Heartbreak, disappointment and disbelief - the emotions that have run this summer through my office and the hundreds of social service and City of Philadelphia government agencies that work with us daily to put the lives of homeless individuals and families back together. 

In August 2012, state government made good on its threat to cut the $205 monthly cash welfare benefit known as General Assistance (GA) to the poorest disabled people who live among us - 70,000 individuals in Pennsylvania, 35,000 of whom live in Philadelphia. Our Legislature thinks that by cutting GA, it will save Pennsylvania $150 million in cash outlays a year, but has it considered the individual and societal costs for those who will no longer be able to afford to travel to their doctor appointments or pay co-pays for medication? Have we factored in costs to hospitals of thousands of additional people using the emergency room as primary care or the costs to the prisons and the shelters for people who steal to eat or who lose their housing along with their sole source of income? This measure is short-sighted and drastic and fills us with dread and disbelief. HAP’s telephones have been ringing off the hook as panicked social workers and potential clients call about accessing HAP’s fast-track Social Security disability benefits program known as “SOAR” - a program also gutted by recent state cuts. 

Separately, this spring, the Pennsylvania Legislature approved Voter ID legislation that will make it imperative for all voters to have state-issued photo ID if they want to vote in the November 2012 presidential election, potentially disenfranchising thousands of Pennsylvania voters. HAP, with its expertise in helping homeless individuals to obtain birth certificates - an essential first step in obtaining state-issued photo ID - joined as a plaintiff in the litigation challenging this law. HAP has been on the front lines in assisting clients to obtain state-issued ID for years; in 2011 alone, we helped 764 individuals access their birth certificates. Birth certificates not only help our clients obtain identification, but are necessary to apply for subsidized housing, medical assistance and other benefits. Many of HAP’s clients are served by PECO-sponsored HAP Birth Certificate Clinics held across the City and HAP is extraordinarily grateful to the hundreds of lawyers and paralegals from numerous law firms and corporate legal departments who have joined to make these jam-packed clinics an unqualified success. HAP’s most recent Birth Certificate Clinic held on September 12 at PECO’s Market Street headquarters served 199 clients. Forty-five volunteers from 14 corporations and 1 law firm staffed the clinic.

The process to obtain an ID is not intuitive or as easy as one might imagine - to obtain a state-issued photo ID, one needs a birth certificate and a social security card; however, to obtain either of these critical supporting documents, one needs a photo ID. It is a chicken-or-the-egg dilemma that successfully eludes many clients and, sometimes, HAP volunteers’ best efforts. For individuals born out-of-state or at home, for those adopted or unsure of their mother’s maiden names or birth hospital, the process often takes months and sometimes years - and it always comes with a monetary fee. For a peek at HAP Managing Attorney Michele Levy’s excellent expert report on HAP’s detailed experience in obtaining ID for clients, see HAP’s website at www.homelessadvocacyproject.org (under HAP Pennings). As I write this, we are awaiting Pennsylvania Courts decision on the Voter ID law.

In this difficult climate, HAP will continue to fight to keep our clients afloat and to help the thousands at risk of homelessness from falling into an already overburdened shelter system. We need your help as never before. Volunteer! Write a check! Get involved! And please know that we are so grateful for your overwhelming support.

Marsha I. Cohen, Esq, Executive Director
Our Mission

In the fall of 1990, a group of concerned members of the Philadelphia bar and the homeless services community created HAP to address the unmet legal needs of the city’s homeless population. HAP was founded in the belief that homeless people have unique and complex legal problems that often are not adequately addressed by traditional providers of legal services to indigent and low-income individuals. Homeless individuals often lead transient, unstable lives, and are often debilitated by mental illness, substance abuse, and inadequate education. They frequently lack an understanding of their legal rights and the ability to make effective use of the network of advocacy and service organizations that is available to assist them. Living in crisis, often without income or resources, homeless persons are less likely, and less able, than other indigent clients to make use of Center City-based legal services programs.

