

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless Case Study with a focus on the COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT¹

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The Legal Clinic's community education and engagement efforts, integral to its mission, have a dual focus. The first and most fundamental aspect of this work is helping DC's community members experiencing poverty and homelessness to understand their rights, be able to stand up to authorities, and take action when their rights are violated and when their – and their community's – needs are not being met. The second is helping the community in general, and those who interact with individuals experiencing poverty and homelessness in particular, to understand the rights that people struggling through poverty and homelessness have, the multiple challenges that they face, and the importance of treating them as one would treat any other member of the community.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first provides an overview of how the Legal Clinic's activities in community education and engagement began and how that work has evolved over the years. The second and third put the spotlight on two Legal Clinic programs: Homelessness 101 training for police and others that the Legal Clinic has been providing since 1998; and engagement of DC's community members experiencing homelessness and poverty to assist them in their own advocacy. The fourth draws lessons learned from the Legal Clinic's experience to date in the area of community education and engagement.

Each is told from the perspective of several actors: Legal Clinic staff members involved in delivering these services; individuals who have been direct beneficiaries of these services; and organizations that the Legal Clinic has collaborated with in delivering these services.

I. Overview

From the very beginning, the Legal Clinic considered it important to share with the broader community information about the issues and challenges faced by DC's community members experiencing homelessness and poverty.

Patty Mullahy Fugere -- one of the founders of the Legal Clinic, an early member of the Legal Clinic's Board, and since 1991 the Legal Clinic's Executive Director -- reflects:

When we held our first training in December 1985 at the DC Bar (a session attended by over 100 attorneys) we shared information about the many issues that intersect in homelessness – lack of affordable housing, mental health challenges, public health concerns, a threadbare social safety net – and what lawyers could do to address those issues. Mitch Snyder, then a

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¹ When the case study is completed this will appear as an attachment to the case study Reference Document. A summary will appear in Chapter 2 of the Reference Document. All quotes have the prior approval of each individual quoted.

leader of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) and an activist in the movement to end homelessness, delivered a keynote that inspired attendees to think about how to use the tools of our trade to effect positive change in that movement. We wanted more people to learn what our small ad hoc planning committee was learning about the challenges of experiencing homelessness. Our roots are very much in the idea of educating community.

Community Education and Engagement are consciously woven into many aspects of the Legal Clinic's work.

Over the years, community education and engagement have been consciously woven into the Legal Clinic's work:

- For many volunteer lawyers, participation in the Legal Assistance Project (LAP) presents a unique opportunity to learn about the multiple challenges that people who experience homelessness face, and to use their legal skills to assist in addressing some of these challenges. In the course of receiving legal assistance, clients, too, often have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and tools that they can use to advocate on their own behalf and to navigate DC's complex bureaucracy.
- The Legal Clinic's involvement in Affordable Housing also has a dual focus. One is bringing to the attention of DC's broader community, and DC government officials in particular, the precarious situation of households of limited means who are losing their housing due to the forces of gentrification brought on by developers eager to make a profit on the backs of the city's poor and a system of regulations that are supposed to protect tenants but do not. Beyond that, through the support that tenants receive from the Legal Clinic and others, they are able to acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to become forceful advocates for themselves and their communities.
- As an effective advocate with the DC government and the DC Council, the Legal Clinic's staff, often in collaboration with other advocacy and community organizations and occasionally with law firms, have fought for the rights of people experiencing homelessness and poverty and brought to public attention the multiple challenges faced by these community members. The Legal Clinic, in all of its advocacy efforts, intentionally reaches out to community members who are impacted directly by DC budget and policy decisions, to support them in their own self-advocacy with DC authorities around the issues that they face.

The Legal Clinic takes steps to establish programs that focus on education and community engagement

In 1995, when the Legal Clinic hired Sr. Mary Ann Luby (who is legendary among community members in DC experiencing homelessness, as well as with the providers who serve them), it was able to put a more strategic focus on education and outreach efforts. Patty Mullahy Fugere reflects on the important role that Sr. Mary Ann played:

Our work in education and client engagement became solidified in 1995 when Mary Ann Luby joined our staff. When we met Mary Ann, she was the Executive Director of Rachael's

Women's Center, one of the Legal Clinic's first intake sites. She was very committed to advocacy and to speaking the truth, even when it was unpopular to do so. Early on, we asked her to join our Board. While effective in her role as the executive director of Rachael's, as the years went by, Mary Ann decided that she no longer wanted to administer a program, but rather felt called to be engaged directly with the people whom Rachael's and organizations like the Legal Clinic served.

