



HISCOCK
LEGAL AID
SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

2018

justice for all: What does it mean to you?

We defend. We empower. We collaborate.
We promote justice for all.



OUR VISION

The Hiscock Legal Aid Society, recognized as the most trusted source for legal assistance to those in need, will ensure that no one in our community is denied justice because of a lack of means.

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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Dear friends,

As we look back on the last year, there is much we have to be proud of. Our organization continues to evolve to meet the ever changing needs, and the ever changing legal landscape, of the community we serve.

While much has changed in Syracuse, one fact of life in the salt city continues to be in the headlines: poverty; grinding, generational poverty. The national ratings, news reports and local media all proclaim Syracuse as a deeply divided, poor community.

Syracuse has been faced with the many challenges of poverty, under employment and low employment for years. While our community, like many communities, has its deficits, it also has an abundance of assets.

The Hiscock Legal Aid is one such asset, and our work is vital in addressing the root causes of poverty. Our attorneys and support staff work tirelessly to maintain family integrity, housing and basic freedoms. Our work impacted more than 8,000 people last year.

This work isn't only the right thing to do. It makes economic sense, too. The New York State Commission on Access to Justice estimated that for every dollar spent on civil legal services to low income families, \$10 is returned to New York State.

We believe our community's assets can shine when justice is promoted not just in privileged corners of society, but for everyone. Syracuse is infinitely richer, more compassionate and more equitable as a result of our efforts and the efforts of our clients.

We hope you'll join us in supporting our work in promoting justice for all.

VIRGINIA A. HOVEMAN
BOARD CHAIR



Dear friends:

In 2018, Hiscock Legal Aid Society was able to provide more services to the community than ever before. This was accomplished through reorganization, expansion of funding and updating of our processes and models for the delivery of legal services. These new ways of serving the community were developed and supported by our talented and energetic Board of Directors and Administration and Management Teams.

In 2018, our Appeals, Civil, Family Court and Parole Programs closed more than 5,400 cases compared to 4,600 the year before. This dramatic increase illustrates the hard work of our attorneys and support staff that resulted in significant increases in service delivery across all practice areas, which include appeals, domestic relations, family court, housing, immigration and parole representation.

Our reach has grown by providing noteworthy assistance throughout Upstate New York to hundreds who faced dire immigration and other legal problems. The depth of our responses has grown by adding enhanced social work services to our repertoire.

This year, our funding and resources continued to support our work in promoting justice for all. Onondaga County has steadfastly funded our Appeals, Family Court, Parole and Civil Programs. We also were supported by the State of New York's Office of Indigent Legal Services, Office of New Americans, IOLA and Judiciary funds.

The City of Syracuse continues to assist with our efforts to prevent homelessness and the New York State Bar Foundation, United Way and a myriad of other foundations and private donors affirmed our work by providing support in a wide variety of ways. Our many contributors who support our Justice for All fundraising effort have allowed our practice the flexibility we need to address emergent needs within our programs for the benefit of the community.

While there is still much to do, our vision is clear.

With your support, we will keep working together to ensure no one in our community is denied justice because of a lack of means.

LINDA GEHRON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRESIDENT AND C.E.O.

THANK YOU TO SUZANNE GALBATO

Hiscock Legal Aid Society said thank you and farewell to outgoing long time board member and immediate past board chair Suzanne Galbato who concluded her board service in 2018.

During her time as chair, Suzanne led a dynamic board in supporting the ongoing evolution of the Hiscock Legal Aid Society.

Suzanne shared this sentiment about HLA in a previous annual report: "I've often thought that one of the most valuable, affirming things for anyone is to know that they are being heard," said Suzanne. "At Hiscock Legal Aid, we often work with people who are at one of the most difficult, precarious points in their life. Oftentimes, before our attorneys can address a client's needs or make any inroads on a case, they must—like any human relationship— establish trust with the client. To gain trust, they must listen – not simply to respond, but to truly hear and understand the client's situation."

"Suzanne Galbato served as chair during an exciting period of growth and change at the Hiscock Legal Aid Society," said Linda Gehron, Executive Director, President and C.E.O. "During her tenure, she worked closely with HLA leadership as the agency saw its budget grow in size, expand programs to better serve the community, and transition to a new President and C.E.O. following the retirement of Susan Horn. We are most grateful for Suzanne's service."

