



HISCOCK LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Annual Report 2014





OUR MISSION

The Hiscock Legal Aid Society promotes the fundamental right of every person to equal justice under the law by providing high quality legal assistance to individuals and families in need in Onondaga County and the surrounding region.

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LETTERS



SUSAN R. HORN
President and C.E.O.

2014 marks Hiscock Legal Aid Society's 65th year serving people in Onondaga County and across Central New York. We began as most organizations do – humble, and as little more than an idea about what an organization like ours could offer the community. Frank H. Hiscock, Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals from 1916 -1926 left initial funding in a bequest to start Hiscock Legal Aid.

What began as a small organization with just a few staff has grown and adapted considerably over the past six-and-a-half decades. Today, we have nearly 60 full-time staff members who represent clients facing a multitude of challenges. 2014, in particular, has been a year of tremendous change.

With support from the local Community, Gifford and Allyn foundations, we've undergone an ambitious, agency-wide technology upgrade. The project has put new computers, cutting edge tablet technology and an integrated, cloud-based document/case management software system directly into the hands of everyone who works here. We've already begun leveraging this technology to streamline our processes and foster collaboration to better serve our clients.

We've introduced "Justice For All" a new community engagement and fundraising initiative that has brought our mission to people in our community through presentations in our office and at local law firms, CPA firms, and the United Way to name just a few.

Our end of year Justice For All fundraising breakfast made more than \$60,000.

We have a brand new, completely redesigned home on the web. If you haven't visited hiscocklegalaid.org, please do.

Of course, some things never change. In 1949, when we first began, we had talented, passionate people to do this work every day. We had donors to believe in our mission. We had the community to believe in the transformative power of level the playing field and promoting justice for all.

With 1 in 5 of the legal needs of low income people unmet today, we still need your support. Thank you.



SUZANNE O. GALBATO
Chair, Board of Directors

Each year, thousands of cases are handled by the dedicated staff of the Hiscock Legal Aid Society.

With each new case opened, and closed, people across our community are provided with an opportunity to be heard; to have potentially explosive conflicts settled peacefully; to have an opportunity to move on from a difficult time in life.

As you page through this report, you will see many facts, figures and statistics from 2014. While we know numbers are important, we also place tremendous value on those people who make up those numbers.

People like Earnestine, profiled later in this report, is one such person. A full-time employee at a local healthcare organization, Earnestine's life was turned upside down with a cancer diagnosis; that same month her mother had a stroke. A short time later, her daughter died leaving her in a custody battle with her grandson's father.

Hiscock Legal Aid Society was able to help Earnestine through what she describes as one of the

most difficult periods in her entire life. It is cases like this, people like Earnestine, who make me beam with pride to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors for this organization.

Thank you for joining us in promoting justice for all.



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HISCOCK CASES OPENED 2014:

Family Court	1,876
Criminal and Family Court Appeals	76
Extradition Defense	41
Parole Defense	543
Civil Program	1,755
Emergency Solutions Grant (Landlord/Tenant)	379
Foreclosure Prevention	207
International Victims Project	150
Parent Success Initiative	31
Cancer Legal Advocacy Services Project	59
Domestic Violence Project	111

HISCOCK CASES CLOSED 2014:

Family Court	1,739
Criminal and Family Court Appeals	81
Extradition Defense	33
Parole Defense	513
Civil Program	1,862
ESG	367
FPP	177
IVP	58
PSI	189
CLASP	98
DV	136



FINANCIALS

2014 EXPENSES

\$4,291,591

Salaries	2,792,247.00
Payroll Taxes & Benefits	882,712.00
Occupancy	160,436.00
Insurance, Office Supplies & Other Misc. Expenses	152,731.00
Equipment Purchase, Lease & Maintenance	111,477.00
Professional Fees & Contracted Services	85,616.00
Publications & Dues	48,853.00
Conferences/Seminars	32,616.00
Public Relations & Fundraising	24,933.00

2014 REVENUES

\$4,565,596

Onondaga County	2,492,945.00
New York State	916,747.00
IOLA Fund of New York State	352,296.00
Other Grants	239,703.00
Fundraising	154,216.00
City of Syracuse	111,816.00
USDOJ – Office on Violence Against Women	106,148.00
Foundations	90,950.00
United Way of CNY	50,755.00
Endowment Fund Grant	50,000.00



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CLIENT STORIES

MEET EARNESTINE

SYRACUSE, NY

Earnestine Williams has called Central New York home for more than two decades. She's worked at an insurance company based at the Syracuse Community Health Center for the past 18 years. In her role as a manager for their enrollment department, Earnestine helps people sign up for insurance.

