

DECEMBER 2000

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Campaign for Legal Services Raises More Than \$100,000 in its First Year

In Massachusetts, approximately three out of every five persons who request representation from a legal services provider are turned away due to lack of resources. To help remedy this situation for its clients, South Middlesex Legal Services (SMLS) has embarked on a Campaign for Legal Services, the first major fundraising effort since its founding in 1976. The goal of the Campaign is to raise \$300,000 over three years. "This Campaign will help us to narrow the gap between the number of those eligible for our services and the number we can represent," says Nancy King, Executive Director of SMLS.

The Campaign is directed by the Campaign Leadership Committee, co-chaired by Michael Leon of Nutter, McClennen & Fish, Ralph Lepore of Holland & Knight and Robert Molloy of Staples. Other members include bar and community leaders in the service area. All have contributed an enormous amount of time, and are dedicated to the success of the Campaign.

To begin the fundraising drive, more than 100 people attended a kick-off dinner at the Sherborn Inn on April 10, 2000. Jan Schlichtmann, a well-known Boston attorney portrayed by John Travolta in the movie *A Civil Action*, delivered an inspirational and riveting keynote address. Mr. Schlichtmann represented several Woburn, Massachusetts families, whose children died from leukemia, in a toxic tort claim. Also during the evening, Ralph Lepore recognized the major donors to the Campaign, and thanked them for their support and leadership in this important effort.

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Photo by Kathleen McCarthy DeStefano



Attorney Jan Schlichtmann, keynote speaker at Campaign kick-off dinner.

Campaign Spotlight

Framingham Co-Operative Bank

"When we began our **Campaign for Legal Services**, the Framingham Co-operative Bank was an obvious place to begin," says SMLS Executive Director Nancy King. "The bank has always treated our clients with dignity and respect regardless of the size of their bank accounts or the languages they speak." Two of the bank's leaders stand out in their efforts to aid the Campaign.

Vice President Lawrence E. Erickson is a charter member of the Campaign Leadership Committee, which usually meets in one of the bank's conference rooms, complete with refreshments supplied by Larry. Says Ms. King, "Larry has been an enthusiastic and creative member of the Committee, and is persistent in the pursuit of the Campaign's goal."

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Message From the Executive Director

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a very sincere thank you to everyone who contributed to the first year of our Campaign for Legal Services. The response from lawyers, law firms, corporations and individuals has been heartening, and we are well on the way to meeting our three year goal. It is impossible to overstate the value and importance of your donations. As a result of them, hundreds more clients will receive the legal help they need: more victims of domestic violence will stay safe from brutal partners; more clients will maintain their housing; and more disabled children will obtain an appropriate education. And we will come a little closer to the ideal of "justice for all."

The success of the Campaign, along with an increase in state funding, has enabled SMLS to expand the staff in our Housing and Domestic Violence Units and increase our education attorney to a full time position. In addition, we have been able to hire a paralegal, a participant in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and increase staff in our Private Bar Volunteer Program. All of these additions enhance our ability to represent our clients. None of this could have happened without the individuals and organizations listed in this newsletter.

During the 24 years of its existence, SMLS has depended on fluctuating state and federal funding, United Way and foundation grants to support its work. With such limited and unpredictable funding, we have helped many eligible individuals and families, but have had to turn away many more. Because of the more than \$100,000 raised during this first year of our Campaign, we will be able to say "Yes more often." Once again, on behalf of all the people who will benefit from your generosity, thank you.

Happy Holidays,
Nancy King

Campaign for Legal Services

(continued from page 1)

Six weeks after the kick-off dinner, on May 22, 2000, the Committee hosted the third annual golf tournament to benefit SMLS at the Framingham Country Club. A day of driving, putting, and dining ended with a raffle and live auction. Norm Resha, host of "Calling All Sports" on WBZ radio, presided over much spirited bidding. Thanks to his skill and enthusiasm, the auction provided those in attendance with great entertainment (and some terrific deals) and contributed to the overall success of the day. Due to the generosity of the sponsors, donors, golfers, and bidders, the event raised \$17,000, to bring our total contributions to more than \$100,000.

"We are very encouraged by the results of the 2000 Campaign, and hope to exceed these efforts in 2001," says Michael Leon. "This has been a great way for me, the local bar, and corporations to give back to the community."

