<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE:</th>
<th>ORIGINATOR:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Community Legal Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subject:**

There Are No Simple Stories
That's the reality our clients bring to us, every day.
When the line starts forming outside our doors before our staff arrives in the morning, the people waiting to see CLS attorneys know they didn’t get into their situations overnight, and they usually know the solutions won’t be instant.

In this annual report, we’d like to introduce you to some of our clients’ stories, and the often complex paths to their conclusions.

**There are no simple stories.**

**That's the reality our clients bring to us, every day.**

Often, a client will come to CLS with a specific problem, such as a utility shutoff because of overdue payments. Once we start working with the client, we often find a variety of other problems that need to be solved before we can address the first problem. For example, the client lives in a house that was owned by her elderly mother, but the mother died before transferring the title. The utility company does not recognize the client’s ownership and will not work out a payment plan with her. When we start to work on getting the house title transferred to the client, we find that her identification documents—social security card and birth certificate, for example—have been lost over time. It is not uncommon for a client to leave her documents behind when fleeing domestic violence. And as we work through these issues, the client also receives notice that she is at risk of foreclosure because she is delinquent in the subprime mortgage her mother secured to repair the roof.

There are no simple solutions. When CLS works with clients we may involve in-house attorneys, paralegals, and social workers. Teams from our nine practice areas often collaborate as client issues cross specialties. We frequently collaborate with our two closest partner organizations—Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA) and the Philadelphia Volunteers for the Indigent Program (VIP)—in addition to several other public interest law practices in southeast Pennsylvania. We also work with attorneys from the private bar, who provide pro bono services directly via CLS or through VIP. Finally, we work with private attorneys as co-counsel on class actions and other complex litigation.

With more than 40 years in the trenches fighting for equal access to justice, CLS knows how to work through the complex, interwoven problems our clients face. We know how to work with other attorneys, the courts, legislators and other organizations to win justice for our clients and to fix laws and regulations so people living in poverty have fewer hurdles in their lives.

We can work through a lot, but there’s one more element to the solution: you. You are an integral part of the CLS team. Whether you advocate for the rights of the poor, fight for better education to lift people out of poverty, or contribute money, you are part of the CLS team and part of the reason for our success. We hope you will see a bit of yourself in this annual report, also, because without you the path to justice would be that much more complicated.

Debby Freedman, Esq.  Barbara Sicalides, Esq.
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Ms. P came to Philadelphia from Haiti 10 years ago and speaks Creole. Her English skills are very limited. Ms. P enrolled in the Philadelphia Gas Works’ low income program, the Customer Responsibility Program, which establishes a fixed monthly bill based on a percent of a customer’s income. Ms. P’s CRP bill was $38.64: although relatively high, Ms. P had been paying her gas bill each month.

PGW terminated Ms. P’s service, alleging unauthorized use and meter tampering. Ms. P had no reason to tamper with her gas meter because a lower meter reading would not have changed the amount of her gas bill. Additionally, PGW demanded more than $3,700 for alleged unauthorized usage even though Ms. P had already paid for her usage through her CRP payments.

For more than seven months, Ms. P had no gas service, including an entire winter with no central heat, hot water or cooking gas.

CLA advocates for affordable rates for low-income utility customers.

CLS Language Access Project coordinates CLS services to Philadelphia’s limited English proficient and immigrant communities. LAP advocates for language access for clients to services and benefits through litigation, administrative and legislative advocacy and policy setting at the local, state and national levels.

CLS Energy Unit attorneys Thu Tran and Phil Bertocci, with Temple Law intern Josie Hyman, filed a Formal Complaint with the Public Utility Commission on behalf of Ms. P, requesting an emergency order for restoration of gas because Ms. P’s joint disorder is exacerbated by lack of hot water. After lengthy negotiations involving a PUC Administrative Law Judge, PGW agreed to restore Ms. P’s service and placed her back on the low income program.

CLS Energy Unit handles client disputes with the gas, electric, and water utilities, with the priorities of preventing service shut offs and obtaining service restoration.

CLS advocates for affordable rates for low-income utility customers.

From LIHEAP to each utility’s low-income programs, CLS and our partners believe our society can provide the basic necessities of heat, water, and electricity for everyone.
CLS takes a holistic approach to serving clients.

In addition to our ABC project, the Family Advocacy Unit and Child Care Law Project look for ways to improve the lives of children by connecting parents with resources they need to reunify their families and by providing referrals and advice on how to maintain a child care business in impoverished neighborhoods.

The Disability Rights Network's vision is that all Pennsylvanians with disabilities are empowered with opportunities and choices, and are fully included in all aspects of community life, having access to quality education, employment opportunities, and housing options, free from abuse, neglect and discrimination.