"I like helping people," said Williams. "Most of the people I work with are on Medicaid and are low income people who don't have health insurance. It gives me great joy to help them."

Earnestine, who has been providing for others facing challenges never thought she'd be in a position where she needed help. That changed in 2011 when she was diagnosed with cancer. That same month, her mother had a stroke. The year after that -- her daughter passed away leaving her in a potential custody battle with her grandson's father. Deiondre, then 12, found his life turned upside down with the death of his mother and his grandmother's illness.

Earnestine, a woman who'd helped so many people in so many ways over the years, found herself in need of help. In addition to her cancer treatment, she had to sort out her grandson's custody.

That's when an attorney from Hiscock Legal Aid Society connected her to our collaborative Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project—CLASP for short.

"Sharon, my attorney, set up an appointment and set up the whole scope of what was going on," said Williams.

Earnestine found the free legal help she received at Hiscock Legal Aid Society to be incredibly useful as she navigated through the complex legal system through one of the most difficult periods of her life.

"We just clicked," said Williams. "She prepared me for the judge's questions when I went to court so I wasn't caught off guard."

"After meeting with Sharon, I had peace of mind," said Williams. "I felt more relaxed. It gave me hope. I was very happy with the service. I felt calm and the whole frustration thing was gone."

Earnestine's grandson lives with her. She's back at work. She says her grandson is doing well too. "He's in school. He's got good grades. His mom always wanted his grades to be up. He has stability."





YEAR IN REVIEW



FAMILY COURT

Our Family Court Program litigated 2,000 cases in the Onondaga County Family Courts this year, and secured highly beneficial outcomes for hundreds of parents and their families.

For example, one parent was reunited with children who had been wrongfully withheld by the other for years. Our team of attorneys and staff gathered and presented law enforcement, school, child protective and mental health information to the court that resulted in a decision awarding this parent full custody; requiring the offending parent to get treatment; and granting an order of protection.

In another case, we were able to help keep a family together, rather than face a placement of their child in foster care due the parents' struggle with addiction. We helped to identify and locate a relative who was willing to offer the parents and the child housing and other support. The court was willing to allow the child and mother to stay together while living with the relative while the parents received her treatment.

We assisted another client with leaving the state to accept a job with much higher pay. We were able to show the court that the non-custodial parent had not been exercising court ordered parenting time; was an untreated drug addict; and had no stable residence for visitation. The visitation provisions were modified and our client was able to improve the quality of life for the children by accepting the new job out of state.



CIVIL

A single mother, targeted by her employer, was summarily dismissed from her teaching position while terms of her employment were being discussed. She was left without income or employment, and in desperate need of assistance. Our extensive representation in an Unemployment Insurance Benefit hearing resulted in a restoration of income, and a personal vindication for our client.

Domestic violence and a brain tumor left our client shaken and frightened. She feared for her son and herself. Our attorney was able to secure a divorce, custody and ample support for our client, allowing her to face her struggles with security and confidence.

A client who sustained unexpected financial hardship and a medical condition that left her with severe anxiety suddenly faced the loss of her home through foreclosure. Unable to navigate the court process alone, our attorney engaged in extensive negotiation with the bank and other creditors. The resulting success included the client's mortgage reinstatement and reduction of other debt, so that the client can remain at home and afford to keep it.



APPEALS

This was another banner year for the Hiscock Legal Aid Appeals program, with a wide range of successes that benefited both individual clients and our overall clientele.

The client (Mr. F.) had previously obtained a reversal of his trespass conviction, as he was a guest of the tenant. The County Court inexplicably sustained the resisting arrest charges, where the underlying arrest was the trespass. The Court of Appeals reversed that conviction as well, finding it insufficient as a matter of law. More importantly, the Court appeared to reverse a 20 year old trend of favoring form over substance, noting that overly stringent application of preservation rules "would raise the disturbing possibility that factually innocent defendants will suffer punishment for no good reason."

The client (Mr. B.) had his conviction reversed, as the lower court threatened him with the maximum sentence if he went to trial and lost. The Fourth Department viewed that as improperly coercive, rendering the plea involuntary.

