

# Iowa Health and Law Project

## Background

Iowa Legal Aid's Health and Law Project is an innovative project which seeks to bring together medicine and law to improve low-income Iowans' lives by addressing the legal problems that affect their health. Presently, the project is working with medical facilities in four areas of the state – Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Ottumwa, and Sioux City. The project's primary goals are to:

- Improve the lives of low-income Iowans by addressing the underlying legal problems that are affecting their health status.
- Establish cooperative working relationships between medical personnel, social workers, and attorneys through training, joint intake, and case identification.
- Reduce health care costs over the long-term.

## Services Provided

The Iowa Health and Law Project focuses on assisting low-income Iowans with the following issues:

- Housing such as substandard housing, discrimination, and public housing
- Elder abuse, including financial, physical, and mental
- Income supports such as Social Security/Disability Income benefits, Veterans benefits, and Medicaid and Medicare benefits
- Educational access for children with disabilities
- Family law issues such as domestic violence, guardianship, and advance directives

*Christina had fled with her children from an abusive husband. On several occasions, he came over to her apartment in the middle of the night and started pounding on her door. One night he came over and waited until dawn. When Christina went outside to take the children to day care and go to work, he physically assaulted her and took the children.*

*Christina spoke with an Iowa Legal Aid (ILA) representative while she was at the Council Bluffs Community Health Center for a doctor visit. ILA referred her to a domestic abuse shelter that could help her file for a Protective Order. After the client had filed the Protective Order, ILA agreed to represent her at the hearing. At the hearing, the client was granted a Final Protective Order that also gave her temporary custody of the children.*

## Outcomes and Results

During the first six months of 2008, 199 cases were closed through the project. The cases impacted 460 household members, 160 of whom were children. Financial gain for clients whose cases were closed totaled \$61,543.87. Project staff opened 188 cases during the same time period. Project leaders are working with the National Medical-Legal Partnership to develop more robust outcomes and evaluative measures.

## Participating Sites

- Broadlawns Medical Center – Des Moines
- Cass County Hospital – Atlantic
- Child Health Specialty Clinic – Council Bluffs
- Council Bluffs Community Health Center – Council Bluffs
- Mercy Hospital – Council Bluffs
- Montgomery County Hospital – Red Oak
- Polk County Health Department – Des Moines
- Primary Health Care – Des Moines
- River Hills Community Health Center – Ottumwa, Richland, Centerville
- Siouxland Community Health Center – Sioux City
- WIC Clinic – Council Bluffs

For more information about the Iowa Health and Law Project, please contact Michelle Hoyt Swanstrom at (641) 683-5638, ext. 1803 or [mswanstrom@iowalaw.org](mailto:mswanstrom@iowalaw.org).