

WHO WE ARE

The Foundation's Juvenile Court Project reunites families



Juvenile Court Project attorneys and staff

The ACBF Juvenile Court Project (JCP) contracts with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to provide free legal representation to parents with pending child welfare cases in Allegheny County Children's Court. The JCP's mission is to advocate for the interests and protect the legal rights of our clients who face many challenges to maintaining their families not the least of which is poverty.

lives of families. To protect client confidentiality, the names of the clients have been changed.

Karen M's children were removed from parental care based on allegations of domestic violence and drug abuse. After the children were removed, Karen applied for a JCP attorney. Upon meeting with her attorney, Karen followed his advice and enrolled in domestic violence

“JCP attorneys provide parents with strong advocacy both inside and outside the courtroom.”

– Eleanor Grainy, JCP Director

With a staff of seventeen attorneys and seven support staff, the JCP represents approximately 1,200 parents per year in all facets of a dependency case from emergency shelter hearings to termination of parental rights hearings. In addition, JCP attorneys represent clients in child abuse expungement proceedings before the Department of Public Welfare, Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

The JCP attorneys work collaboratively with staff social workers who are trained to locate services and provide encouragement and support to our clients. We also engage in outreach to the community. For example, JCP social workers host a housing fair each year giving agencies that provide temporary or permanent housing to the homeless the opportunity to share information with the JCP and each other. This collaboration benefits our homeless clients by enabling the JCP to make direct referrals to many programs throughout Allegheny County. JCP staff members often give presentations to community groups, law school classes and other social service agencies in an effort to educate the public about the workings of juvenile court and the misconceptions the public may have about our clientele.

With the help of the JCP several hundred families were reunited during the past year. The following clients' stories illustrate how strong advocacy can make a difference in the

treatment, secured a PFA, and submitted to a drug abuse evaluation. At the petition hearing, Karen's attorney was able to provide the court with the proof needed to show that the children were safe in Karen's care. The court dismissed the petition and awarded Karen sole custody of the children. The total time the children were in care after Karen secured a JCP attorney was sixteen days.

Robin E. is a young mentally challenged mother of a six-year-old boy. Due to her disability, Robin was unable to manage her household finances and was easily taken advantage of by people that Robin thought were friends. Robin was dependent on a roommate to help her provide proper care to her child. Unfortunately, Robin's son was placed in foster care after Robin's roommate left the household. Robin's JCP attorney and support advocate worked diligently to assist Robin in finding supportive housing and services that would help Robin maintain her son successfully in her home. Robin and her child were soon reunited in a safe supportive environment with services that will aid Robin until her son reaches adulthood.

These are just two of the many cases that closed successfully. Without strong advocacy, the cases may have ended differently. The attorneys at the JCP work hard every day to help parents get the support they need to reunite with their children.



JCP Director Eleanor Grainy

Juvenile Court Project Staff

Director

Eleanor Grainy, Esq.

Managing Attorneys

Catherine Volponi, Esq.
Benjamin Zuckerman, Esq.

Staff Attorneys

James Ball, Esq.
Frank Bogatay, Esq.
Jeffrey Eisenberg, Esq.
Kiersten Frankowski, Esq.
Nicole Gardiner, Esq.
David Gilliland, Esq.
John Hayes, Esq.
Gina Klein, Esq.
Kathryn Miehl, Esq.
Barbara Atkin Ramsey, Esq.
Melinda Sala, Esq.
Ray Sanchas, Esq.
Robert Scott, Esq.
David Sheldon, Esq.

