



## From the Executive Director's Desk

BY DEBORAH FOWLER

Starting a new year is always a cause for reflection on goals accomplished and those not yet realized. In 2023, during a very difficult legislative session, Texas Appleseed's team worked tirelessly to ensure that the Texans that we work for had a voice at the legislature. We are very proud of the bills that we helped to usher across the finish line, with strong, bipartisan support. We are equally proud of our work with committed leaders at the capitol on bills that didn't make it through the process—and we look forward to continuing to work with those leaders in 2024 to address the barriers that kept priority bills from passing. Appleseed is a trusted resource for data-driven policy analysis and solutions—and we know that the research we undertake during the legislative interim helps policymakers make the case for needed change. Our staff will be hard at work analyzing new research this year, so that we can hit the ground running during the 2025 legislative session.

We are also working on some exciting new initiatives this year that you'll read about in this newsletter. A previous legislative win that created new solutions for survivors of coerced debt has created the opportunity for Texas Appleseed and its partners in the Texas Coalition on Coerced Debt to develop a pilot program in North Texas that will connect survivors to pro bono attorneys who will assist them in obtaining a court order that will allow them to clear that debt from their credit records. We are grateful to the five funders who are supporting this pilot, and we are looking for the pro bono champions who will help this pilot become a successful model for other regions!

Pro bono heroes are critical to Appleseed's work. Each year, we have an opportunity to recognize our pro bono partners at the Good Apple Dinner—in 2023, we were proud to recognize three firms (Akin, DLA Piper LLP, and Hogan Lovells) that assisted Texas and Mexico Appleseed in producing a report, via research, writing, interviewing, and translation, that focused on unaccompanied Mexican children who cross the border into the United States. That report will be launched in the U.S. this year; it recommends policy solutions for both the United States and Mexico, and offers the opportunity for a bi-national solution to the heartbreaking struggles these children face. We were also delighted to recognize two longtime Appleseed supporters—Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray—as our 2023 Good Apples. Their pro bono work and philanthropic efforts serve as an inspiration for all of us, and we are grateful for all that they do.

We are also deeply grateful for our board members, who offer Appleseed tremendous support and help extend our work. We are excited to welcome new members in 2024, and we thank many others for their longtime service.

So—as we start 2024—we want to take a moment to thank our partners and supporters for the successes they ensured through Appleseed's work in 2023. Their collaboration energizes all of us for the work ahead in this new year.

With gratitude,  
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\*Affiliations listed for identification only

## Enlisting Pro Bono Attorney Help in North Texas

Texas Appleseed, as part of the Texas Coalition on Coerced Debt, is seeking the help of pro bono attorneys to assist in a pilot program in Dallas and Tarrant counties. The program begins in January 2024 and focuses on coerced debt—debt incurred by an abuser in the name of their victim, through threat, force or fraud.

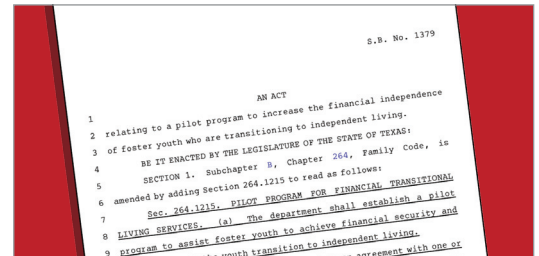
Survivors of domestic violence face numerous obstacles to rebuilding their lives after leaving an abusive relationship. The pilot program will connect survivors with attorneys who can assist them in obtaining a court order declaring them to be a victim of identity theft. The order can help eliminate barriers to accessing employment, housing, credit, and educational opportunities caused by bad credit and credit burdens due to coerced debt.

Current state law extends identity theft protections to survivors of domestic violence who are victims of coerced debt. However, because the process to access these protections can be complicated and technical, many survivors are unable to take advantage of them. Texas Appleseed received funding from five funders to launch the pilot.

