



The Legal Project

Pro Bono Corner Winter 2016

Lisa A. Frisch, Executive Director

The Legal Project Marks 20 Years of Service

When newly admitted attorney **Elizabeth Lott** called me in 1995 to discuss a new non-profit, The Legal Project, she explained that the Capital District Women's Bar had formed a program that would organize the volunteer efforts of lawyers to offer legal advice and assistance to victims of abuse and others who couldn't access legal help elsewhere. I immediately knew how extraordinarily important this could be for our community.

At the time, I was the Criminal Justice Bureau Director at the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and was responsible for coordinating legal and policy change across the state in the area of intimate partner violence. I knew, from working with advocates, police, courts, prosecutors and beyond that although we were able to affect quite a bit of positive change in New York's justice system's response, the missing link was accessible civil legal assistance for victims—helping obtain emergency orders of protection, temporary custody of their children or divorce.

Although we constantly tell abuse victims to leave their abusers, it was and still is virtually impossible for the majority of victims of domestic violence to afford a private attorney, particularly for something as resource intensive as a divorce. Elizabeth explained that this new program would focus on serving both domestic violence victims and the "working poor" who were unable to qualify for other forms of legal help and often went without vital guidance and legal assistance—making matters much worse in the long run. I knew then, as I know now, that having a program like The Legal Project in our

community makes a tremendous impact on helping people who otherwise would fall through the enormous chasms in our system.

As we enter the 21st year of The Legal Project, I am pausing to take some time to reflect on these two remarkable decades in our history. This is a particularly important milestone for us; not only in years, but also in the evolution in our efforts to meet the growing community need for civil legal help for the working poor and victims of domestic violence. Our program has gone from one part-time Executive Director to manage our volunteers to a staff of twenty-four along with well over 200 volunteers.

Over the years, The Legal Project became a significant part of the strong network of services that we are so grateful to work with in the Capital Region, serving more than 3,600 people in need each year. The attorneys who first envisioned the concept of The Legal Project wanted to find a way to best organize the volunteer efforts of lawyers and offer this assistance to those who work but often have a job, or three, and live paycheck to paycheck, on the verge of financial disaster.



20 years later...Senator Neil Breslin, Congressman Paul Tonko and Legal Project President Elizabeth Lott at our Pro Bono Awards Luncheon on 10/14/15

Our clients may have assets such as a modest home or a retirement plan, or have abusive partners that maintain all control over the family income but who withhold all but a small allowance to them. Most have never asked for help before and few ever had prior contact with a lawyer for any reason. When they come to us, it

may be the very first time they reached out for assistance or they may come to The Legal Project when they could not qualify for help from other programs. Often unaware of exactly what they need, our phones ring from anxious people needing advice and guidance for a major challenge in their lives. Many are frightened victims of abuse who need emergency legal representation in Family Court, or are seeking to sever their legal ties to their abusers through divorce. Others are desperately trying to save their homes from foreclosure or must deal with a complicated bankruptcy process after dire life circumstances like draining medical bills, death of a spouse or job loss. Some are seeking to become citizens or are dealing with a cumbersome and complex immigration system.

The Legal Project also supports our community in such positive ways as is bringing together volunteer business attorneys who can work with low to moderate income small business owners, including veterans and refugees and immigrants who have dreams and plans to own or expand a business in the region.

Our program continues to take full advantage of the remarkably generous time and talent of the private Bar, law students and many other non-attorney volunteers, and we have developed an extremely skilled and committed staff dedicated to helping those who may have nowhere else to turn, in sometimes the most difficult of situations. The Legal Project does all that it can to locate support or information to everyone who reaches out to us, even if we are unable to provide that help ourselves. No one who is in a life crisis that requires civil legal help should have to go it completely alone. This only prolongs an already deteriorating situation, sometimes to the point of no return.

To date, more than thirty-five thousand people in the Capital Region have directly benefited by the services of our staff or pro bono attorneys, many who had nowhere else to turn. We thank our supporters, our volunteers, our board and our incredible staff for turning the seeds of an idea by the Capital District Women's Bar into a reality.

Congratulations to our Award Winners and Thank You for Your Support!

We held our Pro Bono Awards Luncheon at the Century House in Latham on October 14, 2016 with 160 people in attendance. Congratulations to all of our award winners, who do so much for the community and for our clients.