CONGRATULATIONS TO JEAN SHIRLEY LIBERTY BELL AWARD RECIPIENT (FROM ONONDAGA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION):

In 2018, HLA Client Advocate Jean Shirley received the 2018 Liberty Bell Award.

The award is given each year to a non-lawyer who, outside of his or her regular employment, selflessly promotes the values of American democracy and its rule of law. The Liberty Bell award is among the American Bar Association's top honors.

Jean Shirley has been known for her tenacious work ethic, magnetic personality, calm-headed demeanor, and her calling to assist those less fortunate. Jean boasts a 45-year career with Hiscock Legal Aid Society as a client advocate most recently in its Parole Program. For this program, Jean screens clients who've violated parole supervision conditions and works to find reasonable and appropriate rehabilitation and treatment alternatives to incarceration.

By providing clients with the interpersonal skills needed to take responsibility and feel empowered to address family, substance abuse, or mental health issues, Jean "stimulates a deeper sense of individual responsibility, so that folks understand their rights and their duties. Jean manages to do this in a non-threatening and disarming manner, creating trusting and lasting relationships that lead to personal growth," said Linda Gehron, Executive Director, President and CEO, Hiscock Legal Aid Society. "I have seen Jean's presence sustain our clients through very difficult and emotional litigation, making it possible for them to succeed."

OFFICERS

Virginia A. Hoveman
CHAIR

Mark Field
CHAIR ELECT

Margaret M. Cassady
VICE CHAIR

Joseph A. Hardick
SECRETARY/TREASURER

Linda Gehron
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRESIDENT + C.E.O.

MEMBERS

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Nadine C. Bell
Cameron T. Bernard
John Buss
David M. Carnie
Patricia J. Curtin
Wynetta Devore
Carol Dwyer
Sam A. Elbadawi
Suzanne O. Galbato
Margaret M. Harding

Conor Kirchner
Patricia Lynn-Ford
Jillian L. McGuire
Shannon O'Connor
Matthew L. Parry
John G. Powers
Janice T. Rosbrook
Stephen Rosenholm
Barry M. Shulman
Paul F. Vellano
Earnestine Williams

**OPENED:
5,434**

**CLOSED:
5,408**



37%

According to a 2016 report from the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, It is estimated that only 37% of the civil legal needs of low-income New Yorkers are met by existing resources.

\$10

It is estimated that \$10 is returned to the New York State Treasury for every dollar invested in civil legal services.



FAMILY COURT

2018 has been a fantastic year for our Family Court Program.

In the past, our Family Court Program had a client advocate and often times a social work intern. In 2018, we have created an entire team that we call the Social Work Team which includes two interns who are going to Syracuse University to obtain their Masters in Social Work as well as a part time LMSW who is also an attorney.

Our team assists mostly clients who have pending neglect and abuse cases in some of the most vulnerable and critical times of their lives.

Their assistance includes making referrals for services, helping with transportation and necessities, assisting with housing as

well as being present at court appearances so our clients have a team behind them inside and outside of the courtroom.

In addition, we have had many success stories for the families we have represented.

We have helped survivors of domestic violence obtain orders of protection and retrieve their children back from their abuser, we have been successful in a number of hearings including but not limited to child support violations, custody, family offense, and imminent risk hearings.

Families have been mended as a result of our family court team's effort.



PAROLE REVOCATION DEFENSE

In 2018, the Parole Revocation Program continued to provide zealous representation to persons charged with violating the terms and conditions of parole, defending their due process rights, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.

In addition to defending our clients against serious allegations at their parole revocation hearings, we filed several petitions for a writ of habeas corpus, arguing that the Division of Parole violated our clients' due process rights during the parole revocation process. In one case, we successfully advocated for the release of a client who was ordered to enter the Willard Drug Treatment Campus but was held in jail for an

excessive length of time before being sent to the program. In several other cases, we gained the release of clients who were illegally detained at their preliminary revocation hearings, for reasons including insufficient evidence and denial of the basic right to present their own evidence.

In numerous other cases, our attorneys, with the invaluable assistance of a full-time social worker, were successful in diverting our clients to community-based treatment programs, giving them the opportunity to address underlying substance abuse and mental health issues in a therapeutic setting instead of state prison.



CIVIL

The HLA Civil Program attorneys and support staff continued to zealously advocate for their clients in 2018, closing more than 2,000 cases.

