

TOWARD JUSTICE

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MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP BRIDGES NETWORKS

A Partnership for Healthy Bodies and Lives

Last December, Susan and her brother Mark were living in her car. While Susan worked as a cashier at Cub Foods, Mark, who has disabilities, spent time at a friend's house or the library. A portion of Susan's wages were being garnished to pay off credit card debt. That didn't leave enough money to even think about renting an apartment.

Susan's doctor at Hennepin County Medical Center's Whittier Clinic wasn't sure about the legalities, but she didn't think someone with an income as low as Susan's should be subject to wage garnishment. She sent Susan to Carrie Graf, the Legal Aid lawyer who works on site at Whittier.

A Vital Pipeline Between Networks

Carrie is on a two-year Equal Justice Works (EJW) Fellowship sponsored by Stinson Leonard Street and the Family of Hyman Edelman. In the first year she established a partnership between Legal Aid and Whittier, modeled after Stinson Leonard's 20+ year partnership with the Community-University Health Care Center in south Minneapolis. Since November, Carrie has been working with the Whittier team to build relationships, communication and trust with medical personnel and patients.

"This medical-legal partnership allows me to serve as a pipeline between two broad networks," says Carrie. "The Whittier team

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knows what kind of help their patients need in order to get healthy and stay that way. When a patient has legal problems that interfere with their health care — housing problems are the most common — I can draw on a wealth of information and experience from my Legal Aid colleagues to seek a solution.”

Carrie has become a vital connection for people like Susan and her brother. In Susan’s case, the first step was discovery that she qualified for and should request an exemption. According to the law, since Susan’s low income qualified her to get state food support, she was not immediately required to pay her credit card debt. Carrie then connected with Jeremy Carvell, who works in Legal Aid’s consumer protection unit. “There are three very specific things one needs to include in an exemption request,” says Carrie. “Once I got that information from Jeremy, writing the letter was easy. For someone like Susan working full-time and living in a car, doing that research and writing the letter would be overwhelming.”

When Carrie isn’t working directly with patients, she continues building the pipeline between the organizations. “Carrie’s excellent communication skills have been a major factor in the success of this partnership,” says Molly Jacques, Whittier’s Practice Manager. “She developed a Steering Committee at the clinic site with an interdisciplinary group including medical residents. She’s done a great job of meeting with the right people, making herself known, and educating the medical staff. She is so adept at reaching out, learning what people need, and making connections.”

For example, Carrie arranged for employment attorneys from Gender Justice to meet with doctors. Patients often can’t get well because they don’t take time off for injury or illness, fearing they will lose their jobs. The employment attorneys instructed the doctors how to craft letters to employers to ensure the patient can get the needed time off. They also explained the new laws protecting pregnant and nursing women in the workplace.



Determining Partnership Success

Early on, staff at Whittier discussed ways to determine the success of the partnership. So far, Carrie’s work has met or exceeded their success criteria, including a measurable, positive impact on patient health. Carrie’s intervention can be tied directly with improved health outcomes, such as a patient who has been moved off of the kidney transplant list because of easier access to good food.

The EJW Fellowship gives Carrie the time and flexibility to develop the program in ways that work best for both patients and medical staff. “This is why I went to law school,” she says. “I love the opportunity to think through a tangle of problems and distill it down to manageable steps. Always, my guiding question is: ‘How can I help patients?’ This collaboration is a chance to change the circumstances that make people sick.”

As for Susan and Mark, a visit to Carrie’s office meant the return of \$645. The wage garnishment stopped. While still faced with financial and other challenges, they have a better chance now that Susan is taking home all of her wages. They are now living in a pay-by-the-week hotel and looking for more stable housing.

SUPPORT THIS MEDICAL LEGAL PROJECT

Carrie’s EJW Fellowship will run out in the fall of 2015, and Legal Aid needs additional funding to make the project sustainable.

Support the long-term viability of the medical-legal partnership at Whittier.

Go to www.MyLegalAid.org click on **DONATE ONLINE** and type “Whittier” in the dedication field.



