



# **BPI Annual Report**

## Table of Contents

- 1 **Thoughts on BPI from Alex Kotlowitz**
- 2 **Letter from the Board President and Executive Director**
- 3 **Police Accountability and Justice Reform**
- 6 **Housing**
- 8 **Making the *Gautreaux* Legal History Accessible**
- 10 **Early Learning in Altgeld-Riverdale**
- 12 **Contributions**
- 14 **Financials**
- 15 **Staff**
- 16 **Board of Directors**

Cover: Friends enjoying the Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Initiative's Beaubien Woods field trip

## Thoughts on BPI

**A friend recently told me, *I don't recognize my country anymore.* I suspect many share that sentiment. The very foundations of our democracy have been rattled—as has our faith in who we are as a nation. And so in these distressing times, it's essential that we try to remind ourselves why we love this country.**

Right up there on my list, I think of my friends at BPI. Their defiance, their bigheartedness, their empathy, their fearlessness. All things I cherish in our country, right here, in one organization, among this small group of lawyers and fierce advocates.

They've stood beside the desperately poor of public housing. They've battled financial institutions which have walked away from foreclosed homes, leaving them neglected and battered. They've pushed for early learning opportunities in Altgeld Gardens, one of our poorest and most isolated neighborhoods. They've worked to hold the police and local government officials accountable. They killed the city's plan to build an airport in Lake Michigan. In short, they have sweated and toiled to make our democracy work as it should.

BPI brings out the best in us. They're unshakable and tenacious – and have a deep abiding faith in the simple yet crucial notion that life ought to be fair. I'm reminded of something the late Studs Terkel once said: “My goal is to survive the day. To survive it with a semblance of grace, curiosity and a sense I've done something pretty good. I can't survive the day unless everyone else survives it too. I live in a community and if the community isn't in good shape, neither am I.”

That's BPI. And they're not going away. We need them now more than ever.

### Alex Kotlowitz

June 2018



A long-time friend of BPI, **Alex Kotlowitz** may be best known for his national bestseller, *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America*, which the New York Public Library selected as one of the 150 most important books of the twentieth century. Alex's nonfiction stories, which one critic wrote “inform the heart,” have appeared in print, radio, and film. From his documentary, *The Interrupters*, to his stories in *The New York Times Magazine* and on public radio's *This American Life*, he is the recipient of numerous awards.

## Dear Friends,

Alex Kotlowitz’s eloquent reflection on BPI both supports and challenges us. A bracing tonic in tough times as well as a call to action.

As we look back at BPI’s efforts over the last year and ahead to our 50th Anniversary next year from the vantage point of today, two thoughts emerge.

First, a thought about justice: Bryan Stevenson often says that the opposite of poverty isn’t wealth, it’s justice. This idea, at the core of BPI for nearly 50 years, is embedded in our motto “For a Just Society.” It’s at the heart of all of the work described on the pages that follow—our work as an ally of community partners all over the city to create a just system of police accountability in Chicago . . . our work for housing justice, building thriving communities with affordable housing, good schools, and safe streets . . . our work for justice in Altgeld-Riverdale where so many young children and their families experience trauma first-hand . . . our work in justice reform advocating for alternatives to incarceration as well as housing for formerly incarcerated individuals.

A second thought that arises upon reading Alex Kotlowitz’s essay is the idea that we are not in this alone. *Everything* that BPI has been and is able to accomplish—and will ever be able to accomplish—reflects a collective effort. BPI and our community partners. Fellow advocates. Committed foundation funders. Generous individuals. All of us working together for justice—and committed to children, families, and individuals everywhere who are denied justice and their equitable stake in our society.

Thank you for being a part of BPI’s work for a just society and for all you do in the name of justice, especially in these deeply challenging times.

Sincerely,



**Nicholas J. Brunick**  
*Board President*



**E. Hoy McConnell, II**  
*Executive Director*





# Police Accountability and Justice Reform

### **Why is BPI focusing on civilian oversight of the police department?**

In addition to the recently established Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) and new position of Deputy Inspector General for Public Safety, BPI is deeply involved in the formation of an entirely new board that would give the community a powerful new voice in police oversight and reform—one that would help ensure that the people most directly affected by police reforms will play an active role in developing them. We believe this is essential to increasing the legitimacy of the police department, improving police-community relations, and making the city safer for everyone.