To ensure that homeless people had access to legal services, HAP’s founders created an organization designed to deliver legal services directly to them in the places where they live and eat. Since its inception, HAP has conducted legal clinics in shelters and soup kitchens throughout Philadelphia. By recruiting and training volunteer attorneys, legal assistants and law students to staff these clinics, HAP is able to leverage its resources to provide free legal counseling and representation to a population not adequately served by other legal services programs. HAP is the only legal services organization in Philadelphia that conducts such direct outreach to the homeless population.

HAP collaborates with shelter providers, homeless advocates, community service providers and the legal community to provide homeless clients with legal representation and to connect them with other social services. HAP currently holds legal clinics at twenty-five homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Since HAP’s first legal clinic in December 1990, HAP’s 350 volunteers have helped more than 28,800 homeless people. To date, HAP’s volunteers have provided more than $39 million worth of free legal services to homeless clients.

HAPpy Outcomes

Volunteer Lisa Whitley, Ballard Spahr

69-year-old client, JA, attended HAP’s Sunday Breakfast clinic, requesting assistance in obtaining his New York birth certificate. He was born at home somewhere in Brooklyn, but had no recollection of where his parents lived at the time and New York had no record of his birth. His father was a minister, so his family moved around quite a bit. In order to apply for a delayed birth record, he needed to verify his identity through school records, baptismal records, census data, marriage, etc. JA had very vague recollections of his childhood and his only real memory was the Douglass Jenner school which he attended in Brooklyn as a child. While Ballard Spahr volunteer Lisa Whitley was able to find information about the school, she also learned that it had burned down in 1962, along with all of its records. Undeterred, Lisa conducted a FOIA request of the Social Security Administration in an effort to obtain information on JA’s parents’ original application forms that would substantiate potential census data. During the course of that search, Lisa met with a Social Security representative who told her that the SSA also conducts identification research for clients with missing information and that JA could go forward with an application for SSI benefits. Lisa attended the benefits interview with the client and his case worker and was able to provide sufficient evidence of JA’s work history and verification of his parent’s information to satisfy their identification requirements. JA was awarded (and has received) over $25,000 back benefits and is now collecting a monthly SSI check. Lisa then submitted the Social Security Award Letter to New York’s Vital Records, from which she obtained JA’s delayed birth certificate. JA will now be able to obtain photo ID so that he can vote in the presidential election this fall.

JA was overcome with emotion upon learning of the award of benefits at his SSA interview. He was extremely grateful and told Lisa that, up until that moment “he was stuck – he couldn’t go forward and he couldn’t go back.” — now he can begin living his dream!

HAP Staff Attorney - Laura Kolb

When Tanisha attended a HAP legal clinic, she was 8 months pregnant and living in shelter with her two year-old daughter. Early in her pregnancy she was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart condition and informed that, due to her compromised health, she might not survive the stress of delivery. Tanisha’s doctor recommended that she prepare for this possibility and make arrangements for the care of her daughter and expected newborn. When she first met with HAP Staff Attorney Laura Kolb she knew nothing about wills or advanced medical directives and was unsure how to proceed. Tanisha’s biggest fear was that because she was indigent, her children might be taken by child welfare in the event of her death and placed in foster care.

Through an in-depth intake and subsequent meetings, Laura provided Tanisha with relevant information and answered her questions about wills and advanced directives. Through HAP’s counsel, she was informed of her rights as a parent and reassured that, with the proper preparation, her wishes regarding her children’s care would be protected by law. With the attorney’s guidance, Tanisha was able to calmly consider her options and after much deliberation, she identified her older sister as someone she could entrust with the care of her children. She also had a few small belongings that she wished to leave specifically to each child and Laura helped Tanisha organize all of this information for inclusion in her will. Finally, Laura then referred Tanisha to an estate attorney who agreed to assist her free of charge. The knowledge that her children would be well-cared for in the event of her death brought Tanisha great comfort and through HAP’s assistance, Tanisha was provided valuable legal assistance and support during a time of great stress and uncertainty.