THE JACOB E. PRITZKER DISABILITY LAW FELLOWSHIP CHOICE AND INTEGRATION PROJECT

A place to flourish

For us, 'people with disabilities' is not a vague, amorphous category. We're talking about our son."

Jacob Pritzker's parents Fred and Renee have been strong advocates throughout his childhood. Now Jacob is an adult, out of the school system and ready to move ahead.

"Given the rigidity and funding limitations for independent housing," says Fred, "there are no good alternatives. That keeps us worrying into the night — what will happen to our son when we're no longer able to care for him, or not here? What kind of life will he have?"

Taking action now and for the future

The Pritzkers have turned worry into action. They established the Jacob E. Pritzker Disability Law Fellowship in cooperation with the University of Minnesota Law School and MMLA's Disability Law Center (DLC). The goal is to enable all individuals with developmental disabilities to choose integrated housing and services that the individual controls and can afford, and to create models that will be used throughout the state.

The one-year fellowship comes at a time when states are under federal pressure from Medicaid to consider what an integrated setting really is, and to move away from regimented, institutionalized settings. It's an opportune time for innovative legal and practical solutions, and that's where Sean Burke, who started work as the Pritzker Fellow in September of 2013, comes in.

"In Minnesota we have an overreliance on the four-person group home," says Sean. "For most people in their 20s who have developmental disabilities, that's their option. It's not a terrible option. It's better than many states have. But it's inflexible, expensive to the state, and not individualized in meaningful ways."

Minnesota has no system in place for creative person-centered planning. "When the power to design and implement housing and services is in the hands of the people who use them," says Sean, "then a home is more than housing — it's a place to flourish. And in the long run, it would be less expensive than our current rigid structure."

He's seen it work. Four families pooled resources, bought a home and remodeled it, negotiated with the county for funds,



and contracted with service providers. The four young men live independently, with support that fits their needs. This endeavor required tremendous effort and personal expenditure for the families involved. Sean would like to see the process replicated on a systems level, so it would be accessible to all persons with disabilities and not just those with the family resources to do it themselves.

Tangible benefits for real people

Sean has been working to empower families, helping them envision options beyond those presented by the county and the state. "I explain the landscape as it is today," he says. "I familiarize families with vocabulary and advocacy tools so they can ask the right questions, develop creative solutions, and get the funding and services support to which they're legally entitled."

Working with individual families gives Sean a broad view on needs throughout the state. He serves on state-level policy committees that are studying the funding structure for housing for people with disabilities. He's also developing a guide for parents and advocates, to help them understand the current options and create new ones.

"We wanted this Fellowship to give tangible benefits to real people," says Fred. "To parents who are tired or getting older, and for adult kids who are bored out of their minds and just want a chance at a life like anyone else, where they have choices about where and how they live. Not decades from now, but now."

Sean has made solid progress so far, and the Pritzkers are delighted with the results. "I've been to housing seminars where people came up and thanked me," says Renee, Jacob's mother. "They tell me about the advocacy Sean has done for them and their kids. His work has already had a profound impact on individual lives."

DYNAMIC YOUNG SUPERVISORS SET COURSE FOR FUTURE

Leading Legal Aid's second century

Nine years ago, MMLA's Minneapolis office welcomed three new attorneys. Today, that cohort — Drew Schaffer, Genevieve Gaboriault and Lael Robertson — has stepped into leadership as supervisors. All three have brought vibrant energy, focus and commitment to their work at Legal Aid over the past nine years and are now leading the work into Legal Aid's second century. If you'd like to see the future of Legal Aid, take a look at these dynamic young supervisors.

HOUSING

Drew Schaffer

In the fall of 2005, Drew Schaffer sat in the audience at housing court, listening to the hearings in order to prepare for his new job in Legal Aid's housing unit. A family with several small children caught his attention. The parents were representing themselves in an eviction case with repair issues.



A few days later the family called Legal Aid and became one of Drew's first cases — and his very first court trial. The father was a janitor and the mother was a nurse, and they lived in a single-family home in North Minneapolis with a Section 8 voucher. The house was infested with mice and bats, had a faulty stove, a constantly running

toilet, water damage, and radiators that didn't heat several rooms properly. After a failed housing quality standards inspection in August, the clients withheld rent. The landlord filed for eviction because of nonpayment. It was October, and the weather was starting to turn chilly.