This month, Texas Appleseed's website will contain information on how attorneys can formally sign up to participate, along with other general information, such as key dates and trainings. An intake form, for people wanting legal assistance, will also be announced in 2024. Please email Ann Baddour, at [abaddour@texasappleseed.org](mailto:abaddour@texasappleseed.org), with any questions.

## 88th Legislative Session

As part of the regular legislative session last year, Texas Appleseed is proud to announce that eight bills we advocated for were signed into law. For a recap of the bills, some of which go into effect in 2024, see "New Laws in Texas" on the homepage of our website.



## Rainbow of Resources in Spanish



Texas Appleseed's Rainbow of Resources, a resource guide aimed at connecting youth in foster care and youth who are experiencing homelessness with vital LGBTQ+ resources, is now available in Spanish. Thousands of Spanish-speaking youth will now have access to this life-saving information. The new guide can be found by visiting our "Projects" tab and scrolling down to the section titled "Homeless Youth." A press release, in Spanish and English, can be found under our "Resources" tab. Printed copies of the Spanish or English brochure can be requested by emailing [info@texasappleseed.org](mailto:info@texasappleseed.org). The Texas Bar Foundation provided funding support for the creation of the brochure.



## Stay Tuned

We will be adding another social media platform this month! Look out for further updates, as we'll be launching on Threads!

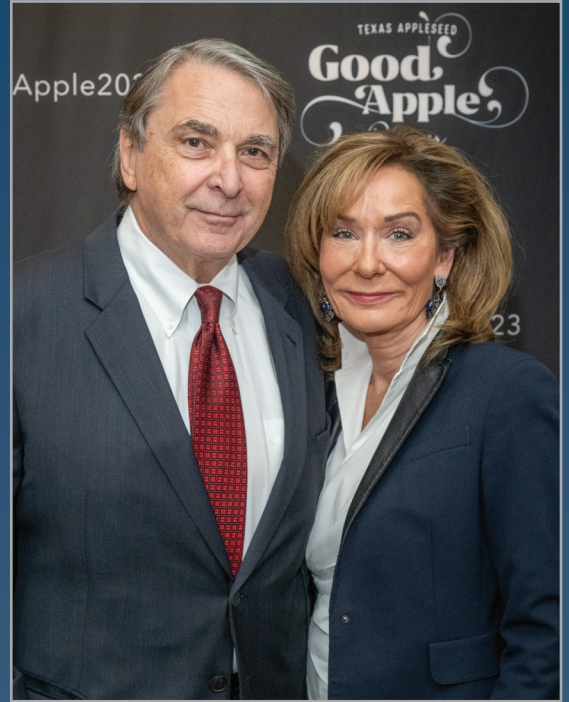
# Good Apple

DINNER

In November 2023, we celebrated the leaders and organizations who made Texas better.

We honored **Melanie Gray** and **Mark Wawro** with our 2023 J. Chrys Dougherty Good Apple Award for their inspiring leadership, commitment to justice, and extensive community service. We also presented the 2023 Pro Bono Leadership Awards to three law firms—**Akin, DLA Piper LLP (US)**, and **Hogan Lovells**—for their incredible support and tireless work on numerous issues of ours.

To learn more about the event, visit “Good Apple Dinner” under the “Get Involved” tab on our website. And, for additional event photos, visit our Photo Gallery at [www.texasappleseed.org/photo-gallery](http://www.texasappleseed.org/photo-gallery).



Event photos by Chris Caselli Photography

# JOIN the EMERGING LEADERS COUNCIL

## THE EMERGING LEADERS COUNCIL

is a member-based arm of Texas Appleseed. They work on various projects pro bono, creating new and innovative ways to support our nonprofit.

If you reside in Texas, we welcome you to join. It is open to all types of professions, whether you are a designer, a medical professional, an educator, an advocate, an attorney, or you have some other type of expertise!

Visit the “Get Involved” section of our website to see membership benefits and for our online application form. The next opportunity to apply is January-March 2024, to welcome additional members starting in April 2024.

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