



SEOLS
Southeastern Ohio Legal Services

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

SEOLS ADVOCATES





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LETTER



Jim Daniels, Director, Southeastern Ohio Legal Services, Thomas J. Bonasera, Chair, Board of Directors, Ohio State Legal Services Association and Thomas W. Weeks, Executive Director, Ohio State Legal Services Association.

We are proud of all SEOLS has done to stretch its resources and to make a difference in the lives of the people we serve. To make sure we are making the most of what we do, we are re-examining what we do and how we do it. One example of the need for this reexamination can be found in the recent spate of books, articles, and reports on evictions and their impact on families and communities.

The best seller “Evicted” tells of low income families facing eviction and how “without a home everything else falls apart”. Similar stories are repeated in courts across SEOLS’s 30 counties, every month, as thousands of low income families, confront eviction. Like the “Okies” of the Dust Bowl, they are like nomads, moving several times a year, from one bad house to another, searching for a stable place to land, repeatedly uprooted from home, neighbors, schools, jobs, and communities.

The Urban Institute reports that: *“Housing plays a critical role in providing stability to poor families. When families lack it, there are terrible consequences. Research shows that eviction can have enduring effects on families’ ability to obtain basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, and medicine) and can cause depression among mothers, and a strong body of evidence links inadequate housing and homelessness to child abuse and neglect. Housing instability can lead to frequent school moves, high rates of absenteeism, and low test scores among children. Housing affects almost everything.”*

From January 2015 to December 2017, SEOLS devoted over 28,000 hours helping 4,625 clients in 30 counties with housing problems: evictions, condition problems, lock outs, land contract disputes, foreclosures, and fair housing issues in public and private housing and mobile home parks. We have engaged volunteer attorneys and law students

to help and spent many more hours educating social service providers, tenant advocacy groups, and local governments about tenant/landlord rights and responsibilities and affordable housing issues.

But despite this effort and time, the ongoing, disruptive churning of the lives of our clients’ families has continued. We are asking ourselves: how might SEOLS help with this and other problems of our clients, outside of court? In this report, you’ll read about some of the ways we have begun developing partnerships with city government, treatment facilities, medical providers, social agencies, and others to help the people we serve before their problems show up in court.

We are at the beginning of this reexamination and we invite you to join the conversation. If you have ideas about ways to improve life in your community, ways to improve access to housing, transportation, quality education, and health care, we would love to hear from you.

Thomas J. Bonasera
Board Chair

Thomas W. Weeks
Executive Director

James M. Daniels
Director

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"WITHOUT MY LAWYER OR THIS SERVICE, I WOULD
OF CONTINUED TO BE VICTIMED (SIC) BY MY
ABUSER OF 35 YEARS."

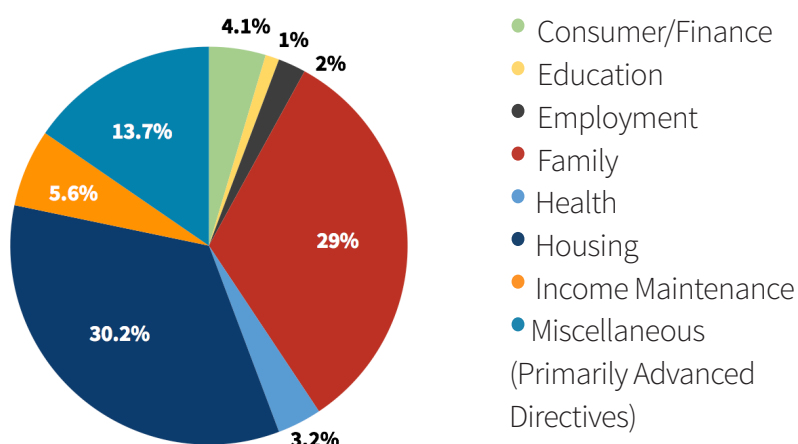
- SEOLS GOT A DIVORCE FOR THIS DISABLED
MOM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR.

STATISTICS

4,352 TOTAL CASES


 Male: **1,349**
 Female: **2,981**
 Other: **22**


CASES BY PRACTICE AREA



DEMOGRAPHICS

Veteran	421
Disabled	997

 64.5% of households helped were at or below 100% of the poverty guidelines

 12% of households had no income

 Obtained 138 civil protection orders that helped protect 182 adults and 226 children household members.

SEOLS STAFF:

28 Attorneys 10 Staff 2 Paralegals

Leveraged the help of 197 pro bono attorneys to serve 5786 individuals and families.

PERSONS HELPED


6806
 ADULTS


4,209
 CHILDREN


368
 SENIORS

"SO GLAD I HAVE YOU THERE FOR ME. I WASN'T AS SCARED AS I WAS BEFORE (SIC)."

