



**PISGAH**  
LEGAL SERVICES

# Justice Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF PISGAH LEGAL SERVICES

*Pursuing Justice. Improving Lives.*

SECOND QUARTER

2008

## Legal Aid Stops Violence and Abuse

PLS HELPS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS IMPROVE THEIR SAFETY AND REBUILD THEIR LIVES

From the outside it seemed like Joanna\* had a great life and a promising future. She has two daughters and is a nursing student at a local community college. But inside she was filled with fear and anxiety.

Joanna's husband wasn't working and spent his days checking on her. At home her husband berated and attacked her.

One afternoon he called her at school and told her to "Get home now." When she pulled into the driveway, he dragged her into the

*\* Client's name and some details of her story have been changed to protect her safety and confidentiality.*

house. Joanna resisted the whole way because she was sure that if he got her inside he would kill her. She barely managed to escape the house and filed for a Domestic Violence Protective Order.

Joanna contacted PLS and staff attorney Julie Klipp Nicholson obtained a one-year court protective order that grants Joanna the couple's home and custody of their children, limits her husband's visitation and requires him to pay child support. Most importantly, the order protects Joanna from her abusive husband and she is now free to pursue her education and her future.

Joanna and her children were just three of the 2,014 domestic violence victims and their children whom PLS helped in 2007. (Not all victims are women, but very few male victims seek aid from PLS.)



*Joanna,\* the client featured in this article, did not want her photo or real name used to protect her safety. PLS helped her escape an abusive marriage after her husband nearly killed her. For many women like Joanna, legal aid plays a critical role in ending violence and fear for them and their children.*

PLS attorneys help women secure court protective orders to improve their safety and also help with housing, divorce, child custody and other legal issues to pave the way for them to rebuild their lives.

For many women, legal assistance is an essential part of their escape plan. In fact, a study by economists at Colgate and Arkansas Universities found that "legal services are the most

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**INSIDE: Local attorneys  
pledge \$560,000 to lead  
PLS' expansion campaign**

# Pisgah Legal Services Turns 30!

... AND WE HAVE PLANS TO RELIEVE OVERCROWDING AND DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE SERVE

In 1978, Pisgah Legal Services was one attorney who served our first client from a basement office at the Buncombe County Courthouse. To meet critical community needs, PLS has grown tremendously over the years to serve more people.

Today PLS has a staff of 36 and a team of more than 250 volunteer lawyers who improve the lives of more than 9,000 people annually.

In response to thousands of calls for help each year, PLS has grown and now we are bursting at the seams. Overcrowding at our main office hinders our ability to serve clients effectively. Based on state standards, our staff of 36 should have a main office of 10,000 square feet instead of the current 4,500 square feet.

PLS' space crisis is real and critical. Due to lack of space, we are:

- Using the kitchen, basement, attic and a closet as office space;
- Turning away attorneys and others willing to volunteer their time; and

Learn more about PLS' impact in local communities and our expansion plans, at our *improved* website: [www.pisgahlegal.org](http://www.pisgahlegal.org)



*Cramped Quarters!* PLS staff (above) have a meeting in our "conference room" on the porch of our main office in Asheville. The office is desperately overcrowded. We are using the basement, attic, kitchen, waiting room and even a closet as office space. As PLS celebrates the 30th year of providing legal aid to people in crisis, we have plans to move to larger space that will allow us to serve more people.

- Compromising safety, client confidentiality, and the efficiency of our services.

We are proud of what we have accomplished in 30 years. We know, though, that there are many people we have not been able to help because we lack adequate space and other resources. We have a plan to secure the space we need for the next twenty years.

To expand our services significantly over the next 15 years, PLS will purchase a 13,776-square-foot building in downtown Asheville with adequate space for our current and future operations.

We have started a capital campaign to raise the \$3.9 million needed to purchase and upfit this building. During the initial phase of the campaign, PLS has secured donations from many loyal donors, with local attorneys providing many of our lead gifts.