### **What approach to civilian oversight does BPI support?**

For more than two years, BPI has worked closely with the Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability (GAPA), a coalition of community-based organizations from across the city. With BPI support, GAPA participants held numerous community “listening” meetings, learned about police accountability structures around the country, consulted extensively with national experts, and then developed a comprehensive proposal to address local concerns and needs. In March 2018 GAPA issued a detailed report and introduced a City Council ordinance embodying its recommendations.

The GAPA ordinance, supported by BPI, creates an independent civilian commission consisting of seven qualified and experienced members to oversee both police practice and policy in Chicago. The commission's primary responsibility would be: (1) to ensure that the right leaders are in place to manage the police department and other oversight bodies; (2) hold these leaders accountable for meeting clearly defined goals; and (3) work in concert with police leadership to set department policy.

The GAPA ordinance also proposes creation of three-member “District Councils” in each of the city’s 22 police districts. Members would be

elected by community residents and charged with strengthening relationships and building trust between community members and the police department.

### **Why should civilians play a role in setting police department policy?**

It is our conviction that in a democracy where police policy has profound implications in every aspect of our lives, the public should play a central role in establishing such policies. Police departments are unique in that they commonly set their own rules with little or no public input. Of course, police department policy should be rooted in expert knowledge about best practices, and on many issues, civilian oversight authority should defer substantially to the police department. But policies also need to be grounded in the needs and values of the community. A civilian oversight board composed of individuals with relevant expertise and supported by a full-time staff can play that role. BPI believes this will lead to more effective policy and increase the legitimacy of the police department in the process.

### **Will the GAPA proposal work? What will it take to get it in place?**

Similar bodies with similar powers exist in other large cities, most notably Los Angeles, which has had a civilian board since 1925. Milwaukee and San Francisco also have civilian boards.

The Chicago City Council is now considering four civilian oversight ordinances. We believe that only the GAPA ordinance will bring about the kind of transformation we need. BPI will continue to work with aldermen, the Mayor, and the Chicago Police Department to build support for the GAPA proposal.

While willing to consider modifications, BPI believes it essential that the final ordinance reflect a shared vision in which Chicago residents play an active role in selecting leaders and setting policy—and one in which residents and police officials collaborate on improving public safety.

**Why has BPI decided to take on reform of the justice system?**

Mass incarceration is among the most pressing social justice issues we face today. Fueled by community disinvestment, harmful sentencing policies, and the absence of needed supportive services, our criminal justice system is both a consequence of and a contributor to racial and economic injustice.

**What is BPI's focus in its justice reform efforts?**

We are currently tackling two separate but interrelated issues: (1) using community supervision as an alternative to incarceration and (2) increasing accessibility to affordable housing for returning individuals.

**What is community supervision and why is it so important?**

An alternative to incarceration, community supervision enables people involved in multiple phases of the criminal justice system—from pre-trial to post-release supervision—to live and work in the community, support their families, and participate in rehabilitative services.

Vastly more people in Illinois and across the country are sentenced to community supervision than to prison or jail. Community supervision programs have the potential to reduce the prison population and its staggering social and economic costs, while lowering recidivism and crime.

However, very few community supervision programs in Illinois are built on what research and experience tell us works best. BPI is collaborating with policy makers and practitioners to help spread the use of best practices. We've conducted trainings for state legislators and drafted a guidebook for state and county officials. We also led the charge to pass a new state law that will expand eligibility for Adult Redeploy Illinois. Adult Redeploy provides financial incentives to Illinois counties to divert people to community-based services and supervision, rather than sending them to jail or prison. Under the old law, only people convicted of non-violent offenses were eligible to participate.

If the Governor signs the new law, anyone eligible for probation will be eligible to participate, subject to local guidelines. This means many more people in the criminal justice system will be able to take advantage of behavioral health services they so desperately need.

**What is BPI doing to make it easier for people to succeed when they return from prison?**

There is broad consensus that the lack of safe and affordable housing makes it much harder for people to succeed when they return from jail or prison and significantly increases the likelihood of re-offending. But housing for returning individuals—especially housing linked to needed social services—is in short supply.

