

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

LEGAL AID TRUST
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Legal Aid Trust's Annual Report - 2021

Progress with Purpose

In 2021, the Trust formally began operating out of the office of Nag Associates, located in Rajaji Nagar, Bangalore. This move was not merely logistical; the family left behind by Adv. Rakshit K.N. and his clients who looked to the Trust for continuity. The physical relocation served to consolidate operations, ensuring that existing clients of Rakshit could continue to find a familiar space while also integrating into the Legal Aid Trust's growing ecosystem. To aid this transition, the Trust took steps to enhance its digital and professional footprint. Official email IDs were created for employees to streamline communication, and the Trust's website was launched and hosted, complemented by activating Google Map visibility so clients could easily locate the office.

However, with this transition came a natural expansion of responsibilities. By 2021, it became clear that managing both the legacy cases under the Nag Associates banner and the Trust's own growing docket required a significant enhancement in human resources. The Trust began recruiting new staff—legal, administrative, and support—thereby taking on not only more cases but also more people whose livelihoods now depended on the organization. What had once been a relatively lean, volunteer-driven initiative had evolved into a professionally managed entity with defined roles, verticals, and employee expectations. As part of its formalization process, the Legal Aid Trust also completed its official registration under UDI in 2021, solidifying its legal standing as an entity.

Mr. Praneshwaran, Director of CMR University School of Legal Studies a well-wisher of the Trustees, offered to assist in the management of cases at Nag Associates. This was a welcome offer as Legal Aid Trust was trying to figure out how the volume of cases had to be structured and managed with just a set of junior Advocates at Nag Associates Mr. Anjan, Ms. Kavya, Mr. Babu, Mr. Karthik and Mr. Sagar who had lesser confidence in taking briefing from clients, speaking to clients about the proceedings and taking forward the cases to finality. In light of his contribution, Mr. Praneshwaran was formally onboarded as the Patron of the Legal Aid Trust in 2021.

It was observed that there did not exist a structured matrix of the cases that were being managed at Nag Associates. Without such a document, and by just relying on the court diaries, it was difficult to manage cases. This was also becoming a challenge to plan ahead for the cases and prepare for stages like arguments and evidence etc. This was resulting in the junior advocates of Nag Associates only taking time in majority of the cases to enable Ms. Vidya Selvamony to stabilize the situation, understand cases and then prepare for the critical stages of the cases.

Considering the interest of both the organisations (Nag Associates and Legal Aid Trust), Legal Aid Trust took it upon itself to capture the details of every case file of Nag Associates and make a database. Soon it was realised that capturing the details in a Microsoft Excel format may not be adequate. At this stage an amateur software developer Mr. Sunil, a contact of Ms. Vidya Selvamony, was roped in to develop a very basic software to capture details of clients, cases and segregate the cases into Active & Inactive. The charges for the development were discussed and agreed on a daily wage basis as the developer could not quantify the effort that would be required to develop such an application, nor could Legal Aid Trust provide a clear scope of work and formal structure as to how and what details were to be captured at

every stage. Currently, the work is in progress with regards to software development.

The Application has a Masters Module that captures details like the Locations, Court complexes in those locations and the courts within those complexes, the types of cases that can be taken up by the each court, and the stages of the cases under each category.

Add A Client Module: In this stage the basic details like client name and their contact details are entered into the application. Though it was desired to have details of multiple clients in the same case be entered, due to various challenges, the developer was unable to create this feature as a Mother and Child feature, therefore this continues to be an issue in this application.

Add a Case Module: Once a Client is added into the application, it allows case details of the said client to be entered against the client. In this module basic information like the case number, the filing date, title of the client (Petitioner / defendant etc) could be captured.

Active Case Directory module: Once the cases are updated, the details would be available as an active case directory for viewing and editing. A feature is also added to make cases inactive in this module at a stage where the case is completed or the client takes an NOC.

Case Status Update Module: Here the list of cases scheduled for the day will get listed in advance and the Advocates can update the next date of hearing. This will ensure that the cases are again listed in this module based on the date mentioned by the Advocate. This works like a court diary to track cases that are to come up for hearing on a particular date. While this module was created, it was realised that High Court cases don't get the next date of hearing. Therefore, the module was split into High Court and other courts sections in order to capture the details.

Last but not least, a Report Module was developed to generate various kinds of reports from the data being captured in the system at various stages.

Care was taken to ensure there is minimalistic data entry (to avoid mistakes), and the majority of the fields (where possible) were kept as dropdowns. The skeletal form of the application will be ready by March 2022.

In parallel with operational streamlining, 2021 saw the Trust actively engage in legal awareness and capacity-building initiatives. On October 21, 2021, the Legal Aid Programme was conducted at Kithiganur Village, Bangalore, focusing on extending legal literacy at the grassroots level. Earlier that month, on October 9, 2021, the Trust hosted its first Valedictory Ceremony for Interns, celebrating the contributions of law students who had supported its mission. As part of a broader educational collaboration, an MoU was signed with CMR University to jointly undertake legal awareness campaigns, legal literacy drives, research, advocacy, and the promotion of accessible Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods to reduce the judiciary's caseload.

To support ongoing services and ensure professional financial practices, templates were created and approved for proposals and invoices. A dedicated proposal template was also introduced to communicate ad-hoc legal service offers to clients. Monthly invoices were raised and tracked systematically using a dedicated Payment Tracker, enhancing financial clarity and timeliness.

In an effort to maintain client relations and outreach, customized greetings were regularly sent on festivals and special occasions to existing and potential clients. Furthering public engagement, videos on legal topics by advocates were uploaded on YouTube, reinforcing the Trust's mission of accessible legal education.

NOTE: As part of statutory compliance, UDIN KA/2021/0294699 was issued to Legal Aid Trust.

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