- SENIOR CITIZEN BEING HARASSED BY CREDITORS

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis in southeast Ohio. There is an increased focus on the importance of social supports, stability, and connections to one's community to build the resiliency in individuals critical for their recovery. By the time an individual enters treatment, they often have overwhelming legal problems to confront in addition to their addiction. They may have lost contact with their children, are being harassed by creditors, cannot find housing or employment, have lost their driving privileges, and face multiple warrants for unpaid fines and costs. A survey of 104 clients at The Counseling Center, a drug abuse treatment facility in Portsmouth, revealed they had a total of 820 legal problems. The stress of all those legal problems reduces the likelihood of successful recovery. SEOLS wants to help. With a grant from the Ohio State Bar Foundation, SEOLS "embedded" a lawyer in 2017 with The Counseling Center (TCC) to help remove these stressors. SEOLS helped individuals reconnect with

children, separate from abusive spouses, clear up warrants, stop harassment by creditors, get or maintain housing, and improve their ability to obtain employment by sealing records, obtaining a Certificate of Qualification for Employment, or getting their driving privileges restored. We also trained TCC case managers to spot legal issues to refer to us so that we could help their client keep focus on recovery, not legal worries.

"The partnership with SEOLS has been a critical development in our integrated treatment approach," Andy Albrecht, CEO of The Counseling Center, said. "Stressors, like those presented by legal problems, adversely impact everyone, but especially those recovering from drug/alcohol addiction. Having a lawyer to help TCC clients will be a benefit to TCC and the entire community."



INTERRUPTING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The National Education Association reports that school suspensions are “the number-one predictor— more than poverty—of whether children will drop out of school and walk down a road that includes greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment.” Many kids expelled have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, neglect, or trauma from having a parent at home who suffers from addiction. SEOLS wants to stop this “school to prison” pipeline.

In January 2018, with financial support from the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, SEOLS launched the SE Ohio Education Equity Project. This funding allows SEOLS to increase our representation of low-income children facing suspension or expulsion or not getting needed educational services. It also supports advocacy efforts to make communities and school boards aware of and address high rates of suspensions or significant disparities for minority or disabled children within the project’s target region: Athens, Fairfield, Hocking, Meigs, Morgan, Monroe, Noble, Vinton and Washington Counties.

The Project has supported SEOLS efforts, with help from other legal aid programs, non-profits, Ohio University Patton School of Education professors, and an Ohio University prelaw intern, to seek and review public data from the schools in the above counties about suspensions and expulsions as well as treatment of students with disabilities. We will use this data in educational presentations to, and conversations with, local school boards and administrators regarding disciplinary disparities within their district and presenting options of alternative, more trauma-informed options to deal with behavioral issues in the school. If these presentations and conversations do not work, more formal use of the data may be needed to address the problem. In addition, in its first four months, the Project has allowed SEOLS to stop improper suspensions or remove them from a child’s record, help children receive services needed to succeed in school, and obtain ongoing educational services for a student who had previously been expelled. We will take what we learn in the nine counties’ schools to policy makers, community leaders, and school districts across our 30 counties.



PROVIDING HELP

FAIR HOUSING

Historically, Southeast Ohio has been underserved by fair housing agencies. As a result, too many poor people are denied or face loss of housing because of the color of their skin, their disabilities, or old criminal records. SEOLS wants to help.

In 2017 SEOLS, in partnership with Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) and the Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC), received HUD funding for the “The Appalachian Ohio Fair Housing Project” the most comprehensive HUD fair housing project ever funded within southeast Ohio. SEOLS provided fair housing trainings to over 80 community groups and organizations, throughout 35 counties in southeast Ohio. In addition, SEOLS provided legal assistance to more than 50 households hurt by housing discrimination.

In Newark, SEOLS helped activate a Newark Fair Housing Board, required by local ordinance. There now is a three-member board, including a SEOLS attorney, to advise the city on fair housing

issues and hear complaints. In addition, SEOLS started a fair housing testing program in Newark, assembling and training ten local residents to conduct fair housing testing in Newark and elsewhere in our service area. While such testing is available in Ohio’s urban areas, we believe this is the first and only for southeast Ohio.

The impact from these projects will continue in years to come, resulting in increased opportunities for all, in every community, throughout southeast Ohio.

“Thank you for doing such a good job administering the City of Newark’s Fair Housing program. I get compliments on you and your organization's work frequently.”

Mark Mauter, Director, Dept. of Development, Newark, Ohio

“I WAS RESPECTED AND UNDERSTOOD. MY CASE AGAINST ME WAS DISMISSED AND WAS ABLE TO STAY IN MY HOME.”

