

Kirk Root lives with cerebral palsy and has a better handle of his disability than any other person. However, he was told that he could not live in a house of his choice in Orlando because it was not accessible to him. When he moved in anyways, police were called, and he was thrown out. The landlord was concerned for Kirk's safety, but patriarchal notions of disability, without any knowledge of Kirk's disability denied him his Fair Housing Rights. DIG was proud to represent Kirk!



RAY BISHOP

Raymond Bishop was shot and killed on February 12, 2018. He was 84-year-old Marine who had five adult children and two dogs, Roxie and Ranger.

Ray was on the verge of an eviction and could not bear the thought of not being with his two emotional support dogs. Instead of facing the chance of being forced out of his home, he thought of shooting his dogs and then himself. The police came before he had the chance to complete his plans and shot Ray when he refused to put down his weapon. DIG represented Ray's family in this tragedy that was caused by the denial of an accommodation.



RAHEB V. PINES OF DELRAY

On July 30, 2018, Mr. Raheb entered into a contract to purchase a condominium unit at the Pines of Delray, located in Delray Beach, and disclosed his emotional support dog, Harrison. The Association made invasive inquiries into his disability and need for the animal, and then denied him the opportunity to buy a home – because the association believed that he could have a cat instead of Harrison.

DIG successfully represented Gregory Raheb and the Fair Housing Center of the Greater Palm Beaches to vindicate Mr. Raheb's rights under the Fair Housing Act to have an Emotional Support dog.

DJ V. SARASOTA SCHOOLS

When DJ was in 3rd grade, the Sarasota Public School District improperly placed him on a modified curriculum so that his standardized test scores would not be counted. DJ remained on a modified curriculum until he entered high school. In high school DJ was placed back on a general education curriculum. He was six years behind his peers. DIG represented DJ and in an unprecedented 109 page order from the administrative law judge, won six and half years of compensatory education for DJ to make up for the years lost in the system. the District was also found to have been deliberately indifferent to the needs of this student.



OUR PROJECTS



DIG created and facilitates the Supper Social Club, a monthly neuro-diverse dinner club that connects adults with disabilities for a meal and conversation. Participants get an opportunity to meet new people, enjoy the company of friends and have spirited conversations.



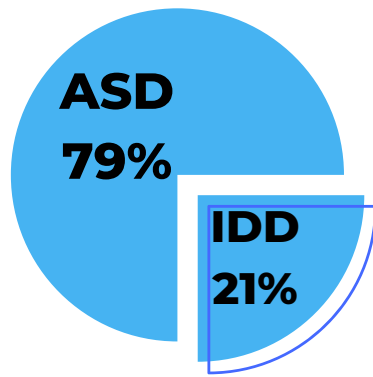
The Mission of the project is to create sustainable, systemic change in the way we deliver services to victims/survivors with disabilities, allowing the individual to make informed, self-directed decisions.



Animal Partners Project is working with agencies both local and statewide to reduce trauma, build resilience and provide normalcy for abused children who are removed from their homes and placed in foster care, child victims of abuse and children in the delinquency systems.



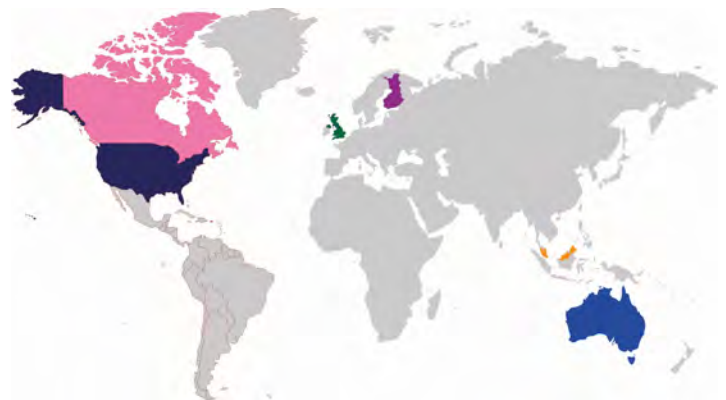
ATVFL or Access the Vote Florida is the state chapter of The REV UP campaign and is an initiative of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) that first began during the 2016 election cycle.