James T. Towne, Jr., Esq.
The Legal Project Champion Award

The Beltrone Group
Swyer Companies Corporate Leadership Award

Stuyvesant Plaza, Inc.
Friend of The Legal Project

Heather N. Brondi, Esq.
Brigid Nolan Memorial Award for Pro Bono Service to Victims of Domestic Violence

Barbara King, Esq.
Stanley A. Rosen Memorial Award for Service to Victims of Domestic Violence

Jill Nagy, Esq.
Kurt Clobridge Memorial Award for Pro Bono Service

Barbara Weiner, Esq.
Outstanding Service Award

Barbaruolo Law Firm P. C.
Barry A. Gold Law Firm Leadership Award



Awardees Ed Swyer, Jill Nagy, James Towne, Heather Brondi, Joe Caranfa, Anne Erickson on behalf of Barbara Weiner, Janet Kaplan and Barbara King



The Barbaruolo Law Firm, winners of the Barry A. Gold Law Firm Leadership Award



Dr. Paul Byron, Susan Towne and James Towne

Legal Project Champion Award Presented to James T. Towne, Jr.

James T. Towne, Jr. Esq. was presented with The Legal Project Champion Award and he used the opportunity to announce an extremely generous \$50,000 Matching Grant to assist underserved communities with domestic violence and other urgent civil legal problems. Jim also surprised his wife Susan and his brother-in-law Paul Byron when he unveiled a beautiful plaque honoring their father William E. Byron by dedicating The Legal Project's new **Civil Legal Outreach Center** in his memory. Bill Byron cared a great deal about access to justice and helping those less fortunate, and was the first non-attorney President of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York. This Outreach Center is equipped with the technology

to conduct remote meetings and even consultations with clients, as needed, making our services more accessible to those who need them. Thank you, Jim, for your foresight, creativity and generosity. Your investment into this effort will mean a great deal in our work to provide civil legal services to the underserved in the Capital Region. All donations made in our 2015-2016 Winter Appeal will be doubled by this match. Donations can be made on our secure website at www.legalproject.org.

For more great photos of our luncheon and pro bono reception; a list of our generous sponsors; biographies of the award winners; and a listing of the participating restaurants which provided the amazing food, please see our website event page at <http://www.legalproject.org/index.php?page=160>.



Legal Project staff hard at work at the Pro Bono Reception



Our good friend Susan Arbetter from WCNY's Capital Pressroom, helping us announce our raffle winners at the Pro Bono Reception

Immigration Pro Bono Attorney Jill Nagy Wins Kurt Clobridge Memorial Award

We were thrilled to have Kurt Clobridge's wonderful mother Gail join us to help present Immigration attorney Jill Nagy this very special award, honoring her son's legacy as a dedicated volunteer and remarkable lawyer in our community. Thanks to the help of her good friend Darci DeLisle, Gail was able to make the trip from Binghamton, NY to help us celebrate Jill's award and our 20th anniversary.

As Gail noted "...Jill Nagy has worked tirelessly helping others and this award embodies the spirit with which Kurt lived his life. In addition to all that Jill has accomplished, she possesses the virtues of integrity, honesty and the pursuit of justice, irrespective of a person's financial or social standing. Her compassion for others translates into the basic love of other people, the recognition of their problems, and the desire to help."



Attorney Jill Nagy and Gail Clobridge

Gail so generously shared stories about her son Kurt, recalling that when he was a very young boy, when other kids were playing soldier or cowboys, Kurt came home for lunch one day and quite seriously announced that he was going to become a lawyer when he grew up. He never strayed from that plan. Not only *did* Kurt become an attorney, he did so with the idea of helping people and he was a wonderful pro bono attorney for the clients of The Legal Project. He touched the lives of so many in his all too brief time on this earth, and we are proud to honor him by presenting this award each year to other,

exceptional lawyers who do so much for those in need. Thank you, Gail for helping to make our awards luncheon even more special, and to Jill, for all that you do.



Thanks to Lydia Kulbida of WTEN, our fabulous Pro Bono Awards Mistress of Ceremonies

2016 Legal Project Calendar



Diana Bangert-Drowns

Thank you to the very talented artist, silent auction donor (and pro bono volunteer) Diana Bangert-Drowns who donated her original artwork for the 2016 Legal Project calendar! The printing and graphics for the calendar was donated by **Konica-Minolta Business Solutions** and **Modern Press**. We still have some of these gorgeous calendars left-- if you would like one, please email Lisa at lfisch@legalproject.org.

Thank you to the Capital District Bankruptcy Bar Association

We are very grateful to the Capital District Bankruptcy Bar Association for the \$1500 donation for bankruptcy software to The Legal Project, awarded at their holiday party in December. This software will enable The Legal Project's foreclosure attorneys to be able to assist those who are also in need of bankruptcy representation, thus streamlining the cases and providing the most effective service possible.

Welcome to Immigration Attorney Mevlüde Akay!