We were worried that if she didn't find a place to land in DC, she might need to leave our community, which would have been a tremendous loss. So we created a part-time, temporary position for Mary Ann, asking her to help us monitor the District's efforts during hypothermia season. She was such a valuable addition to our work that part-time and temporary soon became full-time and long-term, until her passing.

During the 15 years that she worked with the Legal Clinic until her untimely death in 2010, Mary Ann spent a great deal of time out and about with DC's community members experiencing homelessness and poverty. She was determined to meet people where they were (figuratively and literally), and walked the streets and the parks to talk to impacted community members. She engaged people experiencing homelessness and in the process learned about the issues affecting them. Mary Ann started *Listen Up*, a one-page front and back newsletter, easily recognizable by the ears on either side of the masthead. *Listen Up* provided practical information of interest to those experiencing homelessness - hot weather is coming, so drink plenty of water; here are the symptoms of hypothermia - look out for one another; there is going to be a job fair; the DC Council is having a hearing. It was a great tool for keeping community members experiencing homelessness abreast of important topics and events of interest to them.

Robert Warren - an advocate who previously experienced homelessness, the Director of the People for Fairness Coalition, a member of the National Coalition on Homelessness Speakers Bureau, a Street Sense writer and vendor, and a tireless advocate in the DC community for the right to affordable housing that everyone should have- reflects on what Mary Ann did in the areas of education and outreach and the impact that she left on him and his colleagues:

When we first met to form the People for Fairness Coalition in 2008, a wonderful woman from the Legal Clinic came to Miriam's Kitchen where we have our weekly meetings. She did some workshops on how to do outreach, how to approach folks. She shared with us best practices.

Just meeting and talking with her, she struck me as someone who really believed in what she was doing, who stood up for people and gave them a voice. She was a no nonsense type of person. The time we spent with her was inspiring.

She was well respected in the community. She gave a lot of credibility to our outreach. Just being the person she was in the community, the fact she took time out to come speak with us and do the training meant a great deal. She included us in things. She encouraged our engagement in the process being able to have a voice at the table.

Know Your Rights Training

The *Know Your Rights* training series evolved as the Legal Clinic gained an increasing appreciation of the need for DC residents experiencing homelessness and poverty to both know their rights and take action to ensure that their rights are honored. Delivered on a variety of topics – including Street Rights, Right to Shelter, Rights in Shelter, Disability Rights, Consumer Rights, Social Security Disability (SSI/SSDI) – and accompanied by handouts, the Legal Clinic’s *Know Your Rights* talks were designed to provide individuals lacking stable housing and other important services with information about their rights in specific areas and how to connect with an attorney if their rights were violated, as well as programs that might be helpful to them.

The trainings, which last about an hour, were delivered at first in an ad hoc fashion and subsequently more regularly. They are currently delivered at shelters, day programs and other venues where people experiencing homelessness congregate. The Grassroots Advocate schedules the trainings which are delivered by lawyers from the Legal Clinic staff.

In 2017, the Legal Clinic delivered 55 *Know Your Rights* Trainings.

While being interviewed for this case study, Reginald Black, a Street Sense writer and vendor and a tireless advocate for DC’s community experiencing homelessness, pulled out a frayed copy of a handout focusing on Street Rights that he received several years before when he attended a *Know Your Rights* training.

One of the things that I learned from the Legal Clinic was my rights on the streets and how to deal with police officers. The general public does not know their rights. Before I knew this information, I would get harassed.

When I see a friend who I haven’t seen for a while, I share with them the information I learned. I share with them where they can go, what they should do if a law enforcement officer comes along and tells them they are obstructing pedestrian traffic or trespassing.

I learned that, while the Federal Park Police can remove you from a Federal Park, the District Police can’t remove you from a District park. If you are alone you can sleep in any District park after dark after it closes.