Cards by State



Cards by Country



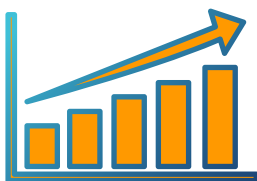
OUR WORK

**417 Intake
Calls**

**91 New
Cases**

**77 Closed
Cases**

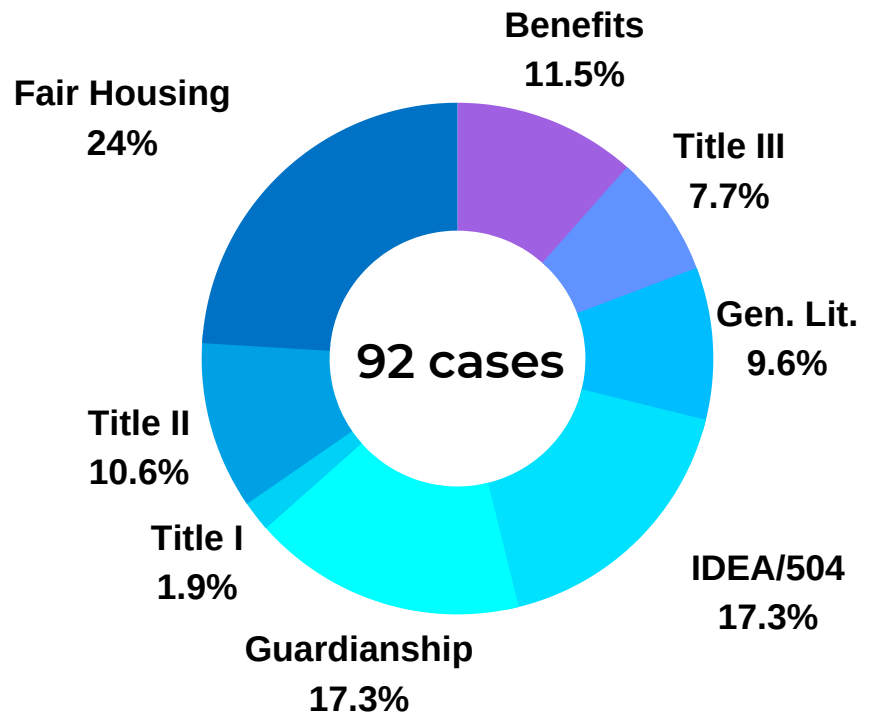
**32 Settled
Cases**



ANNUAL STATISTICS

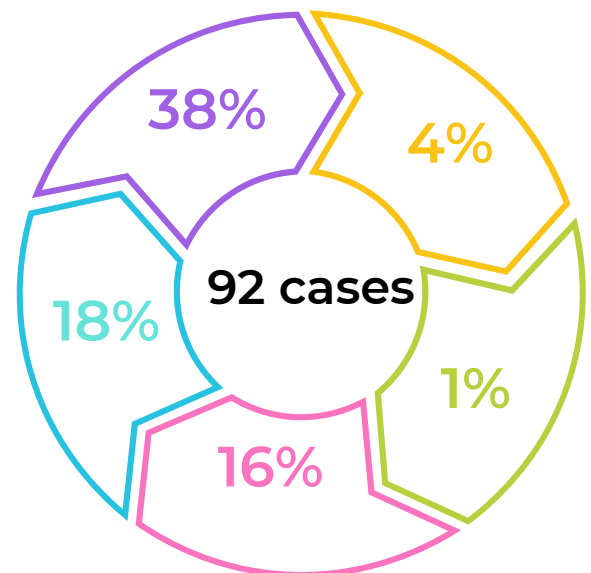


Active Cases by Type



Active Cases by Disability

Intellectual Disability = 38%
Deaf/HOH = 4%
Vision = 1%
Physical = 23%
Mental Illness = 16%
None = 18%