The client (Mr. C.) had his grand larceny conviction reversed and a new trial ordered, based upon the trial court's improper exclusion of key exculpatory evidence showing that there was no scheme to defraud.



PAROLE

In addition to acquiring countless favorable plea dispositions for hundreds of clients and a record number of dismissals via Habeas Corpus petitions alleging the clients' Due Process rights were violated, the Parole Revocation Defense Unit acquired considerable individual noteworthy dispositions over the course of 2014.

One client, (Mr. A.) was acquitted of charges of attempting to assault his former paramour. Utilizing hundreds of pages of social media and telecommunications records and a surgical cross-examination of the complainant, the complainant was forced to confess that she exaggerated the encounter to have the client incarcerated for dumping her for another woman.

Another client's (Mr. B) charges were dismissed at a Preliminary Hearing after the Unit successfully attacked the complainant's credibility to a point where the Hearing Officer determined their testimony was "unreliable." The client was charged with allegedly stalking and assaulting his ex-girlfriend. During a vigorous cross-examination, the complainant, who was charged with felony Arson for attempting to light the client's home on fire only days prior to the alleged criminal conduct, was forced to confess that she made up the charges as part of a scheme to force the client to drop the felony charges against her in exchange of dropping the charges against him.



CLIENT STORY

MEET JEANINE

BALDWINSVILLE, NY

“You helped me when I had nowhere to turn and I could not help myself,” said Jeanine Anderson, a Baldwinsville resident who turned to Hiscock Legal Aid Society during a particularly difficult period in her life.

A divorced mom of four children, Jeanine’s ex-husband was awarded full custody of her daughter as a result of her addiction. After embracing a life of recovery for many years, Jeanine wanted desperately to again play a central role in her daughter’s life.

“I had no idea what to do,” Jeanine said. “I was stuck.”

At the time, she had just a few hours a week of supervised visitation with her daughter. She needed an advocate to fight for her best interests and she found that in Susan Griffith, Supervising Attorney and Bryn Lovejoy-Grinnell, Senior Attorney.

“Susan was everything a woman wants in a lawyer,” said Jeanine. “She was confident. She was self-assured. She was very much on my side.

When we went into the court room, she was the best representation I could have whether I was paying \$10,000 or 10 cents.”

Hiscock Legal Aid Society was able to get Jeanine far more time with her daughter: the month of August, some school breaks, every Wednesday and every other weekend.

Jeanine reflects on that time, and expresses her gratitude: “I walked through hell in gasoline pants and you guys helped me.”

“Like anyone with an addiction, I am in a whole new world now,” said Jeanine. “I have direction. I have my family and I never take them for granted any more.”

She credits Hiscock Legal Aid with having played a pivotal role in helping move this process along.

“I have played by the rules,” said Jeanine. “I have walked the walk; talked the talk. You guys have stood by me to make sure I am playing by the rules. I have earned my way back to this little girl.”



HLAS + THE COMMUNITY

JUSTICE FOR ALL EVENT

This year Hiscock Legal Aid introduced a new community outreach/fundraising campaign called “Justice for All (JFA). The events held throughout the year were free to attend and lasted no more than an hour. During that time, attendees have an opportunity to take a virtual tour of our mission and vision. Additionally, participants have the opportunity to meet clients and hear their stories.

“We wanted JFA to serve as a compelling, fast-paced way to share the mission and vision of Hiscock Legal Aid Society” said Jason Torreano, Director of Development at Hiscock Legal Aid. “In introducing this new system, our aim was to both friend, and fundraise, for the programs and services of HLAS.”

JFA was held at law firms and businesses in Syracuse, and more than 170 people came through the program over the course of the year.

Nicki Trice is a former client of HLAS and currently serves as a receptionist at the agency. “I feel JFA is important to show how Hiscock Legal Aid not only helps the individual, but how it also empowers families and as a whole helps generations of community members,” said Trice.

The culmination of this year long program took place on December 3 at Drumlins. More than 150 people attended and the agency raised more than \$60,000.

2014 CUPCAKES/SU

Hiscock Legal Aid Society has enjoyed collaborating with entities around Central New York the first half of 2014.

In spring 2014, the agency worked with a capstone course at Syracuse University’s Newhouse School to redesign agency brochures, social media banners and to create videos of clients HLAS has served.