Achieving the Legal Clinic’s goal of greater awareness of the challenges of homelessness

Over the years, the Legal Clinic has sought out opportunities to educate the DC community on issues related to homelessness and how to approach people experiencing homelessness. Staff members from the Legal Clinic have given talks to school counselors, students, and community groups. The Legal Clinic has been invited to be on panels sponsored by Good Faith Communities, the Washington Council of Lawyers and many other organizations.

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Patty Mullahy Fugere reflects:

Our hope is that when community members become aware of the challenges facing our clients, and when they understand the impact of the affordable housing crisis on DC's lowest income residents, they will be less tolerant of the District failing to adequately meet our clients' needs.

In 2006 the Legal Clinic hired Kristi Matthews into a full-time position, with half of her time to be spent with the Legal Clinic and the other half with the Fair Budget Coalition. She was given many responsibilities including: create and operationalize an advocacy-training program; support and attend the Know Your Rights trainings at shelters and day programs; and work

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with clients of the legal clinic when they express interest in doing advocacy for improved systematic services. .

Over the years the Legal Clinic has provided a variety of trainings and workshops geared toward DC community members who have not experienced homelessness or lived through poverty. Audiences have included students, members of churches and synagogues, and other non-profits. The focus is often on gentrification and homelessness and its impacts on people who end up on the streets because they have been priced out of their communities, forced to leave their homes due to the increase in property taxes or rising rents. Increasingly, people are being forced out of their homes and apartments by developers who are intent on demolishing those properties and replacing them with high-priced, mixed-used complexes composed of apartments, offices, restaurants, and stores. Some of the Legal Clinic's presentations involve a simulation followed by a discussion of what gentrification looks like in DC and how it has led to an

increase in the number of people who are experiencing homelessness.

Ayo Heinegg, a DC high school teacher, sought out the assistance of the Legal Clinic both at a charter school where she used to teach U.S. Government and D.C. History and at a private school where she taught an elective on Inequity & Social Justice in DC to 11th and 12th graders. She reached out specifically to Kristi Matthews who had also come to the charter school in prior years. Ayo reflects on the experience:

I asked Kristi to come in on several occasions. During one visit, she did a simulation of gentrification. During another visit, she focused on the power and privilege that white people exert without even knowing that they are doing it. The exercise on privilege showed students that everyone benefits or suffers from an interlaying latticework of different types of privilege, some of which one is born with, and others which one can acquire over life oneself. The more privilege one is born with, the easier it is to work to achieve the acquired privilege. Those with denser networks of privilege enjoy a safer, more comfortable life.

Recently I involved Kristi in a ArcGIS mapping project. My students created an "Opportunity Map" of Washington DC. The map illustrated the distribution of an "opportunity index" over census tracts in DC, where the opportunity Index was an average of thematic opportunity maps on health, employment, housing, public safety, and education. Each of these thematic opportunity maps, in turn, consisted of an index of standard deviations from the mean of several indicators related to that theme.

The key to making sure that this map accurately reflected conditions and opportunity in DC was to select indicators most relevant to DC. Kristi was able to select relevant indicators based on her years of experience in the community. Kristi and the Legal Clinic for the Homeless plan to use the resulting report. This is an excellent example of "town-grown" collaboration that can benefit both students and residents.

Kristi is extremely gifted at popular education. She doesn't just sit there and gab. She always does a simulation, an interactive activity. She engages the kids as they learn. She comes from some of the repressed communities she is fighting for. She is very open about that. She showed them that you don't have to be powerful to make change; people from humble backgrounds can make change. It is essential that students from both privileged and lower-income backgrounds understand this. The students love it.

II. Putting a Spotlight on the Legal Clinic's Homelessness 101 Training for Police and others

The Legal Clinic has been providing training to Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) recruits for almost twenty years. The training came about due to conversations around the rights of clients, many of whom had been unfairly arrested or harassed by the police. The Legal Clinic wanted to try to ensure that law enforcement officers understood some of the challenges that people experiencing homelessness face; the causes of homelessness; and that simply because some of the people they engage with are experiencing homelessness doesn't mean they shouldn't be treated with the same respect that everyone deserves.