The Domestic Relations Unit at HLA represented many clients in divorce and other family law matters, providing them with guidance and advocacy. One case resulted in our client receiving financially necessary spousal maintenance for a period of five years, and another led to a domestic violence survivor obtaining an order allowing them to keep their address confidential from their abusive partner.

The devoted members of HLA's Immigration Unit continued to help those in need of assistance in immigration matters such as applications for citizenship, asylum applications, and other forms of humanitarian relief. This included obtaining an extension of Temporary Protective Status for a client who was transported to the United States for emergency medical care after he was severely and permanently injured in an earthquake that struck Haiti.

The Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project provided comprehensive legal services to low-income individuals and families affected by cancer, which in one case meant completing a will for a client that ensured that her partner of 30 years kept the house they had lived in for so long.

HLA's dedicated eviction defense attorney appeared in Syracuse City Court daily to protect the rights of tenants and keep them in their home, and the Foreclosure Prevention Program provided counsel and representation to homeowners facing foreclosure. The unemployment insurance benefit program ensured that recently unemployed individuals were not unlawfully denied their benefits.

APPEALS

The Appeals Program had another successful year, with many notable victories coming in both the Appellate Division, Fourth Department and lower courts.

177

Appeals cases opened in 2018

Among them was obtaining a new trial for a client in a case where the prosecutor's dismissal of the only African-American juror was discriminatory (People v Davis). In another case, we successfully argued that a client's conviction should be reversed and his charges completely dismissed, where police illegally stopped and searched our client in violation of his Fourth Amendment rights (People v Searight). We also enjoyed unprecedented success in litigating Family Court cases.

In one, we were able to get a client's petition for visitation with his child reinstated because the trial court improperly dismissed the petition without giving our client the opportunity for an evidentiary hearing (Matter of Kelly v Fifield). In another case of note to domestic violence survivors, the Fourth Department reversed a neglect finding against a client that was based on her being the victim of abuse, finding that there was no proof that the children were harmed by such exposure (Matter of Stephanie H.).





JUSTICE FOR ALL

Hiscock Legal Aid Society held its Justice For All breakfast on October 10, 2018 at Drumlins.

The annual event invites people from around CNY to come and learn about our mission and vision from former clients, as well as agency and board leadership.

"Justice For All gives us an opportunity to do what we do every single day: bring our mission to life," said Linda Gehron, President and C.E.O. "Our days are long, the cases are often challenging yet the mission resonates deeply with those who work with us. Justice For All helps us to illustrate that."

In 2018, the organization introduced the Justice For All award to honor somebody who has dedicated his/her life to promoting justice in our community. The inaugural recipient of the award was the Honorable George Lowe.

SUPPORT JUSTICE FOR ALL

make a gift:
hlalaw.org/donate



MY STORY

WRITTEN BY NATASHA

My name is Natasha and approximately two years and two months ago, I was a victim of domestic abuse. I was lost. I was confused. I was scared. I had been hurt so badly that I could not begin to explain to any one (not even myself) just how much.

What should have been the best days of our lives turned out to be an horrific nightmare. The man I loved, cherished, and devoted my entire life to for more than twelve years was not the man he led me to believe he was.

I was so ashamed that I was afraid to let my family or friends know that my husband was abusing me, as I would always put him up on a pedestal when I spoke of him to my co-workers, parents, family and friends.

After many years of convincing, I decided to give in to my husband's request to move to the United States so we could be together all the time. I sold everything I owned. I gave up my job, my home to spend the rest of my life with the one I loved. I didn't know he had an entirely different plan for me.

I had no idea that one day I would be standing in Hiscock Legal Aid's office in need of a lawyer. With not a dime to my name, Hiscock Legal Aid and their staff took us in. They treated me and my children with respect. They never once made us feel like we were less important than any other client there. My children and I felt like we were a part of their family.

They provided a real sense of belonging. Hiscock Legal Aid Society was the safe place I needed.

When I learned that my husband filed for a divorce instead of getting counseling, I was crushed. I wanted to escape, to go back home to Jamaica, somewhere familiar, somewhere I knew and felt safe. I was drowning and drowning fast.

It became clear to me pretty early on through working with my lawyer that if I took my kids with me to Jamaica, I could lose them. I knew I needed to get sole custody of my two children. So I decided to stay. I decided to fight for my children.