BPI is working to better understand the barriers returning individuals face when trying to find housing. And we're working to build partnerships between housing providers and the criminal justice system in order to reduce those barriers.



# Housing

### **What is CHA doing to make its waiting list system better for public housing applicants?**

Big reforms are underway as CHA moves from a city-wide waiting list to a site-based waiting list system. Throughout 2017 BPI worked closely with CHA to improve its plan for a new system that creates separate waiting lists for individual developments or groups of small developments and scattered sites. CHA applicants will be able to “shop” online to choose their preferred location. The CHA site will feature photos, detailed descriptions of buildings and the neighborhoods where they are located, and estimates of the length of time it will take for a unit to become available.

The implications of this change are enormous and highly beneficial to public housing families. Under the old system, applicants reaching the top of the list (often after waiting many years) were offered the first available unit and were removed from the waitlist if they declined the unit without “good cause.” More applicants were removed from the waitlist than were housed.

Now applicants will choose a preferred location, so it’s highly likely that the new system will be more efficient and that time spent waiting for a public housing apartment will be shortened for many CHA families.

### **With a new housing boom underway, will CHA expand to more areas of Chicago?**

While CHA continues to complete many mixed-income sites where large public housing developments once stood, it is also branching out in new and promising ways to provide public housing in communities well beyond these sites. For example, CHA housing for families is being included in developments across many North Side neighborhoods, including Montclare, Belmont-Cragin,

Albany Park, Logan Square, Humboldt Park, Rogers Park, Edgewater, Lincoln Square, and the Near North. While there has been opposition in two Northwest neighborhoods, for the most part these developments are proceeding with little or no resistance. As they should.

### **How many families do the Chicago and Cook County Housing Authorities serve through their Housing Choice Voucher programs?**

It may be surprising to learn that three times as many families in Chicago and Cook County live in housing subsidized by federal Housing Choice Vouchers than those who live in public housing apartments—specifically some 60,000 voucher households compared to about 20,000 families in housing authority “hard” units.

Vouchers offer families the opportunity to choose their own apartments. However, both community and landlord resistance often make the task of doing so a challenging one. As a result, voucher families are concentrated in limited areas of the City and suburban Cook County, with over 60% living in areas of concentrated poverty. Clearly more needs to be done to help voucher families find homes in neighborhoods with strong schools and safe streets.

### **What can be done to help these families?**

Importantly, a number of housing organizations are working to combat discrimination. At the same time, not only does BPI vigorously advocate with both the city and county housing authorities to make a range of housing search and counseling services available to voucher holders, we are also actively seeking ways to motivate landlords in strong communities to make more apartments available to these families. Additionally, BPI is working with other organizations across the country to change restrictive federal regulations that make it more difficult to find housing in neighborhoods of opportunity.



# Making the *Gautreaux* Legal History Accessible

**In 1999, in a decision by the Seventh Circuit, Judge Diane Wood wrote, “When the time comes to write the story of public housing in the United States, the thirty-plus year saga of this litigation and the experience of the City of Chicago will surely feature prominently.” Fortunately, BPI will soon make the now fifty-plus year history of *Gautreaux et al. v. CHA* significantly easier to write.**

In fall 2018, BPI will launch a digital archive of the *Gautreaux* lawsuit, which began with the initial complaint in 1966 and continues to this day. BPI intends to make the primary sources available online to anyone interested in the history of public housing in Chicago.

Today, online archives are revolutionizing how scholars research and write about the past. I know this firsthand from my experience conducting research for my doctoral dissertation as a graduate student at Northwestern University where I study the history of race, gender, and incarceration in America. For the past two and a half years, I have also been digitizing the *Gautreaux* lawsuit. The opportunity to construct a digital archive has encouraged me to integrate my training as a historian and apply it to the growing fields of the digital humanities and public history. Digital sources are crucial to teachers and students alike. BPI’s online archive will allow researchers to supplement the history of large structural changes, like integration, with individual stories, like those of BPI attorney Alex Polikoff and civil rights activist Dorothy Gautreaux.

The *Gautreaux* archive highlights the grit, strategy, and perseverance demanded in large and complicated lawsuits aimed at social justice. It holds orders, briefs, memoranda, legal transcripts, maps, and photographs. These documents provide fascinating insight into how BPI attorneys remained committed to a vision of equality despite confrontations with intransigent officials.