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How the program began

The training started off focused solely on MPD Recruits. Over time it developed into a training that could be adapted to other audiences. In addition to training police officers, the Legal Clinic has trained staff from numerous Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), DC Public Library staff, Criminal Court Judges from the DC Superior Court, staff from DC's Probation and Parole agency, Officers from the National Park Service, the DC Protective Services, and the Amtrak Police.

Ann Marie Staudenmaier, who joined the Legal Clinic in 1996, has among her responsibilities addressing issues related to the criminalization of homelessness. Ann Marie reflects on how the Legal Clinic's police training program began:

I started going to meetings related to people experiencing homelessness in places like Georgetown and Dupont Circle in the late 1990s. In the course of going to these meetings, I began to learn about criminalization of homelessness. Interested in the topic, I started reaching out to see what other cities in the US were doing to address this. I found out that the San Francisco Coalition for the Homeless was training the police, and got the idea to try to replicate that in D.C.. Their training program was called "Homelessness 101", which I adopted to fit what was going on in DC.

I broached the subject of starting a similar training program with the Commanding Officer of MPD's Second District, which covers Georgetown. She was amenable to giving it a try, and put me in touch with staff at the DC Metropolitan Police Training Academy. The idea initially was that I would start by conducting the training for the Recruit classes, which I have been doing ever since. At the beginning the scheduling was hit or miss. I had to rely on them to contact me and I would periodically reach out to make sure I got on the schedule.

Eventually, the training became an official part of curriculum. I had a point person at the Training Academy who really appreciated the training, and made sure it was always on the schedule. I now do approximately five to seven trainings per year for MPD, depending on the number of Recruit classes. There are usually around 25 people in each recruit class.

Sometimes they will group two or three recruit classes and I will train them at the same time. The response from the trainees has been overwhelmingly positive.

MPD General Order 38-14: Interactions with Homeless Persons

On October 31, 2011, after several years of advocacy on the part of Ann Marie and her counterpart at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, which included working closely with Assistant Police Chief Diane Groomes and her staff, the Metropolitan Police Department issued General Order 308-14, "Interactions with Homeless Persons." General Order 308-14 provides formal guidance to DC police officers on conditions under which they may or may not initiate contact with persons experiencing homelessness; issue a

“Move On” order; and request identification. The Order also provides specific guidelines to police when handling personal property of persons experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness 101 Training

Homelessness 101 is a two-hour training module conducted in an interactive fashion that takes place as part of a unit on Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights. Participants leave with a number of resources that they can refer to when they are on the streets and encounter someone who is experiencing homelessness.

The training has five objectives:

- Educate about **causes** of homelessness;
- Dispel **stereotypes**;
- Show the **human face** of homelessness;
- Offer **resources/alternatives** to arrest;
- Review **various laws** which might come into play when dealing with people experiencing homelessness

HOMELESSNESS 101

I. Opening Exercise

A. How many know someone who is homeless?

B. Brainstorming session: come up with a list of situations where police interact with persons experiencing homelessness, such as:

- Person experiencing homelessness sleeping in a park;
- Mentally ill person talking loudly and incoherently to himself;
- Person experiencing homelessness leaves behind several large bags while they leave to use a public restroom;
- Person quietly panhandling on public space;
- Family who has just been evicted sitting in a public place with nowhere to go.

II. Causes of Homelessness

A. Power Point “Quiz”

B. Hand out Fact Sheets

C. Themes:

- No adequate emergency shelter, causing more street homelessness
- Recession caused drastic increase in families experiencing homelessness over the past several years.
- Not enough affordable housing
- Govt. income programs inadequate to survive on
- Even people who work can experience homelessness
- Mental illness and addictions are factors but not the main cause of homelessness

III. Stereotypes/Faces of Homelessness

A. Visualize someone who is experiencing homelessness—what comes to mind?

B. List stereotypes and discuss:

- Addictions
- Mentally ill
- Lack of Hygiene
- Scam artist/Too lazy to work

- Criminal behavior
- C. Presentation** by homeless/formerly homeless resident of DC
- D. Conclusion**
 - Anyone can experience homelessness;
 - Communities experiencing homelessness are as varied as society as a whole (past clients include surgeon; biophysicist; psychiatrist; former housewife, etc.)