During that period, every day felt like it was never ending, But Tara Trammell counseled me.

She tried to get me to laugh, smile and gently pushed me back on my feet. In the court room when I would break down in tears she was strong for me when I could not be. She was there for me emotionally and physically. These are the quality people that Hiscock Legal Aid has representing victims of domestic violence like myself.

Even though I often felt like I laughed and cried at the same time working with her, it was a great honor to have her by my side. I knew Tara and her team had my best interest at heart. Tara knew intuitively what I needed to survive, to get by, to get up and face another day. She was the best lawyer any one could ask for.

One of the ways my husband abused me was that he never followed through with getting me legal status once we were married. When my marriage ended, I was not able to work legally in the US. I had no way of supporting my children or myself. Based on my situation Hiscock Legal Aid was able to file an application under the Violence Against Women Act to obtain legal status allowing me to work and support my children.

I am now divorced and have full custody of my children.

I am more settled and I am feeling happier every day.

While I know we will go back home to Jamaica eventually, right now my kids and I are looking forward to our future. We've been through so much over the past three years and we want to take the time out to appreciate life's blessings.

Hiscock Legal Aid Society was my foundation. They brought me through the storm. They gave me advice that I didn't even know I needed. To everyone, who took my hand, thank you.

Even when I thought I couldn't do it, they made me believe I could.

...And I did

IN THE COMMUNITY

HLA Attorneys receive Ella B. Family Justice Award

Amanda McHenry and Nancy Farrell, co-supervising attorneys for Family Court, received the Ella B. Family Justice Award in April at the Family's Matter Conference hosted by the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services.

The two received the award as a result of their efforts to advance representation for low income partners threatened with the temporary or permanent loss of their children to state custody. Both Amanda and Nancy helped establish and carry forward the work of "Removal Watch" which aims to defend parents fundamental rights to due process as early as possible and at every stage of child welfare proceedings.

COMMISSION ON PARENTAL LEGAL REPRESENTATION

In 2018, Hiscock Legal Aid Society President and C.E.O. Linda Gehron, Esq. began serving on a new Commission on Parental Legal Representation. The commission is focused on examining the current state of mandated Family Court representation and determine how to ensure the future delivery of quality, cost-effective parental representation. Ms. Gehron was appointed to this post by the New York State Chief Judge Janet DiFiore.

As a result of this work, the commission was able to bring

about unanimous support from the NYSBA House of Delegates Resolution in support of early representation in neglect cases to help avoid keep families together and avoid unnecessary foster care.

"I'm honored to be given this opportunity to collaborate with legal scholars, judges and expert practitioners from around New York in continually improving programs that serve our clients," said Linda Gehron, President and C.E.O. "The Hiscock Legal Aid Society has served thousands of clients in our mandated programs over the years so we have much to contribute, and much to gain, in being a part of these critically important conversations."

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

HLA Law Assistant Jill Port: “I was honored to walk in the Vera House White Ribbon campaign in 2018 to show my support for the women and men in our community that have survived domestic abuse. The purpose of the White Ribbon campaign is for men to make a pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against woman and girls. Being able to support that pledge is important to me and also created a bonding opportunity within our community to unite us in a fight for what is right.”

UNITED WAY DAY

HLA is proud to be a United Way agency. Each year, the organization comes together to support the United Way’s efforts in obtaining donations from individual and corporate donors. For 2018’s campaign, Office Manager Michele Dyess and the Admin Team had another fun filled event to raise money and build camaraderie with a reboot of HLA Trivia and raffles with great prizes.



COLLABORATIONS

Hiscock Legal Aid Society is proud to partner with people and organizations around our city, state and nation to promote justice for all.

These partnerships have given us the opportunity to provide holistic support for clients with a variety of legal needs. Our collaborations include, but are not limited to: The Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Home HeadQuarters, Legal Services of Central New York, Vera House, the Center for Community Alternatives, the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York and Albany, the New York Immigration Coalition, Empire Justice and the Office of New Americans.



Hiscock Legal Aid Society is grateful to have again received funding from the New York Bar Foundation. This grant allows the organization to install kiosks in the HLA waiting room so clients can arrive to our offices and prepare documents using the massive online do-it-yourself data bank. with support from HLA staff.



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We promote justice for all.

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