From a young age, Andrew was not like other children. While he watched his classmates earn praise for their accomplishments, he struggled to retain the information they produced with ease. Over time, he withdrew from his peers and become involved in solitary activities. When engaged in conversation, he insisted on discussing the intricacies of marsupials, a topic he had studied for months on end. While some would dismiss these traits as charming quirks, to the trained eye, they were early symptoms of Asperger's Disorder, a condition he would not be properly diagnosed with for years. His school noticed his learning difficulties and enrolled him in a special education program early on, but Andrew's problems at school were far from over.

In spite of the school's efforts to tailor Andrew's special education program to his needs, his academic performance and conduct deteriorated to an unmanageable level. Unlike some of the other children enrolled in special education, Andrew's IQ was surprisingly close to average, but his functioning impairments told a different story than his cognitive performance. Not only was he unable to focus, he also had begun to receive daily detention notices for bad behavior.

Like many concerned parents, Andrew's mother tried to help her son improve in school, but, after losing her job, she was facing the equally daunting worry of providing him with food and shelter. To help cover the cost of raising her son, she applied for Supplemental Security Income on his behalf, but her request was denied due to his normal IQ level. Living on the $680 per month in unemployment compensation, she knew she needed professional help to challenge the Social Security Administration's unfavorable decision. She came to CLS knowing she couldn't afford to treat her son's developing condition without the cash and medical assistance he would receive as an SSI recipient.

Initially, Andrew's mother simply hoped to appeal SSA's decision, but Ms. Noland felt strongly that Andrew required an education program better suited to his needs. She informed Andrew's mother of her right to contest his initial placement and demand a learning environment that allows her son to reach his full potential. Once Ms. Noland had secured the medical and ancillary evidence of Andrew's special needs for her own case, she referred his mother to the Disability Rights Network. Encouraged by the referral system's past successes and convinced of Andrew's entitlement to a more appropriate education, DRN referred his case to a private attorney, who won the case. Andrew can now look forward to school, and his mother can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that Andrew will receive the medical care and the education he needs for a bright future.
CLS Elderly Law Project specializes in helping seniors overcome some of the problems faced by people who are 60 years old and over. We assist nursing home residents, personal care residents and homebound elderly, as well as other vulnerable seniors in Philadelphia.

The Senior Law Center protects the legal rights and interests of seniors in need, providing free legal services, community legal education, professional training, advice, information and referral services, and advocacy.

CLS works with local, regional, and national partners in the private and public interest bars.

Individual cases like Mr. S’ often lead CLS and our partners to initiate legislative and regulatory action to create protections for low-income people in Philadelphia, and across Pennsylvania and the country.
At 82 years old, Holocaust survivor Shmul Kaplan leans on crutches to walk through his subsidized apartment in Levittown. He pays $67 a month in rent, and receives $140 in food stamps and $600 in Supplemental Security Income, each month.

The United States granted Shmul political asylum when he fled Russia in 1997 to escape anti-Semitism. For Shmul, it was not the first time he experienced religious persecution; he and his mother and sisters fled Russia for Kazakhstan when the Germans invaded during World War II.

Shmul settled in the Philadelphia area. Too old and disabled to work, he qualified for Supplemental Security Income. Both of Shmul’s legs were crushed in a train accident when he was 18, leaving him unable to walk without assistance.

Shmul’s well-being, comfort and safety in America depended on these government benefits. So, when his checks stopped arriving, he started to get worried.

Shmul went to the HIAS and Council Immigration Service of Philadelphia for help, which led him to CLS. At that time, the CLS Public Benefits Unit was serving another client with a case similar to Shmul’s, whose SSI was cut off while the client was in the naturalization, or citizenship application, process.

As a result of the 1996 “welfare reform” law, asylees (and refugees) like Shmul qualify for SSI for up to seven years before obtaining citizenship. In the meantime, asylees are expected to become permanent residents, hold the “green card” for five years, and then apply for citizenship in order to continue their benefits. Shmul had been eager to become an American citizen, and applied for a green card right away.

Like that of many others, however, Shmul’s carefully prepared paperwork was sitting stagnant at Citizenship and Immigration Services. Limits on asylees obtaining green cards delayed people like Shmul obtaining permanent residency, and then the events of September 11, 2001 caused CIS to run more extensive background checks on citizenship applicants, creating a backlog of applications.

Shmul’s SSI was ended in 2004, and he began receiving a reduced benefit of $215 per month in General Assistance while still paying $67 per month in rent. His Medicare health insurance also was improperly terminated so he could no longer see specialists to care for his leg.

