



PISGAH  
LEGAL SERVICES

# Justice Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF PISGAH LEGAL SERVICES

Pursuing Justice. Improving Lives.

THIRD QUARTER

2007

## PLS Helps Cancer Patient Avoid Homelessness

THE HEALS PROGRAM HELPS MISSION AND MAHEC PATIENTS OVERCOME CRISES AND IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH

Hope had just received the devastating news that she had cancer when she and her husband Gary received an eviction notice from their landlord, giving them just four days to vacate their home.

For three years, Hope and Gary had been living in a dilapidated trailer. They struggled with a leaky roof, rotting floors, electrical problems and other dangerous problems in the trailer. Hope once fell through the rotting floor.

Despite repeated requests, the couple's landlord refused to make repairs to the trailer, in violation of NC law and local housing codes.

Eventually, Gary made more than \$4,000 in repairs at the couple's own expense just to keep their home barely habitable. He kept all of the receipts for his work. When he requested a reduction in rent to compensate them for the repairs, the landlord refused.

In January 2007, Hope was diagnosed with cancer. She was beginning treatment and was



*Hope and her husband Gary didn't think life could get any worse. Hope was undergoing treatment for cancer and Gary had just lost his job when their landlord threatened to evict them from their dilapidated trailer. A Mission Hospital social worker referred Hope to PLS' new HEALS program and attorney Mae Creadick helped Hope and Gary prevent eviction and avoid homelessness. Hope's cancer is now in remission and she and Gary have found a better place to live.*

very sick. Gary had been laid off a few months before, and they were behind on rent. The couple was distraught that, in the midst of these crises in their lives, they faced homelessness if evicted.

Fortunately, a social worker at Mission Hospitals referred Hope to PLS' Health Education and Legal Support (HEALS) program.

Hope contacted PLS, and HEALS attorney Mae Creadick immediately began work to stop the landlord's eviction threats. After months of legal actions, the landlord finally agreed to settle the case, dismissing her eviction suit and granting the couple eight months free rent in exchange for their work on the trailer.

*Continued on page 2.*

# PLS Struggles with Severe Overcrowding

BOARD AND STAFF EXPLORE SOLUTIONS FOR SPACE CRISIS

Pisgah Legal Services outgrew its main office, the Gudger House, in the late 1990's. To help more people in crisis, we added an average of two staff positions per year since then. Now, with a staff of 34, our Victorian home is desperately overcrowded. We are using the kitchen, basement, attic, waiting room and even a closet as office space. Staff members are forced to share desk space and files stack up in the hallways because there is no storage space.

**PLS regularly turns away attorney volunteers, interns and other volunteers due to lack of space.**

Architects determined that, based on state standards, a staff the size of ours requires 10,000 square feet, more than twice the size of our current 4,500 square foot office.

Though we outgrew our space almost a decade ago, we could not take steps to expand our office until we resolved a dispute with the federal Legal Services Corporation over our ownership of the Gudger House. With our clear ownership of the property finally established, the PLS Board and staff have been working diligently to plan a solution to our space crisis.

Board President Terry Van Duyn explains that "the need for more space is dire. I don't want to see



*Due to overcrowding at PLS' main office, staff attorney Jennifer Foster must work in a cramped storage closet, overflowing with office supplies, client files, and PLS' computer server.*

our space constraints affect staff morale or productivity or PLS' great track record of effectiveness. We are committed to securing adequate space to allow PLS to serve the next generation."

## HEALS Patients with Urgent Needs, *continued from page 1.*

With this financial relief, Hope and Gary were able save enough money to move to a more stable home with a more reasonable landlord.

HEALS helped Hope avoid homelessness when she was fighting for her life. Fortunately, her cancer is now in remission.

Hope is just one of the more than 100 patients that PLS has helped since launching the HEALS program in Fall 2006. HEALS is a medical-legal partnership with Mission Hospitals and the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC).

Through HEALS, two PLS attorneys work on-site at Mission Hospitals assisting low-income patients with non-medical problems, such as housing and

domestic violence, that may be at the root of their medical issues.

**"We have a duty to look for causal factors of acute health problems and promote prevention of those factors." - Joe Damore, President & CEO of Mission Hospitals regarding HEALS**

Mission social worker Kathi Graham explains the impact that legal help makes for patients, "When someone is injured or sick the additional stress of legal issues can be very detrimental to their treatment and recovery. HEALS helps alleviate some of this stress,

allowing our patients to focus on their health and healing."

In its first year, HEALS trained more than 600 doctors, nurses, social workers and other health care professionals to identify patients that can be helped by free civil legal assistance.

HEALS is based on a model of medical-legal collaboration that has been implemented in dozens of communities around the country.

To support HEALS, you can make a donation to PLS and designate "HEALS" – donations of up to \$20,000 made between now and the end of the year will be doubled thanks to a matching grant from NC Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA).

# What Does Pisgah Legal Services Do with \$50?

PLS STRETCHES DONOR GIFTS TO MAKE LASTING CHANGE FOR PEOPLE IN CRISIS

As you make decisions about charitable giving, how do you choose which organizations to support? What happens to your hard-earned charitable dollar once it is deposited by the nonprofit organization of your choice?

Supporters of Pisgah Legal Services know that **PLS stretches your charitable dollar as far as possible, helping thousands of people** in Western North Carolina meet their most basic needs.

Your support of Pisgah Legal Services makes a profound impact in the lives of people in need. Following are some of the ways that gifts of \$50 or more to PLS improve lives and promote justice in WNC communities:

- \$50 pays for legal advice to help a mother protect her child from an abuser.
- \$100 can prevent foreclosure and predatory lending for a senior citizen in financial stress.
- \$200 covers the costs of helping a child overcome barriers to enroll in public school.
- \$400 funds legal work to ensure that a family avoids homelessness.
- \$1,000 provides legal representation to a domestic violence victim to get a court protective order to improve her safety and increase her independence from her abuser.



*For years, Brenda, Edwin and Eleazar's home was filled with hitting and screaming as they watched their mother suffer from abuse. Pisgah Legal Services helped end the violence and make their home safe. PLS leverages donor contributions with other funding and volunteer assistance to improve the lives of more than 10,000 people annually.*

## PLS Has a New Look

Pisgah Legal Services has a beautiful new logo (see cover), created by Design One, to illustrate the work we do to promote **equal justice for all** in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

## We Couldn't Do it without You!

Pisgah Legal Services has reached its 2007 Annual Campaign goal of \$242,000! **THANK YOU DONORS** for your generous support!

In November, PLS kicks off its 2008 Campaign with a goal of \$260,000. Please keep PLS in mind as you plan your end-of-the-year giving. New or increased donations made by December 31, 2007 will be matched dollar for dollar by the NC Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts.

## Pisgah Legal Services Leadership

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LEAVE A LEGACY: *Remember Pisgah Legal Services in your will.*

## Thank You Sponsors!

PISGAH LEGAL SERVICES HELD THE FIRST ANNUAL *JAZZ FOR JUSTICE* EVENT ON NOVEMBER 7TH TO THANK OUR SUPPORTERS, HONOR OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS AND CELEBRATE OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS. THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS THAT HELPED MAKE THIS EVENT A SUCCESS!



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A big round of applause to the UNCA Jazz Combo for providing music for the event.