The result of our project is an online tool where people with criminal records in Ramsey or Washington Counties can apply for an expungement. The County Attorney can agree to expunge. If they do, they will file the papers with the court and request the expungement.

The traditional expungement process is difficult and expensive. The project allows people with fewer resources to gain access to expungement. It promotes the values of equity, fairness, and redemption.

To see if you might qualify for a criminal expungement in Ramsey or Washington Counties, go to www.helpsealmyrecord.org.
The U.S. Census estimates that 6.5% of the Olmsted County population is black or African American; however, black or African American tenants in Olmsted County are four times more likely to face eviction.

In January 2019, SMRLS, Legal Assistance of Olmsted County and Lutheran Social Services created the Eviction Prevention Project (EPP). At the EPP, tenants are provided legal representation during the eviction process. Tenants also access a streamlined process for finding government and community agency eviction prevention funds.

On May 3, 2019, SMRLS staff in offices throughout our service area gathered for Athena Hollins’ “Cultural Competency” training presentation. “Cultural competency,” according to Ms. Hollins, means “the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures.” This deepened understanding is becoming even more important as Minnesota’s population continues to change and grow increasingly diverse.

SMRLS is committed to educating staff and legal decision-makers about the different cultures of our clients and to working toward equal justice and equal access to the courts, administrative agencies and forums which constitute our system of justice. We hope to host more educational opportunities for our staff and our communities in 2020 and beyond.

A Course in Cultural Competency

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SMRLS Staff at a Glance

31% of SMRLS non-attorneys are people of color

15% of SMRLS attorneys are people of color

27 bilingual SMRLS staff

11 languages spoken by SMRLS staff

Olmsted County Eviction Prevention Project

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The EPP holds clinics on Mondays and Thursdays at the Olmsted County courthouse, offering free legal representation and financial counseling to eligible tenants facing eviction. Members of the Mayo Clinic and IBM legal teams serve in a pro bono capacity. The Olmsted County Judiciary has been very supportive of the EPP, and has revised court calendars, developed new forms and documents, and educated judicial officers to accomplish the goals of the EPP.

The project has seen great success in helping tenants maintain their housing or moving to a new home with the eviction being expunged. Positive relationships have been created with opposing landlords and attorneys. In 2019, Olmsted County had 514 eviction cases. More than 72% of the tenants appearing at court were assisted by the EPP.