Bob Molloy said recently that, "SMLS does so much on a shoestring, but they could do so much more with more resources. Anything given to SMLS is put to such good use. Everyone involved with SMLS cares very much about making sure that all eligible individuals have access to the legal system. With every donation, this aspiration comes closer to becoming a reality."

The pledge card enclosed with this newsletter is for those who would like to make a 2001 contribution before the end of the tax year. Every dollar raised by the Campaign allows SMLS to take a step closer to providing legal representation for all eligible clients.

Photo by Marlene L. DeSautels



Client and children who have been helped by SMLS' housing clinic. Donations helped expand services for this project.

Spotlight

After convincing the trustees of the Framingham Co-operative Bank Charitable Foundation to become a major donor to the Campaign, he started a personal campaign to educate other area banks about SMLS and its funding needs. As a result, many have contributed.

The Framingham Co-operative Bank also participates every year in the SMLS golf tournament as a gold sponsor, and sends a fearsome foursome to play the course. This year, Larry caajoled Norm Resha of WBZ Radio's "Calling All Sports" to emcee our first live auction at the tournament. It was a resounding success!

President Robert P. Lamprey is also an important contributor to our campaign. He created his own innovative and generous way to raise funds for SMLS. When the Massachusetts IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts) Committee requested, as part of their Smaller Bank Campaign, that the Framingham Co-operative raise the interest rate on their IOLTA accounts to 1.5% to generate more funding for civil legal services in the state, Framingham Co-operative responded by raising their rate to 2%.

Bob did not stop there. He has challenged local attorneys to open new IOLTA accounts at the bank—with an added incentive. For every new account opened and active for three months, the bank will donate \$100 to SMLS. Further, once ten accounts have met these criteria and \$1,000 is raised, the bank will match that with another \$1,000. News of this challenge has spread to legal services programs all over the country—and may result in the expansion of access to legal services wherever it is replicated.

For its generous financial contributions, spirited dedication, tireless efforts, and creative innovations, we extend a very special thanks to the Framingham Co-operative Bank.

Photo by Kathleen McCarthy DeStefano



Larry Erickson and Rachel Stewart, of Framingham Co-operative, present the bank's donation of \$10,000 to SMLS at the kick-off dinner.

Photo by Larry Erickson



Kristin Campbell, Vice President and Assistant General Counsel of Staples, gets ready for the "Shotgun" start at the 2000 SMLS golf tournament.

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bate Court For
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Photo by Marlene L. DeSautels



Two attendees at the MetroWest Community Health Fair, which SMLS helped to organize.

Health Care Access Program

South Middlesex Legal Services is pleased to announce the addition of Fran Bakstran to our staff as the new Health Care Access Program (HCAP) and Outreach Program Coordinator. The program is part of a state-funded project designed to assist low- and moderate-income families, disabled individuals, and long-term unemployed persons enroll in state-run health insurance programs. The programs involved are MassHealth and the Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP). There is also a new Insurance Partnership Program that partially subsidizes health insurance purchased by small businesses for low-income employees and their families.

Previously Fran worked for seven years with the SHINE Program (Serving Health Information Needs of Elders), first as a volunteer and later as a regional coordinator. She has developed expertise in Medicare, Medicare supplements and MassHealth for elders. She continues to volunteer for SHINE in her home town of Northborough.

As the HCAP Coordinator, Fran will help families determine eligibility for the state programs. Currently, families and individuals earning up to 133% of the federal poverty level (\$22,680 annually for a family of four) are eligible for MassHealth coverage. The program recently broadened its eligibility requirements for children to 200% of the poverty level (\$34,104 per year for a family of four). Children and teens who do not qualify for MassHealth based on family guidelines may be eligible for CMSP, a primary and preventive health care program administered by the Department of Health.

Fran's enthusiasm and commitment are apparent. She will work part-time both at the SMLS office and at other sites as needed. She is available for outreach presentations and is eager to spread the good news about the expanded medical coverage available in Massachusetts.



Photo by Marlene L. DeSautels

Fran Bakstran, Health Care Access Program Coordinator, helps applicant with insurance forms at the fair.

Private Bar Volunteer Program

To serve more than 27,000 eligible low-income clients in its large geographical service area, SMLS has a staff of ten attorneys and three paralegals. Although our staff is able to help many people, we still must turn away three of every five eligible people who request our services because of funding constraints. More help is needed.

