

# Appleseed Network

Washington, D.C.

[www.appleseednetwork.org](http://www.appleseednetwork.org)

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The Appleseed Network was founded by a group of classmates from Harvard Law School's class of 1958 at their 35th reunion in 1993. Seeking a new approach to pro bono legal organizations, the group planned to focus on systemic social initiatives instead of providing free legal services to individuals. "I don't think any of us in that original group could have anticipated that Appleseed would have developed this way. It was a group of friends who had an idea of how to utilize the talents of accomplished lawyers for the public good," said co-founder Arthur R. Miller.

Since its founding, the Appleseed Network has dedicated itself to "building a society in which opportunities are genuine, access to the law is universal and equal, and government advances the public interest." The organization identifies and researches social injustices and barriers to opportunity, and advocates for lasting solutions through its national network and 17 Appleseed Centers. The extensive network also enables Appleseed to take on a vari-

ety of issues. Executive Director Betsy Cavendish says, "We have legions of pro bono attorneys and partners who are willing to help, and from those legions, we usually can find expertise in the area that we need."

There is a commitment to an interdisciplinary approach through Appleseed's network, although the core of the organization's work is in the law and policy realms. "That's where rights are either vindicated, ignored or abused and I think that one of the great strengths of this country is our commitment to the rule of law and making sure that we live up to that commitment and the promise of opportunity," says Cavendish. The organization looks both at where new laws may be needed and where laws already exist to protect rights or policies it wishes to see, and it plays a role in holding policymakers and other actors accountable.

The legal approach to advocacy has a systemic effect on social injustices, and Appleseed believes it deserves a closer look from grantmakers.

"It's not a Band-aid approach, but a structural, long-term approach, and I think funders do well when they're looking at fixing systems," says Cavendish.

Although Appleseed finds all strategies to advocating for social justice equally important, the organization is determined to focus on laws, making them work for the people they were intended to serve. Cavendish says, "We really believe that the law is where rights and the highest and best ideals of the United States find expression. We owe it to ourselves to live up to those ideals, and we're falling egregiously short in many areas."

*This member spotlight was written by Meredith Brodbeck, communications associate at the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP).*



Betsy Cavendish