The trial lasted three days — still Drew's longest court trial to date. The housing court referee initially decided in favor of the landlord. Drew filed a district court appeal. Two months later, the district court judge ruled in favor of the client on all counts. The landlord's eviction action was dismissed, the clients were awarded rent abatement and refund of overpayment, and the landlord was ordered to complete all repairs, with future rent abated by 50% until they were complete.

"I'll never forget that case," says Drew. "That started my love for eviction defense cases."

Drew worked with the University of Minnesota law school housing clinic for his first eight years on MMLA staff — solid teaching experience that he brought to his new supervisory role. "I enjoy supporting the work of others," he says. "I get the benefit of working with new lawyers, plus I have experienced attorneys in the unit to give me guidance and advice. There's so much to teach and learn when it comes to the skill and craft of representing clients. I now have a smaller caseload myself, but I have the satisfaction of helping other attorneys with their cases."

SENIORS

Genevieve Gaboriault

Taking on a new supervisory role meant Genevieve Gaboriault stepped into an entirely new unit. After seven years with housing and the Housing Discrimination Law Project (HDLP), she is the supervisor for Minneapolis Legal Aid's senior law unit. She brings her housing experience to an area of law that often deals with a myriad of issues for a single client.

The seniors unit serves people 60 years and older. John, a 61-year-old veteran, was one of Genevieve's last housing cases and a perfect segue for Genevieve's move into the seniors unit. John called Legal Aid because he was about to lose his home. He lives in an affordable trailer park near a bus line and grocery store, in a trailer that he owns outright. The trailer has a built-on room and porch where John's adult son stays during visits.



The city recently changed licensing requirements and informed the park that John's built-on room came too close to the neighbor's trailer. John, who is on a fixed income, would have to pay someone to tear off the room and porch. The city threatened to take away the park's license, and the park told John he'd have to either pay

for the destruction of part of his home or leave.

Genevieve inspected the property and the park's records and discovered that the park had misplaced the neighbor's trailer. "Even if John could have paid for the work," she says, "it was simply wrong to make him cut off the side of his home. After meeting with him there, I understood how key that place is to his independence and dignity." She prepared a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) to stop the eviction process, and the park owners agreed to negotiate.

“It was great to sit down together, not in our roles as client, attorney, and landlord but as people with a problem to solve. The park owner served danishes, and we figured out a plan.”

Genevieve, John and the park owners agreed to file a variance request with the city. At the hearing, the city agreed to let the trailer and add-on stay intact with extra fire safety conditions. The park paid for an additional smoke detector and thicker dry wall, and John kept his home.

Genevieve keeps John’s thank-you call on her voice mail. “I just want to thank you —” he speaks with great warmth and affection. “It doesn’t get much better than this.”

Genevieve loves the holistic nature of seniors work, and is happy for the opportunity to advocate on multiple fronts for more clients like John. She brings excellent organizational skills to the supervisory role, and also enjoys that part of the job. “The day-to-day of clients and court can be exciting and fun, but also unpredictable. The administrative part of supervising — planning, grant reporting and dealing with forms — is easier to coordinate and control. I like the balance.”

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Lael Robertson

Lael Robertson worked with HDLP under the supervision of Jay Wilkinson for her first seven years. In February of 2013, Lael accepted the position of HDLP supervisor when Jay began supervising another unit. “Those years of consistent guidance from Jay were invaluable,” she says. She looks forward to helping newer lawyers and clerks develop a love of fair housing work, along with expertise in the area.

“We see a lot of sad people in sad situations here,” she says. “Sometimes we get money damages for clients that make a significant difference in their lives, but money can’t repair the harm done by discrimination. Often, it’s most important to have someone see the situation and say, ‘What is happening here is wrong, and the law says you have a right to be treated fairly.’”

Tracy, a single mother who struggles with anxiety and depression, was one of Lael’s memorable HDLP cases. Both of Tracy’s children have autism. In the midst of a depressive episode, Tracy’s landlord gave her an order to vacate based on housekeeping issues. Lael tried first to get a reasonable accommodation from the landlord. She set Tracy up with



an Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services worker and they formed a plan to correct the problem and move forward with regular housekeeping.