In March, the agency collaborated with 83 and Company – a locally owned bake shop in the Hawley Green Neighborhood – in March on a joint fundraising/buy local event.

On May 1, HLAS worked with several local businesses to celebrate Law Day including Soup R Salad, Vinomania and LoFo, encouraging supporters of HLAS to patronize those businesses on May 1. In return, the agency received a percentage of sales from that day.

2014 VOICES

On October 9, 2014, Hiscock Legal Aid Society and the Everson Museum of Art held this year’s VOICES fundraiser at the Museum. William Hider was the honorary chair for the event. VOICES, a fundraising event entering its fourth year, gives guests the opportunity to support two organizations that encourage and promote self-expression, whether through art or legal advocacy. The event raised more than \$17,000 for each organization.

Susan R. Horn, President/CEO, Hiscock Legal Aid Society, had words of praise for Hider, stating, “Bill Hider is a true Renaissance man: a musician, an artist, a teacher, a man engaged in his community generously sharing his time and talents. We’re so grateful that among his many charitable contributions he has chosen to support the work of the Hiscock Legal Aid Society and the Everson Museum of Art.”

Sarah Massett, Assistant Director of the Everson shared Susan’s sentiments: “The Annual 2014 VOICES event was a resounding success, honoring Bill Hider, who has done so much to make our community a better place, and raising awareness and important funds to two organizations that are essential to the well-being of our region,” said Massett.

“It is truly an honor to join VOICES, and in doing so, support two organizations that are essential to the well-being of our community,” said Hider. “I feel this so strongly because I have been involved personally as a volunteer for both the Hiscock Legal Aid Society and Everson Museum of Art for many years. Communities are about people. The Hiscock Legal Aid Society and Everson Museum of Art strive to serve each individual in our community. By ensuring equal access to justice, and the opportunity for transformational experiences with art, these organizations raise us up.”

LEGAL SERVER

In 2014, HLAS undertook an ambitious IT overhaul that dramatically changed the work flow of the agency. The IT overhaul is the result of a long process that included examining different software packages that could best suit the needs of HLAS.

Older technology that could not cope with the demands and work flow processes of a 21st century firm was replaced with new computers and a new cloud/document/case management system called LegalServer.

LegalServer was implemented the end of 2014 and into 2015. LegalServer is made exclusively for legal aid organizations and streamlines internal processes,

fosters inter-office collaboration and builds capacity for the organization. It also allows for improved grants management, supervision, data input, collection and reporting.

With the new system, attorneys have secure access to the client database from outside the office and are very useful while in court. Attorneys also have access to all paperwork about the case and can scan documents directly to the network. Orders, letters, legal documents are all stored in LegalServer and can be accessed easily without having to find a hard copy.

With the new system, program coordinators input client information for civil matters, family court, parole and extradition, appeals, etc. Everyone has access to this information, including the next court date and case notes.

The new system also records hours of attorney’s time and adds up total hours that are important for future funding opportunities and for reporting requirements.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

We are grateful for the many collaborations we have around the community that allow us to provide holistic support for our clients. These collaborations include but are not limited to HomeHeadquarters (Foreclosure Prevention Project), Legal Services of Central New York (Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project), Vera House (International Victims Project), the Center for Community Alternatives and other human services providers (Parent Success Initiative), Legal Aid Society of Rochester and Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York and Albany (Upstate New York Immigration Law Project).



CLIENT STORY

MEET ANTHONY

SYRACUSE, NY

Anthony Whitaker turned to Hiscock Legal Aid Society when he was at a very difficult point in his life. He had lost his job, his confidence – and his hope for a brighter future.

Anthony describes the treatment he received at Hiscock Legal Aid Society as empowering.

“My attorney was compassionate and supportive, and didn’t make me feel like a charity case,” said Whitaker.

Never having been in a situation quite like this before, and not being one who often relied on others, Anthony felt uncomfortable asking for help. He quickly discovered, however, that his

attorney at Hiscock Legal Aid Society cared deeply about the case and about defending him.

“If it had not been for my attorney, I would have been further in debt,” says Whitaker. “She created an environment of professionalism and provided sound advice.”

Today, Anthony works for a major employer in Central New York. He enjoys spending time with his family and contributing to the community.

“Because of her top-notch performance, I have a good job. I’m paying my bills and have regained my life and my dignity.”



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