Parental Support Advocates

DeLisa Coleman
Deborah Fisher
Betty Tallon

Senior Legal Assistant

Dustin Manwill

Legal Assistant

Carolyn Fisher

Paralegal

Sharon Ciechalski

IT Technician

Philip T. Savino

Receptionist

Debra Santmyer

WHO WE ARE

The Foundation's Lawyers Fund assists lawyers in time of need

Over the past two years, the Foundation has provided over \$60,000 (\$56,000 in 2008 and \$4,000 in 2009) of assistance to lawyers in times of crisis. As far back as the late 1800s, the

confidential basis, the Foundation assists members of the bar facing a variety of issues, including serious medical conditions, substance abuse, and financial problems. One of only a few programs of its kind, the Lawyers Fund also helps in emergency situations. When the 2004 floods devastated parts of Allegheny County, the Fund provided \$36,000 of assistance to attorneys impacted by flooding. The fund currently has approximately \$1.3 million in assets.

More information on the Lawyers Fund can be found on page 33 of the annual report.

“We stand ready to assist lawyers in need and their families. Everything is extremely confidential, and we never use the names of the individuals who receive assistance.”

– Vincent Grogan, Lawyers Fund Committee Chair

bar association was assisting needy attorneys and their families through what was known informally as the “Potato Fund.” After various incarnations, today's Lawyers Fund helps attorneys dealing with life-changing issues and financial setbacks. On a

For more details on the Lawyers Fund, please contact ACBA Executive Director David Blaner at (412) 402-6600 or dblaner@acba.org.

The Foundation's Divorce Law Project helps people start over



Divorce Law Project staff attorney Juli Marhefka

The Allegheny County Bar Foundation Divorce Law Project, which has been in existence since the 1970s, has been a model for many bar associations in the country. Originally named the Indigent Divorce Program, the project assists low-income residents of Allegheny County in obtaining simple uncontested no-fault divorces. The project currently has over two hundred active clients and completed 137 cases in 2009. The program also accepted 207 new clients and received close to two thousand phone calls during that time.

Most of the cases are handled in-house by the program's staff attorney, Juli Marhefka, while a small number are given to volunteer attorneys. The program allows newly licensed attorneys the opportunity to gain experience working with both clients and the court system by entering an appearance limited by the program.

Because the Divorce Law Project waives its one year separation requirement for applicants who have been granted a Protection from Abuse (PFA) against their spouse, the program is able to assist victims of domestic violence in moving on and starting new chapters in their lives. It receives referrals from domestic violence shelters and programs, as well as directly from the court, to address this need.

Although the divorces handled through the program are simple, there are virtually no other agencies or programs that assist individuals in preparing and filing the necessary paperwork. Many of the clients have attempted to file divorces on their own, some multiple times over a lengthy period of time, but are not successful due to the particular complexities of the process. When the court is unwilling to accept their filing attempts or unable to grant a final divorce due to errors in form or substance, they are often referred to the program directly from the Department of Court Records. Additionally the court waives filing fees for Divorce Law Project clients, allowing those who are unable to afford the filing fee for the divorce access to the court. Completing divorce actions for clients allows them to tie up loose ends in their personal lives and in some cases qualify for benefits or programs that they would not otherwise be able to obtain.

Behind the Scenes at the Bar Foundation



*Lorrie Albert
Director, Allegheny County
Bar Foundation*

*Erin Rhodes
Development and
Pro Bono Assistant*

On a given day at the Bar Foundation, staff can be found working on any number of different projects. From Attorneys Against Hunger mailings to reading Loans & Scholarship applications, the Foundation staff's primary purpose is to make a positive impact in the legal community and beyond. Foundation Director Lorrie Albert oversees the Foundation's daily operations while also brainstorming new and innovative ways to improve and expand the Foundation. Development & Pro Bono Assistant Erin Rhodes coordinates many of the Foundation's programs and events and assists Ms. Albert and Pro Bono Coordinator Barbara Griffin with various duties.

The Foundation could not perform its daily functions without the in-kind assistance of ACBA/ACBF Executive Director David Blaner, Senior Director of Operations and Human Resources Ann Ewart, and Senior Director of Finance David Leonard, as well as ACBA departments and staff, including CLE/Membership, Communications/Publications, Finance, Graphics, Information Systems, Marketing, Special Events, and ACBA Services, Inc.