CLS attorneys Jonathan Stein, Richard Weisshaupt, and Michael Froehlich worked with HIAS and Council; the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law; and pro bono lawyers from Ballard, Spahr, Andrews & Ingersoll LLC to successfully file a national class action lawsuit to expedite green card and naturalization applications for Shmul and 16 other, named asylees and refugees, and a class of close to 60,000 others who lost or would lose SSI. As a result of this litigation, asylees and refugees who have been affected by the seven-year SSI limit will now have their applications expedited.

Concurrent with the litigation, CLS attorneys pressed for a congressional remedy of this injustice; CLS is one of the only Legal Services programs able to pursue legislative advocacy because we do not accept federal funding which bans such advocacy. Our lobbying effort led to unanimous congressional passage and the President signing into law in October, 2008, a two-year extension on the SSI limit. The new law reinstates thousands back onto SSI and better reflects the time it takes for people like Shmul to become citizens.

Through this legislation, CLS has protected elderly and disabled refugees and asylees like Shmul from losing their main source of income because of bureaucratic delays beyond their control.

Nine years after arriving in the United States, Shmul Kaplan proudly passed the ten-question citizenship test, earning a perfect score, on September 11, 2007. Back on SSI, he can properly care for his leg, his health and his home. Shmul, and thousands like him, will be able to live as a citizen of the country that has given them refuge and hope. Because the court settlement and congressional SSI extension are one-time remedies, much work remains to insure that needy immigrants welcomed to these shores are able to live here with dignity and the necessities of life.

CLS cases often have significant, statewide and national impact.

In addition to the Kaplan case, major CLS cases have opened SSI benefits to people with HIV/AIDS and to a half million disabled children, integrated the Pennsylvania State Police, fed hundreds of thousands of children in Philadelphia’s free school meal program, and many other major victories for low-income people in Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, and throughout the United States.
An opportunity to make a difference...

Your generous support enables Community Legal Services to provide outstanding civil legal services free of charge to our low-income clients at what is often the most critical time in their lives. To make a gift online, or to learn about the many ways in which you can aid CLS in helping low-income Philadelphia, please visit our website at www.cslphil.org and click on “How You Can Help.” Or call the Development Office at 215.981.3732.

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Presented by the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association

Community Legal Services comprises nine legal units specializing in particular areas of civil poverty law. Each unit represents individual clients, engages in advocacy concerning systemic issues identified through direct client work, and provides community education on relevant legal issues to clients, professionals, and advocates.

Housing Unit: Represents private, public, and subsidized housing tenants in matters involving eviction, illegal lockouts, and substandard housing. The unit also uses systems advocacy and litigation to address issues ranging from lead paint elimination, to federal housing policy changes, to tenant eviction laws.

Public Benefits Unit: Counsels clients, provides education and outreach services, and advocates regionally and nationally on welfare, disability, and healthcare issues. The unit also includes the Advocating on Behalf of Children Project, which helps disabled children access medical care.

Family Advocacy Unit: Advocates for parents to keep their children at home or have them returned from foster care to a safe home, and provides assistance and training to other family advocates. The unit monitors and advocates for improvements in dependency court and foster care.

Energy Unit: Protects the rights of low-income utility customers on service and payment issues, represents group clients on utility rate change cases and serves as the Public Advocate in representing all Philadelphia Gas Works residential customers.

Employment Unit: Represents clients with employment-related problems, including claims for fair wages, family and medical leave, discrimination, and barriers to employment. The unit advocates at the national and state levels on workers' rights issues such as maintaining the protections of the unemployment compensation system.

Elderly Law Project: Represents seniors in a wide range of public benefits and consumer matters, including challenges to denials of Medicaid benefits, decisions by managed care organizations to deny care, and violations of residents' right and quality-of-care requirements in nursing homes and personal care homes.

Consumer / Housing Unit: Represents homeowners in disputes, residential foreclosures, fraudulent consumer practices, and issues with banking or check-cashing agencies. The unit uses systems advocacy and litigation to address the predatory lending crisis and other fringe banking issues.

Community Economic Development Unit: Represents small and start-up community associations, faith-based institutions, social service organizations, nonprofits, and businesses to improve the quality of life and the economic viability of Philadelphia's low-income neighborhoods. The Child Care Law Protect (CLLP), a special project of the CED Unit, is devoted to representing child care providers.

Language Access Project: Works to ensure that Community Legal Services is accessible to Philadelphia communities with limited or no English speaking ability, and that legal issues specific to this population are addressed. The illegal failure to provide interpretation and translation services necessary for these communities to access public services is an important focus of the project's work.

All client names in this report have been changed with the exception of Shmul Kaplan.

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Stock photographs have been used throughout as a representation of our clients and to protect their privacy.
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