Thousands of digitized documents give texture to a long and complicated legal history. Stories of how families, communities, and neighborhoods navigated structural racism in Chicago will feel both foreign and all too familiar to researchers today.

BPI’s *Gautreaux* archive enables online visitors to answer important historical questions using contemporary tools. BPI’s contribution to the democratization of primary sources makes it possible for students and scholars to reexamine and reconsider the history of segregation, housing, and racism. For example, popular narratives of the civil rights movement often celebrate the role of hero stories of figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Rosa Parks. Close examination of the *Gautreaux* archive makes it clear that making change on the civil rights front was also the result of painstaking planning and negotiating with different communities, coalitions, and institutions.

For anyone interested in examining the history of public housing in Chicago and the nation, BPI’s digital archive of the 52-year-old *Gautreaux* case will supply an important new resource for taking up that task.



**Bonnie Ernst** (Ph.D., Northwestern University, 2018) is a historian of the United States who researches gender, race, and the carceral state. Her dissertation, “Women in the Age of Mass Incarceration: Punishment, Rights, and Resistance in Michigan,” examines how ideas of gender equality influenced prison activism in the twentieth century. Beginning in the fall of 2018, she will teach in the Department of Criminal Justice at Indiana University Bloomington.

Bonnie’s work on the *Gautreaux* archive was funded by the **Alan Saks Public Interest Internship Endowment**, which was established in 2007 by the family of Alan Saks to honor his lifelong commitment to social justice as a business leader and civic activist. An endearing and pragmatic idealist, Alan was a founding member of BPI’s Board of Directors in 1969, served as the organization’s President from 1986 – 1990, and remained an active Board member until his death in 2005.



# Early Learning in Altgeld-Riverdale

### **Six years after its founding, what progress has the Altgeld–Riverdale Early Learning Initiative made?**

In 2012, BPI convened key stakeholders from across the Altgeld-Riverdale community, home to Chicago’s largest traditional public housing development and where 40% of the population is under age eight, to focus on creating a comprehensive early childhood system of support for young kids and their families.

Six years later, our Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Initiative offers programming across the birth-to-age-eight continuum, including doula/home visiting, early language development, preK-to-kindergarten transitions, and an after-school science enrichment program. Equally important, our community-wide coalition—the engine of this effort—continues to confirm the value of uniting community organizations and institutions to regularly share information and strategize around community needs. With assistance from BPI, the Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition and its efforts are helping to create a broad system of support for young children. Today, the Coalition is regarded as a valuable community resource, and its members view BPI as a trusted partner.

### **How is the PreK-to-Kindergarten Transitions Program impacting kids, teachers, and the community?**

Wrapping up its second year, the Altgeld-Riverdale PreK-to-K Transitions Program stands apart from most other efforts addressing the critical transition from pre-school to kindergarten. While other programs typically focus on the kindergarten transition within one school or program, the Early Learning Coalition’s program uniquely brings together all preK and kindergarten teachers from four separate elementary schools and two child care centers in the Altgeld-Riverdale community.

With support from BPI, local teachers have created a high functioning professional learning community that focuses on aligning classroom practices across all preK and kindergarten programs in Altgeld-Riverdale to help ensure that children experience continuity between their

preK and kindergarten experiences. The program also engages families in this important transition through family events throughout the year.

With higher student-to-teacher ratios, a sharper focus on academic progress, and a brand new routine, the transition from preK to kindergarten is stressful for kids and parents alike. But a smooth transition isn’t just about reducing the jitters for kids and parents—it’s an important developmental turning point in a child’s life. The link between effective transition programs and larger gains in academic achievement by the end of kindergarten is well documented, and these gains are greatest for low-income children.

A lot is at stake as kids transition from preK to kindergarten, and the Altgeld-Riverdale PreK-to-Kindergarten Transitions Program is helping to ensure a smooth and successful experience that will impact kids for years to come.

### **Is the Coalition doing anything to address the issues of stress and trauma in Altgeld–Riverdale?**

The last twenty years have brought a wealth of research regarding ACEs—adverse childhood experiences—and how such experiences impact children’s health, well-being, and development. Since the start of BPI’s early learning work in Altgeld-Riverdale, teachers, parents, and community partners have expressed their concerns regarding children’s exposure to stress and trauma in the community.