The landlord declined, and Tracy faced a sudden move in late December. Stability is crucial for children with autism, and Tracy

had worked hard to get her kids in a stable school situation with good services. Moving quickly would likely take the children out of their schools. The family teetered on the edge of disaster.

Lael drafted a Temporary Restraining Order and a disability discrimination complaint and sent it to the landlord’s attorney as a courtesy before filing. The landlord agreed to give Tracy six months to vacate, along with a neutral reference and an early return of the security deposit. Tracy had time to find suitable housing with a good school placement, and extra cash to help with moving expenses.

Situations like Tracy’s resonate strongly with Lael, who is also a mother. “It’s good to be fighting for something that is right,” she says. “This woman adores her kids, and she wanted so badly to do the right thing for them. Disability and low income are a tough combination. People try hard to live independently and one crisis can derail everything.”

In her new role as supervisor, Lael is particularly interested in public policy. “I love direct client work, but so often we’re putting out immediate fires. Now I’m able to focus more on systemic change, and advocate for clients on a policy level.”

Opportunity > Experience > Leadership

Drew, Genevieve and Lael all had the opportunity to gain experience and develop skills in staff attorney positions. Now, all three continue as direct advocates for clients while extending their reach among their colleagues. Legal Aid depends on both the vibrancy and energy of new attorneys and the experience of seasoned legal services advocates who grow to take their talents to the broader aspects of Legal Aid’s work.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES AND LEGAL AID PARTNERSHIP

The big picture focus

Camila doesn't remember coming to the United States. She crossed the border in a car seat, sound asleep. She was two years old.

Today, Camila is a sixteen-year-old high school student. She wants to get a job to help support her mother and younger siblings, but neither she nor her mother have documentation. Thanks to a grant and partnership with the Office of Catholic Charities, Legal Aid staff attorney Abby Loesch will help Camila apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Camila learned about Legal Aid through the church where she has been serving Mass for the past seven years. Because she entered the United States as a child, is in school, and has never had been in trouble with the law, she is eligible for DACA, which will give her a legal work permit so she can help her family.

Building trust to rebuild lives

Catholic Charities partnered with Legal Aid's Willmar office in 2013 to expand services to more than 3,000 documented and undocumented Hispanic immigrants like Camila who attend church in the New Ulm Diocese. The grant expands both the geographic region that attorneys can serve, and the services they can offer within those regions. With outreach sites in Marshall and Montevideo, legal help is much more easily accessible to immigrants working in the rural areas.

"The geographic access helps, and so does a trusted intermediary," says Abby. "Many immigrants have complicated legal problems and they're afraid if they ask for help, they'll get in more trouble. The partnership allows us to connect with clients in a familiar place, through people they already trust."

In another case, Abby and staff attorney Kristen Shepherd have recently begun to work with Silvia Acosta and her family. Silvia suffered abuse by her first husband and left him, entering the United States. She and her current partner Felipe have been together for 30 years and have raised a family, but both are still legally married to people they haven't seen for that entire time.

Felipe is a legal resident. Their children, including two minors, are all U.S. citizens. Because of this grant, the office can work with the entire family, including adult children and spouses. The first step is to help Silvia get documentation, which brings stability and the chance to work, and eliminates the family's fears of Silvia being deported. Meanwhile, Kristen is beginning the paperwork for divorce proceedings for both Silvia and Felipe.

Getting the big picture

"The beauty of the Catholic Charities grant is that it allows us to work with the big picture," says Abby. "We can strategize all aspects of the situation and follow through from beginning to end. We start with the family's immigration needs, but because of Legal Aid's broad range of expertise we can also address the other legal complications they face."

The Willmar Legal Aid office will work as a team with the rest of Silvia's family to get everyone on the road to citizenship and self-sufficiency. Quality holistic advocacy through the entire process means a chance to get everything above-board and legal.