OUR FINANCIALS



Revenue

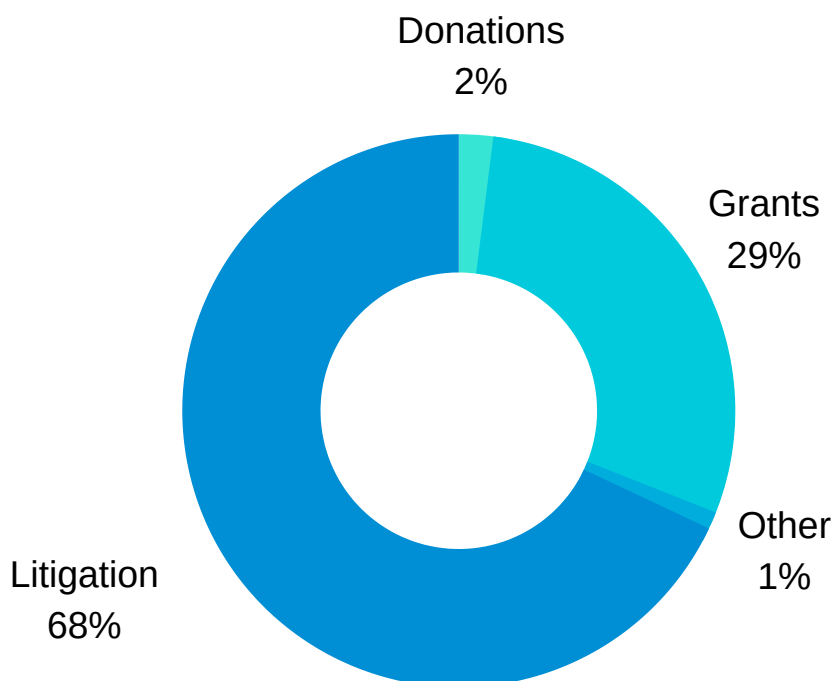
Litigation = \$914,810

Grants = \$388,401

Donations = \$33,529

Other = \$10,026

TOTAL = \$1,346,766



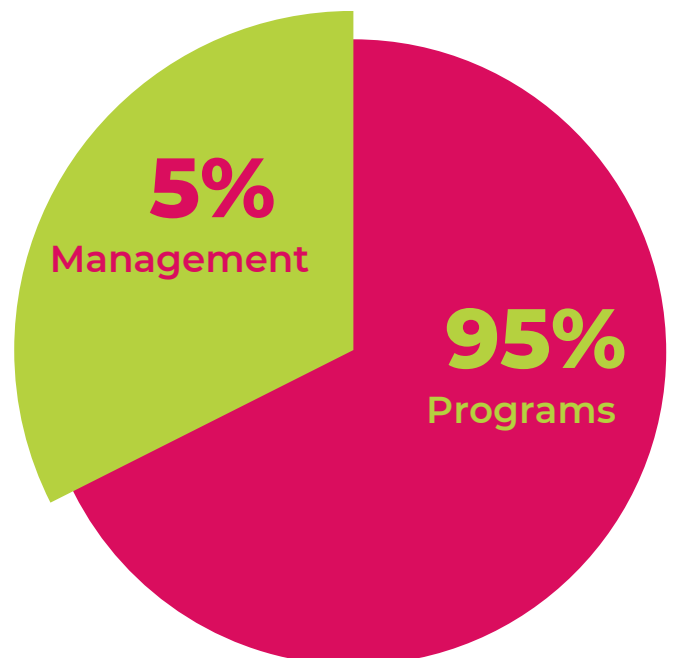


Functional Expenses

Programs = \$911,313

Management= \$50,396

TOTAL = \$961,709



Donate Now