

SPOTLIGHT: SSI Advocacy Project

Jay Sicklick, CCA Deputy Director

The MLPP's newest initiative, our SSI Advocacy Project, builds on nine years of successful, expert advocacy in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) representation and consultation.

Basics of SSI eligibility for children who are eighteen years of age and younger:

What is SSI?

SSI is a federal needs-based benefit that is provided to children and adults with a defined disability.

Who administers SSI?

The Social Security Administration administers SSI, which is also known as "Title XVI" of the Social Security Act. Congress enacted Title XVI in 1972.

Who is eligible for SSI?

Both children and adults are eligible for SSI, as long as the financial and disability criteria are met.

Does a child need to be completely disabled to be eligible for SSI?

No. Children's SSI eligibility is based on the severity of the child's disability and the functional capacity demonstrated by the child in comparison with children who are not disabled. Each case is judged individually, based on the child's age, disability and functional capacity.



Can a family navigate the SSI application and appeal process without an attorney or an advocate?

Yes. The process is complicated and can be exhausting, but diligent families who comply with deadlines and are medically literate should be able to apply for benefits and appeal denials. The MLPP recommends that families contact attorneys or advocates who specialize in children's SSI when preparing for or attending an SSI hearing before an administrative law judge.

WHAT is the SSI Project?

We are looking for child patients under the age of 18 who have been denied Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits by the Social Security Administration.

We can assist the following families:

- Children under the age of 18 with an identified disability (see reverse)
- The family has applied for SSI and has an application pending, or has recently been denied SSI by the Social Security Administration (SSA).
- The family is low-income (e.g. the child is a HUSKY (Medicaid) recipient, or the family receives some type of need-based assistance from either the state or federal government (cash assistance, food stamps, etc.)).
- The child receives ongoing medical care through a primary care practitioner or a specialist.

HOW does the SSI Project Work?

MLPP staff will conduct an intake interview with each family referred to the project. The case will be evaluated by our legal staff which will allow us to:

- provide advice and guidance for the family to proceed with their SSI claim, or
- investigate our potential representation of the family in the administrative hearing process.

If the MLPP represents your patient, we will work with you and the patient's entire medical team to advocate at a hearing before an administrative law judge.

WHEN do I refer a family to the SSI Project?

You should refer a family to the SSI staff when:

- The child has a diagnosed disability and an application for SSI has already been rejected or is pending.
- A family needs assistance navigating the SSI process.

(continued on reverse)

WHAT are the disabilities that render a child eligible for SSI?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) defines 15 “categories” of disability, including growth impairment, musculoskeletal system, special speech and senses, respiratory system, cardiovascular system, digestive system, genitourinary system, hematological disorders, skin disorders, endocrine system, multiple body systems, neurological disorders, mental disorders, malignant neoplastic diseases, and immune system disorders. SSA also takes into consideration a child’s functional capacity.

WHERE can I get information about medical disability “listings?”

The Social Security Administration publishes the childhood listings of impairments at www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/ChildhoodListings.htm.

QUICK REFERENCE resource on Children’s SSI

The MLPP recently published a quick reference card which provides information about SSI (both financial and disability eligibility criteria) and resource information for children with disabilities. To get a laminated copy, call us at (860) 570-5327, or download a copy at www.kidscounsel.org.

Do you have a case that requires collaborative medical-legal intervention?

MLPP Director Jay Sicklick: jsicklick@kidscounsel.org

Saint Francis MLPP Office: (860) 714-1412
CCMC MLPP Office: (860) 545-8581
IRNAAP – Main CCA Office: (860) 570-5327

To submit questions for the next edition of MLPP News, email jsicklick@kidscounsel.org.

More information about the Medical Legal Partnership Project is available on the Center for Children’s Advocacy website at www.kidscounsel.org or at www.ccmckids.org/mlpp.

The Medical Legal Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between the Center for Children’s Advocacy, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, The Hospital of Central Connecticut, Charter Oak Health Center, and Community Health Services, Inc.

Project activities are funded through generous grants from The Aetna Foundation, American Savings Foundation, Connecticut Bar Association, Connecticut Health Foundation, Fisher Foundation, Hartford Courant Foundation, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, J.B. Cox Charitable Trust, The NewAlliance Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut.

Advocacy for Immigrants and Refugees

The MLPP began working with the region’s immigrant and refugee pediatric population in the winter of 2008, pursuant to a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to improve health and educational outcomes for the state’s newest residents.

Case Spotlight

Janaira: from Neglect to Legal Residency

Janaira* was sent to live with her aunt in Hartford by her grandmother, who was very ill and could no longer care for her in their home country.

Janaira’s mother had struggled for years to take care of her, but often could not provide food, clothing, or the money needed for schooling. Her father was a U.S. citizen who was never involved in her life and refused to provide even the most basic support. In her native country, Janaira had been raised by her grandmother until her grandmother’s health became too poor.

A high school junior, Janaira arrived with very little clothing and no understanding of how to begin her life here. She had no legal guardian, no legal status, and little opportunity for future success since she could not work and could not get financial aid for college.

Janaira learned about CCA’s Immigrants and Refugees Advocacy Project from a social worker in Hartford. She called Center for Children’s Advocacy to ask us to help.

A CCA Immigrants and Refugees Project attorney met with Janaira and her aunt to help them understand the federal law that allows abused or neglected children to pursue legal status in the United States. Because there was no appropriate caretaker for Janaira in her home country, CCA was able to file a neglect petition in juvenile court, documenting the neglect she had suffered in her home country and asking the court to make Janaira’s aunt her legal guardian.

When the Court issued its finding of neglect, Janaira was able to apply for legal status as a neglected youth. Last month, she received her “green card” and called her CCA attorney to thank her for her help.

Janaira has one more year of high school to finish and her future is looking much brighter. She can now get health insurance, she is living in a stable home with her aunt, and she plans to pursue a college education in accounting.

* Name changed to maintain confidentiality