

MLPP Forges New Partnerships

This month's issue of the MLPP News provides an update on MLPP activities with a specific focus on the Project's unique partnerships. In addition to our traditional partners (CCMC, Saint Francis Hospital, The Hospital for Central Connecticut and FQHC colleagues Charter Oak and CHS), new and innovative partnerships now provide more comprehensive legal support to teenagers, children from immigrant and refugee communities, and children with disabilities.

MLPP and CCA Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic Join to Support Youth at Risk

Stacey Violante Cote, JD, Director, TLAC

What is the Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic (TLAC)?

The Center for Children's Advocacy's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic provides legal representation to teens on issues including options for safe living situations, access to school, benefits available and access to services provided by the DCF. The Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) also offers informational sessions that educate teens about their legal rights and teach them self-advocacy skills that enable them to access necessary services.

How does the TLAC provide assistance to teens at risk and to the homeless youth population?

Homeless kids are an invisible population. They are invisible to the agencies that could help them, to legislators and to schools. The lucky ones move from friend's house to friend's house ("couch surfing"), or are temporarily housed by relatives. The unlucky ones are sleeping on a floor in a boarded-up building. They are adolescent boys who are not allowed into family shelters, or youth who have run away from DCF placements. They are gay, lesbian or transgender youth who have been kicked out of their homes. They are kids who leave home to escape abuse and neglect. There are not very many places for runaway or homeless youth to go in Connecticut, and this makes them difficult to identify.

The TLAC provides legal support and policy advocacy on behalf of these youth, in areas including:

- **Abuse and Neglect:** What are my rights if my parents are abusive?
- **Educational Rights of Homeless Students:** Can I stay in the school I was in before I moved to the shelter?

- **Education/Special Education:** What are my options if I'm not doing well in school?
- **Emancipation:** Can I live independently from my parents?
- **Immigration:** Can I stay in this country legally?
- **Legal Rights of Teen Fathers:** How can I establish paternity? How can I spend time with my child?
- **Legal Rights of Teen Mothers:** How do I get a court order to get child support? Does my school have to provide a tutor when I leave to have my baby?
- **Reproductive Health Care Rights:** If I am a minor, do I need permission from my parent or guardian?
- **Running Away from Home & Truancy:** Will I get locked up if I run away from home or miss school?
- **Sexual Assault:** Is it legal if my boyfriend/girlfriend is older than me? What are my rights if I was assaulted?
- **State and Federal Benefits:** Do I have to be emancipated before I can get cash assistance? Can you help me get the benefits that I was denied?

Are Immigrant and Refugee teenagers eligible for assistance by the TLAC?

Absolutely. The MLPP's Immigrants and Refugees: New Arrivals Advocacy Project (IRNAAP) and the TLAC work in tandem to provide direct assistance to immigrant and refugee teenagers facing problems with healthcare access, educational access, housing, and public benefits. Our IRNAAP team includes attorneys and an outreach worker who forge relationships with adolescent clients to provide intervention strategies that improve healthcare outcomes and educational success.

How can I learn more about the TLAC or schedule a training session for our practice or clinic?

Please call TLAC Director Stacey Violante Cote, at (860) 570-5327, or e-mail sviolant@kidscounsel.org. Learn more about TLAC publications and resources on the TLAC website at www.kidscounsel.org/aboutus_programs_tlac.htm.

Medical Legal Partnership Brings Safety & Security to Fragile Family

Katie's Story

The MLPP has worked on behalf of children with disabilities since its inception in April 2000. The following story represents the MLPP's work with collaborative partners to improve the quality of life and health outcomes for children with disabilities. For Katie, the MLPP worked with CCMC's Special Kids Support Center and a local legal services agency to ensure that the family of a child with a severe disability was able to preserve housing and critical public benefits.

Katie* is one of the more fragile patients at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. She is only two years old and her medical team is continually on guard over her diagnosis of hydrocephalus, a seizure disorder, pulmonary issues and attendant developmental delays. Katie is fed through a feeding tube.

For Katie's 20-year-old mother, Carla*, life is not easy. She recently moved to Connecticut from Puerto Rico to secure better medical care for Katie.

Carla had been working at Wal-Mart but was not successful at her job because of Katie's medical condition. She missed many days of work to be with Katie at the hospital.



Katie lived with her mother and father, her four year old brother and one year old sister. The family lived in an apartment in the city. After frequent episodes of domestic violence, Katie's father moved out and the family support system began to dissolve.

When Carla contacted CCMC's Special Kids Support Center, she was desperate for help. She had a seriously ill child, no transportation, was two months behind in the rent and had been served with eviction papers.

Special Kids Support has worked with the MLPP many times in the past. Olga Vazquez, of the Special Kids Center, called MLPP Senior Staff Attorney Bonnie Roswig.

MLPP Attorney Roswig advocated on behalf of the family to secure the Temporary Family Assistance benefits they were entitled to. She contacted the local community action

agency in Katie's hometown to advocate for emergency eviction program benefits. Working with Connecticut Legal Services, Attorney Roswig helped Carla get assistance for her eviction proceeding, and advocated for Katie and Carla to obtain the assistance they needed from the Connecticut Department of Social Services.

Katie continues to require ongoing treatment for her medical issues. Not all of the family's problems have been resolved, but for the present Katie's home environment has been stabilized. The partners will continue to assist the family in getting the help they so desperately need.

* names were changed to protect confidentiality

If you have a case that requires collaborative medical-legal intervention, please contact the MLPP.

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To submit questions for the next edition of MLPP News, please 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.

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Coming Next Month: MLPP's SSI Project