Sergeant George O'Bryant has been Ann Marie's contact at the Metropolitan Policy Academy for several years. As can be seen from his remarks, below, Sergeant O'Bryant is a strong supporter of the program:

"Homeless 101" is taught as part of our training on Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights. You need to know how to be able to deal with people from all walks of life whether they live in a mansion or on the street. Ann Marie brings in one or two people who have been homeless to tell their story. This opens everybody's eyes up. It personalizes it. We are all just a pay check away from being on the street. This might be a bad day. The person might have a PhD. Everyone should be treated the same.

There are several things that I like about the training. One is the personalized attention given to recruits through the interactive format used. The other is that it brings in someone who was homeless who tells their story. A third is that it breaks it out so that recruits can appreciate that there are homeless men, women, children, and families.

Homelessness 101 from the perspective of formerly homeless speakers who tell their stories

From the beginning, Ann Marie has woven into Homelessness 101 a section in which individuals who have formerly experienced homelessness put a human face on homelessness by sharing their stories with the recruits. Steve Thomas and Alan Banks, two of these individuals, reflect on what it has been like for them personally to have this opportunity:

Steve Thomas: *"When we started asking how they looked on the homeless, many saw the homeless as an eye sore, individuals not to be respected. All were crazy, or on drugs. Their minds changed after I told my story. I was brought up in the hood, not to trust the police. The police are the last persons you go to.*

It made me feel good, I was contributing. The police training was special, self-rewarding, because I felt like I was putting out knowledge in areas where it can spread."

Alan Banks: *"It has been extremely rewarding. I feel that I'm contributing to correcting an issue that has been a thorn on the side of people experiencing homelessness as well as officers on the street. By telling my story they get to meet someone who has experienced homelessness and they can see that person has a human face.*

The recruits are very attentive, ready to ask questions, ready to learn. A lot of people don't have to think about an issue unless it is in their face."

Homelessness 101 from the perspective of recruits who received the training

Four recruits who had recently completed their training and who had been out on the streets for about a month were interviewed for the case study. During the interviews, each was asked to describe the training they received, what they found particularly useful about the training, suggestions for improving the training, opportunities they have had, if any, during their month on the streets to apply what they learned. Three had little to no contact with homeless individuals before receiving Homelessness 101; one had.

As can be seen below, each in his or her own way found the training to be an eye opener. For all four, the story from the person who had formerly experienced homelessness stood out. Two, in the short time they had been on the streets, had been in contact with individuals experiencing homelessness and had an opportunity to apply what they learned.

Officer Jason Huang: *“The speaker who had been homeless himself stood out. He helped me understand why a person becomes homeless and what he needs to get back on his feet. It was a lot more meaningful to come from a person who had experienced it himself.*”

Following training I was assigned to 6th district southeast of Anacostia River up to Kenilworth and Fairlawn. There were a lot of homeless. During my midnights shifts I would run into them at bus stops. Some came to the station to seek assistance. I helped one get shelter. I had brief encounters with them. I would ask if they are OK, if they needed any assistance.

As a result of Homeless 101 I look at them differently. It definitely changed my point of view. They need to be respected, I am able to put away that pre-judgment and ask if they need help. Sometimes they have had a bad day.”

Officer Brian Heitman: *“I liked the gentleman who used to be homeless and found his way out of homeless. It was an inspiring story. You see them on the street but don’t know their story or what happened afterwards, their struggles on the street. It was helpful learning about some of the resources available.”*

Officer Adams Miranda: *“A gentleman told us his story. He had money and then something happened. He commented that people saw him as invisible. When people walk by they don’t pay attention to homeless people on the street. They don’t even say hi. Many of us were not aware of how you become homeless and how we can help the homeless.*”

I work in Northwest DC near North Capital St. There are several shelters there. I see a lot of homeless. In terms of my interactions with them, one wanted to commit suicide. He had substance abuse issues. He kept saying he heard a voice in his head that he wanted to hurt himself. My trainer and I talked to him. We asked if there were any other avenues.

That is when he told us his story. When he was a kid, a girl introduced him to this life. He went to every hospital for help. He didn’t want to go and get an evaluation. He wanted help from a hospital, a psychiatrist.