– WORKING PARENTS FACING EVICTION



MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP

Since January 2016, SEOLS Newark has partnered with the Muskingum Valley Health Centers (MVHC) in Zanesville to help them help patients in their five county service area with legal stressors affecting their health or recovery. Since the program started, SEOLS has helped 111 individuals and families with a variety of legal problems, including housing, access to health care, income maintenance, and family law issues.

Dan Atkinson, MVHC's Chief Executive Officer, is enthusiastic about the medical legal partnership, noting that outcomes have produced much improved living conditions. He cites one example where SEOLS helped a mobility impaired patient obtain insurance to get a scooter, a result that was "life altering" for the patient. "When people's basic needs are met, they can focus on practicing healthier life styles."

A mother in her 8th month of a high-risk pregnancy was facing loss of all her family's income. Her husband was taking her to daily medical appointments and caring for their three children. To get help from the Department of Jobs and Family Services, he was also given work assignments. When, overwhelmed, he couldn't keep all his assignments, DJFS proposed to stop their help. Fortunately, SEOLS has a partnership with the mother's healthcare provider, Muskingum Valley Health Center, who referred the family to SEOLS. SEOLS was able to stop the loss of help and ensure that it would continue until there was an ability to return to work.



Dan Atkinson, MVHC CEO, and Dennis Harrington, SEOLS Newark Managing Attorney

ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND GENERATIONAL POVERTY

Studies show that foster youth experience a significantly poorer quality of life as adults than do non-foster youth. They are less likely to earn high school diplomas or GEDs, less likely to go to college than non-foster counterparts, and more likely to have contact with the criminal-justice system and incarceration which further diminishes employment – and earnings – prospects. SEOLS wanted to help break this cycle. But it needed a way to make contact with these youths and young adults.

So SEOLS reached out to Sojourners Care Network which provides programs,

housing, and support services to foster families, youth, and young adults coming out of foster care. In 2017, partnering with Sojourners, SEOLS obtained funding from the Ohio State Bar Foundation to provide free civil legal services to youths in, and young adults coming out of, the foster care system. Through its Youth Law Project, SEOLS advocates on behalf of foster children, homeless youth, and young adults facing legal barriers to education, income, housing, healthcare, or employment. By providing legal information, advice, and representation, SEOLS aims to help foster youth in our rural counties succeed.

A 16 year old boy, in foster care and pending adoption, gets suspended for a fight off school grounds. As a result, the adoption falls through and he is sent back into foster care in another county. While the boy is trying to settle into another new home, the school holds an expulsion hearing and expels him without notice to him or his new foster parents. When they go to enroll the boy in school, the school refuses because of the previous expulsion. The boy contacted SEOLS through its Youth Law Project with Sojourners. SEOLS challenged the expulsion due to a lack of notice. As a result, the boy was successfully enrolled in school, is now happily attending school, and on its wrestling team!



FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

	DECEMBER 31, 2017
Grants and Contracts	6,163,466
Investment Income	211,818
Contributions	14,314
Donated Legal Services and Materials	81,450
Other Income	416,110
	6,887,158

EXPENSES

Salaries and Benefits	4,093,414
Donated Legal Services	81,451
Professional Fees	1,182,227
Occupancy	224,583
Telephone-Communications	67,506
Office Supplies	85,779
Equipment	14,561
Insurance	13,539
Travel and Training	137,501
Dues	29,181
Library	36,878
Litigation	36,007
Other Expense	27,175
Depreciation	45,458
Total Expenses	6,039,254
Increase in Net Assets	847,904

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	DECEMBER 31, 2017
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,175,036
Investments	2,149,842
Accounts and Grants Receivable	365,577
PrePaid Expenses	94,909
Property and Equipment Net	583,969
	4,369,333

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Accounts Payable and Accrued Liabilities	376,362
Accrued Payroll and Related Liabilities	193,870
Other Liabilities	60,304
	630,536

NET ASSETS

Unrestricted	3,388,473
Temporarily restricted	350,324
Total Net Assets	3,738,797
Total Liabilities and net assets	4,369,333

**DISABLED WIFE TRYING TO GET HOME HEALTHCARE TO HELP HER CARE FOR
PARAPLEGIC HUSBAND: "WE TRIED AT LEAST FOUR YEARS OR LONGER" ON OUR
OWN. "SOUTHEASTERN OHIO LEGAL SERVICES IS THE BEST."**



DONATIONS

THANK YOU

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Muskingum Valley Health Centers
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
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U.S. Department of Justice
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Webster, Thomas



**"THANK GOD PEOPLE IN MY
CONDITION HAVE SOMEONE
LIKE YOUR GROUP FOR
SUPPORT AND HELP."**



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