The Private Bar Volunteer Program (PBVP) is a way to provide some of that help, for no fee, to many of the people who would otherwise be denied access to legal services. Attorneys who volunteer their time to SMLS handle domestic relations cases, uncomplicated will and estate work, housing cases, bankruptcies, consumer and unemployment cases. The legal work they provide often dramatically changes the lives of those they assist.

During the past year, local private attorneys contributed more than \$268,000 in free legal services. Charlene Cabral of Hargraves, Karb, Cox & Galvani, a long-time, committed member of our pro bono panel explains, "This program is a great service for people who would otherwise be without legal representation. It also allows lawyers like me to contribute to the community by using our professional skills. I always look forward to working with the clients SMLS refers to me."

The PBVP makes free legal training available to its volunteer lawyers. This year SMLS held seminars on divorce and unemployment law. In addition, a bankruptcy seminar is scheduled for December 2000. We expect more than 75 attorneys to take advantage of the training sessions.

A relatively new project of the PBVP is the Lawyer For the Day Program, which is operated with Women's Protective Services and takes place at the Marlboro Satellite Session of the Middlesex Probate and Family Court. Every Thursday, a volunteer attorney and a battered women's advocate is in attendance to assist unrepresented litigants, many of them victims of domestic violence, by reviewing documents, helping to fill out forms, and providing advice. "So many people must go into a courtroom alone because they cannot afford an attorney and do not know where to get help. It is a growing problem in all courts. This program reaches out to these people, extending some measure of accessible legal help," says Jim McLaughlin of Goguen, McLaughlin, Mahaney & Richards, another member of the SMLS pro bono panel and its Board of Directors.

We want to thank every one of our current pro bono attorneys, each of whom has made such a difference by helping vulnerable families and individuals obtain legal assistance. The positive remarks we receive from them reflect the enormous contribution you are giving to the community.

Photo by Kathleen McCarthy DeStefano



Jim McLaughlin with Devin and Darius Arbabi at the Campaign kick-off dinner. Jim and Darius serve on the SMLS Board of Directors and are active members Private Bar Volunteer Program.

Thanks To The Following Volunteer Attorneys Who Accepted Cases For Our Clients In The Year 2000

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Carla Flanagan, an SMLS client, honored for her courageous efforts to escape domestic abuse. She is shown with her three children, Kelley, Thomas and Kara.

Becoming A Survivor

Carla Flanagan is a survivor—although she almost wasn't. Having suffered through eighteen years of abuse at the hands of her husband, Carla made the big decision to flee her Plainville home with her three children after he had twice choked her into unconsciousness. "As I was passing out I said, 'Dear God, my kids are going to be left with this man, and what have I done for them?'" After she had fled and told the local police the extent of her husband's abuse, they charged him with two counts of attempted murder and 47 counts of assault and battery with a deadly weapon.

One year later, Carla has begun to make the difficult transition from victim to survivor. Early on she appealed to the Domestic Violence Project of SMLS for help with her divorce. Attorney Elizabeth Soulé has been able to assist Carla in her family law and related legal issues, as well as help her deal with other problems, such as her security during court proceedings. As result of Attorney Soulé's efforts, it is likely that Carla will not be ordered to divide the equity in the marital home. This relieves her of the need to assume additional debt or uproot her children.

The R.O.S.E. (Regaining One's Self Esteem) Fund is a national, non-profit organization devoted to providing aid and support for women who are victims of domestic violence. On October 10, 2000, at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston, Carla Flanagan was named this year's recipient of The New England Patriots' R.O.S.E. Award. This is a cash gift for survivors of abuse who serve as role models for other victims striving to rebuild self esteem—which Carla clearly does.

A courageous, caring mother, Carla has three strong and loving children who are beginning to recover from their own struggles. She is a respected nurse, recognized by her peers for her outstanding qualities. The revelation of her painful experience has led to a heightened awareness of the need for her community to tackle domestic violence issues squarely. One response has been the development of Plainville's Domestic Violence Round Table.

Carla believes that violent relationships lead to violence in families and society. Therefore, it is important to teach teens, through example and education, to understand what healthy relationships are. She will use her R.O.S.E. Award to write a book that will teach young people how to recognize and avoid abusive relationships. She has been, and will undoubtedly continue to be, active in domestic violence workshops and community awareness programs, helping to ensure that no one will have to suffer the horror and indignity that she and her children did.

Campaign for Legal Services 2000

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