When I pass a homeless person I now say, 'Hello how are you doing? Can I get you a cup of coffee?' when I am on the way to work. A guy on New York Avenue is always there with a sign. He always says 'Have a nice day' with a big smile."

Officer Renae McEvoy: *"What stood out to me is what Alan Banks said about his experience eating out of the garbage. When he explained it, he put it into perspective. For somebody to get to that point that they have to go through garbage to find something to eat has to be a low point.*

The training definitely made me more empathetic. A lot of time we don't know what they use money for; are they going to buy drinks or drugs? When I think more about their predicament I see they are not doing it to be criminal, not to be evil, but to survive."

When asked how the training could be improved, all suggested that more time be given to this topic, ideally with an opportunity to spend up to two or three days on the streets meeting people who are experiencing homelessness and getting to know them. One suggested that the topic of homelessness be revisited when they receive periodic refresher training. Having had experience on the streets it would be helpful to have a chance to share experiences and reflect on ways they can be even more effective in reaching out to DC's homeless population.

III. Putting a spotlight on the Legal Clinic's conscious effort to encourage DC residents experiencing homelessness to be their own advocates

Self-advocacy, as expressed by Patty Mullahy Fugere, is a fundamental value of the Legal Clinic:

We firmly believe that our role is not to be a voice for the voiceless, that people experiencing homelessness have a human right and a responsibility to make their voices known and to be active participants in coming up with solutions to address their needs.

Self-advocacy is implicit in everything that the Legal Clinic does. With the arrival of Mary Ann Luby in 1995, as described above, self-advocacy began to coalesce as an activity that the Legal Clinic began to promote for its own sake.

When Kristi Matthews came on board in 2006, self-advocacy was incorporated as a specific activity in her scope of work. Kristi described why she came to the Legal Clinic and what has given her the greatest satisfaction in the work she is doing to promote self-advocacy.

I have a deep connection to my family and want to not only honor what I have learned from them but also do work that is reflective of the values they have taught me. I came to improve the systems that are similar to the ones that are impacting people I love and respect in my life. I have several family members who are personally experiencing homelessness and struggling through poverty. I wanted to go someplace where I could work on justice.

A lot of people who are experiencing homelessness have the sense that they aren't in control of what is happening to them and it's very powerful to see them take control over their destiny.

My biggest satisfaction is that the community members I work with and support have gone on to become stronger advocates. A lot of people who are experiencing homelessness and poverty have the sense that they aren't in control of what is happening to them and it's very powerful to see them take control over their destiny and demand change from systems impacting their lives.

We want to remain accessible to people in the community who are turned away by mostly everyone else. We want to be on the side of those who feel like there's no one fighting for them.

We value the freedom our work gives us, because we don't take government funding. This permits us to be very vocal with DC agencies, the DC City Council and the Mayor about the ways they are not only letting community members down but also adding to the daily struggles that community members have to deal with each day.

During our interview Kristi described an experience she had while working both with the Legal Clinic and the Fair Budget Coalition, where helping people to become advocates for themselves had an impact on funds set aside for housing for families in the DC budget:

Several years ago, I was organizing families at the DC General Family Shelter to help them advocate for needed housing. Janelle, from Fair Budget Coalition and I went to DC General to meet with residents and talk about ways they could fight for housing.

Fair Budget Coalition was asking to add \$6 million in the budget for the next Fiscal Year to house 300-400 families.

We did a training and several meetings at DC General on how to organize. After meeting with the residents a few times the group - including residents, us, and other advocates - decided to do an action at the Wilson Building during one of the budget hearings around Affordable Housing.

The group also partnered with the Homeless Children's Playtime Project at the DC General Family Shelter and had children who were living with their parents at the shelter decorate little houses and put sayings on them asking for housing.

The Legal Clinic supported residents in every way to ensure that they could participate in the action. We all arrived at the DC City Council hearing. For the action we had a gospel singer who came out and stood in front of the families and sang a song. The Chair was about to start the hearing and this person started singing. Several members of the news media were there. The Council Chair didn't know what to do.

Parents from DC General took their children and lifted them to the dais. Each child put one of the decorated houses in front of each council member attending the hearing. As we were exiting, one family started saying "affordable housing now".