At the end of April, local attorneys had raised more than \$560,000, and the campaign in total had raised \$1.8 million dollars. PLS has \$1 million in grant requests pending. The success of this campaign will come from the combination of many gifts.

In the words of Asheville attorney Roy W. Davis, Jr., "Pisgah Legal Services is a seasoned performer with a strong track record of helping people in times of crisis who can't afford to hire lawyers on their own. The program's success and the unmet needs of the community make it necessary at this time to acquire a larger facility. The local Bar's generous support of the PLS campaign is a verification of this."

Stay tuned to find out more about PLS' exciting plans and to learn how you can help ensure that PLS will continue to fight for justice in Western North Carolina.

# Thank You PLS Donors

YOU HELP PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN

Pisgah Legal Services exceeded our 2007 Annual Campaign goal and raised \$247,869. With these gifts PLS improved the lives of more than 9,000 low-income people.

We are off to a great start for 2008. We have raised more than \$176,000 and are well on our way to meeting our goal of \$260,000.

Donors tell us they give to PLS for many reasons. Here's what some have said:

\* They care deeply about the welfare of disadvantaged children and know that PLS helps 1000's of vulnerable children each year.

\* They appreciate the breadth of issues we address.

\* They know our staff and Board and are confident that we stretch their dollars to make the greatest possible impact.

\* They are impressed that we utilize hundreds of volunteer attorneys to help more people.

No matter your reason for giving, **we thank you for your support.**

Your gift makes a profound impact on the lives of people in crisis. We couldn't do it without you.



*Judy Futch (pictured above) and her husband Paul Smith explain why they give to PLS: "In a national culture, that has increasingly marginalized the poor and disadvantaged, Pisgah Legal Services provides legal representation and advocates for social justice, human dignity, safety and well being of Western North Carolinians. The staff and volunteers of PLS are truly unsung community heroes. We are proud to support them."*

## PLS Is A Critical Resource for Abuse Victims

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expensive support services, the service to which the fewest [victims] have access, and ... the only service that decreases the likelihood women will be battered."

Though it is widely recognized that legal assistance can be crucial for preventing further abuse, victims

have no guarantee of legal counsel when they seek court protection from violence. Their abusers, on the other hand, have a right to legal defense in criminal court.

For most low-income victims of domestic violence in our service area, PLS is the only legal resource available. With four staff attorneys and dozens of volunteer attorneys

to help domestic violence victims, PLS still cannot help every victim who needs legal counsel.

Stories like Joanna's, and the knowledge that we cannot help every woman who asks for it, are what drive PLS to continue to grow. We do not want to leave anyone in harm's way simply because we don't have resources to help them.

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



## Attorneys Recognized for Pro Bono Service

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE PRIVATE ATTORNEYS WHO VOLUNTEER TO HELP PLS CLIENTS

PLS and the 28th Judicial District Bar recently recognized attorneys who have provided exemplary service to PLS' low-income clients.

The attorneys honored with Pro Bono Awards are: **Sharon Alexander** of Prince, Massagee and Youngblood in Hendersonville, **Susan Dotson-Smith** with Dotson-Smith Law Office, **Brad Stark** with the Van Winkle Law Firm, and **Cynthia Strom** of the Law Office of Cynthia Strom, P.A. Sharon Alexander has also been nominated for the 2008 NC Bar Association's Pro Bono Service Award.

In 2007, volunteer attorneys handled 788 cases for PLS clients through the Mountain Area Volunteer Lawyer Program. Cynthia Strom and her staff handled 51 of these cases, contributing an amazing total of 644 pro bono hours (the equivalent of about four months of work!) to help disabled clients obtain urgently needed Medicaid coverage for medical treatment and services.

**Thank you to all of the volunteer attorneys that help PLS clients** access justice and meet their most basic needs.



*Volunteer attorney Brad Stark helped PLS client Barbara Seagraves secure a settlement from her landlord after he illegally emptied her home of her belongings while she was in the hospital. Barbara explains, "I used to be wealthy and I'm an educated, intelligent person. But, there came a point in my life after divorce and illness when I knew what it was like to be invisible."*