Sister Anna Marie Reha is the Diocesan Director of Hispanic Ministry in New Ulm. "I see firsthand the suffering that comes when individuals and families are caught in immigration situations that require legal assistance," she says. "Our partnership with MMLA allows me to refer people with confidence to an organization located in western Minnesota, rather than sending them all the way to the Twin Cities or Sioux Falls." She also views the partnership as an important resource for the future. "When we eventually have immigration reform, we will have an established relationship with a legal resource we can trust. I'm so grateful to have that solid foundation with a law office here in the area."

ASSOCIATES' CAMPAIGN AND EMERGING LEADERS

Leading the way to equal justice for all

The Fund for Legal Aid's first Associates' Campaign launched in 2003, creating a leadership opportunity for new lawyers in the Twin Cities. The Campaign brings young attorneys into the circle of Legal Aid supporters and introduces them to opportunities for service in the legal community.

Many of those who take a leadership role in the Associates' Campaign have had a personal experience with Legal Aid.

Associates over the past 10 years have shown leadership in a number of ways. Lead co-chairs serve on The Fund's Board and Executive Committee. Co-chairs and firm captains network extensively with colleagues and friends, encouraging others to give. They organize competitions, rewards and activities for associate donors. One enthusiastic individual can generate hundreds or even thousands of dollars, tripling or quadrupling donations from their firm's associates. Many individuals are quietly generous with their donations, growing their donations with their legal careers. As partners or in-house counsel, several former associate leaders have joined The Fund's Board.

In 2013, the Associates' Campaign raised nearly \$90,000 in individual contributions. Eight co-chairs representing large and small firms organized over 75 captains from firms throughout Hennepin County to reach out to their contacts. More than 530 donors from 53 firms participated.

The 2013 Co-Chairs brought two innovations to the Campaign:

- Recognizing donors who give at their billable hour – more than 20 percent of the associate donors gave at that level.
- Creating an "Emerging Leaders" category, challenging themselves and others to personally give \$500 or more.

The contributions of this year's eight Emerging Leaders made a solid financial impact. Several thousand dollars translates to real change for real people.

Thank you to our 2013 Emerging Leaders

Katie Devlaminck — Stinson Leonard Street LLP

Dan Hall — Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie P.A.

Dan Herber — Faegre Baker Daniels LLP

Calvin Hoffman — Stinson Leonard Street LLP

Matthew Nielsen — Dykema

Cory Olson — Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie P.A.

Kristin Berger Parker — Stinson Leonard Street LLP

Albert Vredeveld — Shumaker & Sieffert, P.A.

"I believe that, in addition to pro bono service, it is every lawyer's professional obligation to financially support legal services for the poor. Indeed, if lawyers won't help fund this service, who will? From personal experience, I can attest that Legal Aid lawyers are the best of the best in providing high quality legal assistance at a great value to their clients and society."

— Dan Herber, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP

"I was first exposed to Legal Aid's work as a law student at the University of Minnesota Law School. I participated in the Housing Clinic taught by Larry McDonough and Drew Schaffer (of Legal Aid). I enjoyed learning from Larry and Drew tremendously, and knew I wanted to continue to support Legal Aid after graduating from law school."

— Calvin Hoffman, Stinson Leonard Street LLP

"I grew up in a home not much different than those of Legal Aid's clients. I've been fortunate enough to rise above poverty. That was possible only because I was given a fair opportunity to succeed. The legal system is intimidating and often excludes those without financial means. You can't expect people to pick themselves out of poverty if the deck is stacked against them. That's why I support Legal Aid's goal of ensuring equal justice for all."

— Cory Olson, Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie P.A.

"Participating in the Campaign for Legal Aid provides me with a valuable reminder of the immediate and urgent need that real people have for critical legal services, something that is sometimes overlooked in the world of intellectual property law where I practice."

— Al Vredeveld, Shumaker & Sieffert, P.A.

"After law school, I volunteered to work at the Minnesota Disability Law Center (DLC) for several months...I saw firsthand the impact that the DLC had in ensuring equal access for people with disabilities to services that are often taken for granted. Knowing the impact that my donation has, I happily donate to Legal Aid."

— Dan Hall, Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie P.A.



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Thanks to everyone who made the
third annual St. Cloud Access to Justice
luncheon a huge success!