To help address this challenge, BPI and the Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition in partnership with the Juvenile Protective Association launched a pilot program to provide monthly trauma support services in all six preK and kindergarten programs during the 2017-2018 school year. A licensed social worker conducts monthly classroom sessions to help children deal with their feelings and fears, using games, art activities, and books. The therapist also provides monthly teacher consultations in each school. The pilot has helped 430 kids and 17 teachers deal more effectively with the high levels of stress in their lives. BPI hopes to expand this program in the coming school year.

# Contributions

## Individual Contributors

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Estate of Kent L. Vlautin  
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*This list reflects  
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 to December 31, 2017.*

*BPI has made every effort to  
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 or omission, please accept our  
 apologies. We would appreciate  
 your advising us so that  
 we may correct our records.  
 Thank you.*

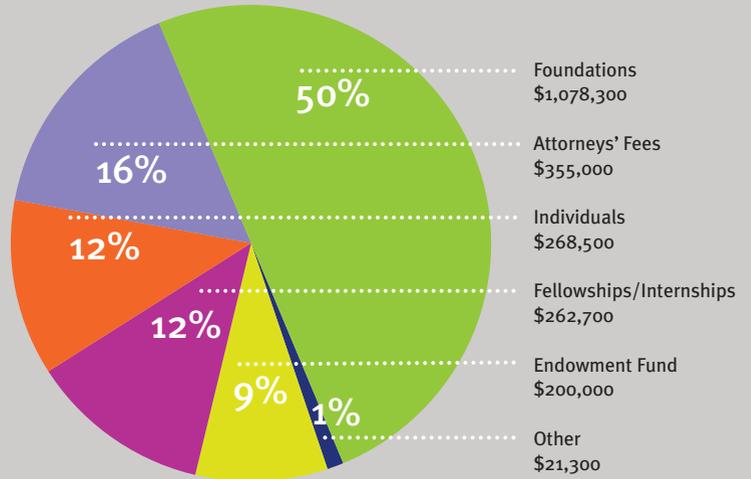
# Financials

January 1 – December 31, 2017 unaudited

## Sources of Funds

Total Sources — \$2,185,800

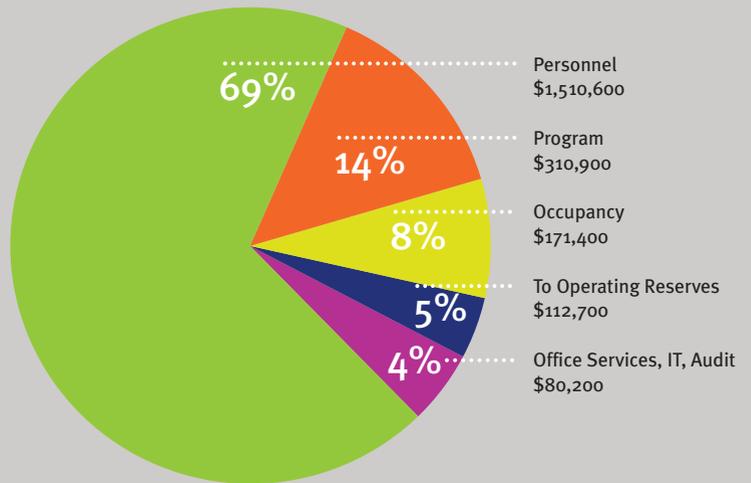
Foundation grants accounted for half of BPI funds in 2017, with individual support and attorneys' fees contributing over a quarter.



## Uses of Funds

Total Uses — \$2,185,800

Personnel and program support expenditures accounted for 83% of funds used in 2017.



# BPI Staff



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## **About BPI**

BPI is a public interest law and policy center that for 49 years has worked to create a just society. Our work today focuses on addressing the challenges of urban poverty and racial inequity, increasing housing and educational opportunity, building vital communities, strengthening early childhood learning, and reforming Illinois' criminal justice system.

Considered one of Chicago's most tenacious and versatile advocates for the public interest, BPI lawyers and policy specialists engage in legal and policy research, advocacy, litigation, organizing, and collaboration with community, nonprofit, government, academic, and business organizations to accomplish our mission.

BPI is a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.



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