Adopt-a-Shelter List

Adopt-a-Shelter: Through HAP’s Adopt-a-Shelter project, a firm or corporate legal department agrees to staff a HAP legal clinic. HAP collaborates with the following law firms, corporate legal departments, and law schools through this program.

Cathedral Kitchen – Archer & Greiner
Caton Village - Schnader Harrison
Covenant House - Duane Morris
Eliza Shirley House – Reger Rizzo;
Blank Rome and Lincoln Financial
HELP Philadelphia – Villanova University Law School
Kirkbride/Traveler's Aid – Hangeley Aronchak; Gibbons, and Drexel
Our Brother’s Place – White & Williams
The Perimeter – Saul Ewing and Cigna
Project H.O.M.E. – Reed Smith and Merck
Station House – Cozen O’Connor and Hogan Lovells
RHD Woodstock Family Center – Morgan Lewis and Exelon Corporation

HOW YOU CAN HELP HAP...

HAP needs your help to serve the thousands of homeless men, women and children who make Philadelphia their home.

There are many opportunities for lawyers, paralegals, law students and others with a variety of backgrounds to assist HAP.

You can:

- Become a legal clinic volunteer. Spend a few hours meeting with a client and assist that client with his or her legal problem.
- Volunteer for the Children and Families Project and assist homeless parents with education, family law and disability matters.
- Volunteer for the Veteran’s Project and assist homeless veterans with obtaining veteran’s benefits and compensation.
- Make a monetary contribution and/or assist with fundraising efforts.

To help make a difference, please call us at 215-523-9595, or complete and return the form on the next page.
HAP’s 2012 April Benefit!

The Homeless Advocacy Project held its Annual Benefit on April 11, 2012. All proceeds of the silent auction and cocktail party, presented by Morgan Lewis, PECO/Exelon, Dechert LLP, Robert E. Keith Jr, and Merck, benefited HAP. This year’s benefit, held at the Sofitel Philadelphia, raised over $190,000 for HAP. HAP would like to thank the following sponsors of the event:

**PRESENTERS:** MORGAN LEWIS, DECHERT LLP, MERCK, PECO/Exelon, and Robert E. Keith, Jr.

**AMBASSADOR:** Jack L. Foltz, Blank Rome LLP, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Anonymous, Cozen O’Connor, Fox Rothschild LLP, Lexis/Nexis, Pepper Hamilton LLP, Saul Ewing LLP

**DIPLOMAT:** Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, PC, Reed Smith LLP, Hangley Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller, White and Williams LLP

**PARTNER:** DLA Piper LLP, Ballard Spahr LLP, Sidkoff, Pincus & Green, P.C.

**BENEFACTOR:** Post & Schell, P.C., Archer & Greiner, P.C., Duane Morris LLP, Feldman Shepherd Wohlgelernter Tanner Weinstock & Dodig, LLP, Gibbons, P.C., Hogan Lovells LLP, Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg LLP, Reilly Janiecek McDevitt P.C., Saltz Mongeluzzi Barrett & Bendesky P.C.


Please Save the Date for HAP’s April 11, 2013 Benefit

**YES, I’d like to help HAP…**

Name: ____________________________________________

Firm/Affiliation: __________________________________

Address: ________________________________________

Phone: ________________________ Fax: ______________

Email: ____________________________

Area of Interest: __________________________________

I would like to make a donation of: □ $25 □ $50 □ $100 □ $250 □ $500 □ $1,000 □ $ _______

Enclosed is a check made out to “HAP”

Please charge this contribution from my credit card: □ VISA □ MasterCard □ American Express

Card Number: ____________________________ Expiration Date: __________ (MM/YY) __________

Name and address as they appear on credit card: __________________________________________

I would like to make monthly donations of $ ________ every: □ month □ months □ months

I would like to make this donation in the memory of: __________________________________________

The official registration and financial information of the Homeless Advocacy Project may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.