

Community Legal Aid of Worcester: Providing Legal Counsel to Underserved Populations In Western and Central Massachusetts



CLA's Mission

To protect and advance the legal rights of low-income, elderly, and other disenfranchised people in order to secure access to basic needs and to challenge institutional barriers to social and economic justice.

Advocacy Units

- Housing (Foreclosure, Eviction, Shelter, Discrimination)
- Domestic Violence/Family Law
- Elder
- Public Benefits and Disability Benefits
- Employment Discrimination
- Humanitarian Immigration



Medical-Legal Partnerships

Medical-Legal partnerships have begun to sweep the nation as one of the most innovative models of providing comprehensive healthcare. These partnerships are designed to bridge the gap between law and medicine as healthcare providers and legal advocates work together to identify and rectify various social determinants that may otherwise be detrimental to a patient's health. A primary goal of this model is to catch both medical and legal issues early in their phases before they escalate and harm patients/clients even more; in other words, medical-legal partnerships hone in on the significance of practicing preventive law and preventive medicine.

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FACM

The Family Advocates of Central Massachusetts (FACM) is a medical-legal partnership between Community Legal Aid (CLA) and UMass Medical School, The UMass Memorial Children's Medical Center, The Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, and The Family Health Center.



Legal advocates at CLA train health care providers at these facilities to screen their patients for potential legal issues that could be responsible (at least in part) for their health issues. Patients are then referred to CLA to receive legal advocacy on these matters.

"My child has been suffering from asthma for the past year, and my landlord refuses to make repairs on our apartment. I think the place may have lead paint and asbestos...can you help us, doctor?"

"My husband says that if I tell the police about what he's been doing to me that he will have me deported and keep our child. I don't want to live like this, but I can't lose my child. What should I do?"

My Summer Work

-Extensively reviewed files of 41 refugee cases that CLA has advocated for since 2009

- Read through case issues pertaining to Mass Health Insurance, Public Benefits (SNAP, TAFDC), and Housing
- Gathered and organized demographic information for each case
- Preliminarily examined case file notes for trends related to the type of advocacy that CLA provided, barriers that prevented or hindered legal aid, different legal issues associated the different populations, and timing associated with the legal issues as well as advocacy

-Observed client intake appointments with a CLA legal advocate at The Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center

-Participated in WRAP site visits to meet with refugees from Burma and educate them about the services that CLA provides

Discussion

The major aim of my summer work was to add to the efforts of CLA in evaluating the barriers that refugees living in the Worcester area face, and the effectiveness of the aid that CLA currently offers these populations. Since an analysis of available data pertaining to these specific populations has not been done before, we can use the information we learn to develop better community training methodologies and support services for refugees living in Worcester. The ultimate goal of this ongoing project to reduce barriers and increase refugee access to benefits, housing, and other necessities.



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References

- <http://www.communitylegal.org/about/projects>
- <http://www.communitylegal.org/about>
- <http://www.worcesterrefugeeassistanceproject.org/>