Thanks to the support of the Office of Court Administration, we have been able to expand our immigration services to include an experienced attorney, who has previously worked in collaboration with The Legal Project for over two years in her volunteer role with the Empire Justice Center. Mevlüde Akay was born and raised in Northern Ireland, and received her law degree from Queen's University, Belfast. She worked as a barrister in London, and then moved to the U.S. in 2013 with her husband, an Albany resident. She graduated with an LL.M. from Harvard Law School and then settled in the Albany area, where she first volunteered at the Empire Justice Center, working on immigration cases. She joined The Legal Project in October 2015 as an immigration attorney, where she represents clients in immigration cases. Previously, she represented asylum applicants at

the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic, and before that she worked as a trial attorney at the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Tribunal in London. Mevlüde is very happy to be serving the immigrant community of the Capital Region, and to be a part of The Legal Project. While not working, she enjoys spending time with her baby boy.

Local Veterans Need Your Help!

We are in need of volunteer attorneys to provide private legal consultations at our veteran's legal clinic at the **Stratton VA Hospital** in Albany, the second Tuesday of each month, 5:30 pm-7 pm. We especially are in need of attorneys with experience in veteran's benefits, bankruptcy, discrimination and civil rights, criminal law or family law. Please contact Jennifer at jguillot@legalproject.org if you are interested or want more information.

Thank you for volunteering September-January!

Bankruptcy

Anthony Arcodia, Esq.
Paula Barbaruolo, Esq.
William Berglund, Esq.
Brian Bronsther, Esq.
Gary Criscione, Esq.
David DeVall, Esq.
Christian Dribusch, Esq.
Marc Ehrlich, Esq.
Kristie Hanson, Esq.
Leigh Hoffman, Esq.
Alan LeCours, Esq.
Justin Myers, Esq.
Michael O'Connor, Esq.
David Price, Esq.
Michael Rhodes-Devey, Esq.
Steven Rodriguez, Esq.
Joann Sternheimer, Esq.
Richard Weiskopf, Esq.

Domestic Violence Legal Connection

Sandra Allen, Esq.
Pamela Babson, Esq.
Vicki Bachman, Esq.
Douglas Broda, Esq.
Heather Brondi, Esq.
Tracey Brown, Esq.

Chad Caplan, Esq.
Martin Cirincione, Esq.
Heather Clickner, Esq.
Eleanor DeCoursey, Esq.
Alexander Dunshee, Esq.
Meg Gilmartin, Esq.
Michelle Haskin, Esq.
Robert Knightly, Esq.
Victoria Lane, Esq.
Noel Mendez, Esq.
Anthony Morelli, Esq.
Joseph Murphy, Esq.
Judith Norrish, Esq.
Elise Powers, Esq.
Lorraine Silverman, Esq.
Nicole Helmer Simon, Esq.
Dina Williams, Esq.

Immigration

Barbara Brenner, Esq.
Theodore Hartman, Esq.
Fred Korkosz, Esq.
Seth Leech, Esq.
Joanne Macri, Esq.
Lisa Mendel, Esq.
Jill Nagy, Esq.
Carlo deOliveira, Esq.
Sarah Rogerson, Esq.
Laurence Stevens, Esq.
Marco Tomakin, Esq.
Brian Wang, Esq.
Barbara Weiner, Esq.

Legally Speaking

Heather Brondi, Esq.
Gayle Hartz, Esq.
Michelle Wildgrube, Esq.
Pam Robich-Wright, Esq.
Dina Williams, Esq.

Albany Housing Authority

Katherine Levitan, Esq.
Meredith Savitt, Esq.
Margaret Vella, Esq.
Coordinators: Louisa Gonzalez & Larry Signor

Albany Public Library

Janet Axelrod, Esq.
Ira Mendleson, Esq.
Ronald Orlando, Esq.
Coordinator: Joseph Chicoine

Ballston Spa Community Center

Michael Belsky, Esq.
Opal Hinds, Esq.
Coordinator: Bronte Roman

Equinox

Janet Axelrod, Esq.
Will Berglund, Esq.
Lori Bovee, Esq.
Charles Feldman, Esq.
Lauren Hunt, Esq.
David Levy, Esq.
Coordinators: Bronte Roman; Anne Siddall; Larry Signor; Pat Vann

HATAS

Lisa Newkirk, Esq.
Michael O'Connor, Esq.
Michael Rhodes-Devey, Esq.
Coordinators: Liz Hitt & Larry Signor

Mechanicville Community Services Center

Anne Reynolds Copps, Esq.
Casey DiPaola, Esq.
Coordinator: Bronte Roman

Saratoga YMCA

Linda Taverni, Esq.
Coordinators: Herb & Shirley Gordon

Schenectady YWCA

Barbara King, Esq.
Edward Salvo, Esq.
Coordinator: Wendi Gapczynski

Small Business Legal Clinic

Jonathan Deily, Esq.

Stratton VA Hospital

Shawn Flaherty, Esq.
Kelly Magnuson, Esq.
Michael O'Connor, Esq.
Coordinator: Larry Signor

Troy Public Library

Anne Hohenstein, Esq.
Coordinator: Laurie Burns

Unity House

Tom Kenney, Esq.
Coordinator: Abe Bolgatz