The whole room repeated the chant. As we left the room the media followed us.

The families talked to the media in the hallway about their experiences in the shelter and why they needed more affordable housing. The families stayed at the Wilson Building waiting for the council members to talk to them and planned next action steps. .

The next day Amber Harding, one of our lawyer advocates, and Patty Mullahy Fugere, our Executive Director, received a phone call. They were told that the Committee found enough funding to house all of these families.

The remainder of this section focuses on what Kristi has accomplished in the area of self-advocacy, as seen from the perspective of three women interviewed for this case study. In the case of the first two, self-advocacy arose in the context of other assistance that the Legal Clinic was providing to these individuals. A theme that runs throughout all three is the role that the Legal Clinic has played in helping them to find a platform for their voices and what this has meant to each of them.

Donna Alston

In 2010, Donna, a single mother who had experienced homelessness for two years, met a lawyer from the Legal Clinic after she visited the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center and was turned down for shelter. Thanks to the many steps Legal Clinic staff took to help her, she now has housing. Once on her feet, with help from Kristi Matthews and other Legal Clinic staff, Donna went back to school and got both her GED and a Child Development Certificate. Donna would like to get an Associate of Arts Degree in Child Development and eventually open her own day care center.

The Legal Clinic made me feel like family. They had an open-door policy. I was always able to get in contact with someone. And they have always come through for me, always. They gave me my voice. They showed me what I needed to do for myself. You can't depend on people. You can't just wait for them to fix the problem. I need to find out what's wrong with Donna to fix the problem.

I was ready for someone to hear me. It always brought out tears when I talk about my son. I need DC government to help more so that we can be sufficient parents from our children.

I love Kristi. She was on the phone with me. She opened a lot of avenues for me. She had my back. She has been a great supporter to this day. She could have a million things on her plate and I when call she doesn't hesitate to help me.

Lashawn Woodson

Lashawn, a single mother, was born and raised in Southwest DC. Four years ago, she found herself experiencing homelessness. Lashawn reflects on her experience with the Legal Clinic:

I contacted the Legal Clinic for assistance. I was going back and forth to the Virginia Williams Family Center looking for housing. I was told that I was Tier 1 but they had no place to put me.

Kristi Matthews told her me about the Rapid Rehousing Program. She said to me "Go to Virginia Williams and stay there until you are placed." I returned to Virginia Williams and the caseworker again told me that they had no place to put me. I went back and told Kristi. Ann Marie Staudenmaier, one of the lawyers at the Legal Clinic, called the supervisor at Virginia Williams. In minutes, they referred me to a motel. When I received my Rapid Rehousing voucher Kristi took me to different neighborhoods to look at apartments.

The Legal Clinic is for the people. They are there to help. They go above and beyond. They try to help you in all aspects of your life. They found me a lawyer for my son. When I was placed in a hotel I was supposed to get a package with basic necessities but didn't. I called the Legal Clinic and they arranged to have the package delivered to me.

Kristi asked me to testify about my experience. I said to myself, "Why should I keep my story if it can help someone else? I don't want anyone else to go through what I did." I started to testify at hearings. I went to meetings focusing on Rapid Rehousing to figure out how to improve it. I am currently helping Kristi with outreach. I never thought I would be an advocate. I am so extra private. I don't want to go in front of TV but you have to move out.

Nkechi Feaster

Nkechi is a forceful and tireless advocate for DC's community members experiencing homelessness and poverty. When she first connected with the Legal Clinic, she was living at DC General with her son after becoming homeless. Nkechi credits the Legal Clinic with playing a decisive role in helping her to find a platform for her voice.

Someone approached me. "The Legal Clinic is looking for people with a story. Get in touch with someone named Kristi." I called Kristi and told her a brief snippet. Kristi asked "Can you come to the office and tell your story?" Being me, I have no problem telling it like it is. I explained my circumstances. I was already in a shelter. I went back to school while in the shelter and got a paralegal certification from American University

I'll never forget her reaction. She said: "Write it out. You are phenomenal. You have to come to the Mayor's office. We are having a panel discussion and I want you to be on it." This was the beginning of my advocacy career with the Legal Clinic and the Fair Budget Coalition.

Over the next year I saw a way to help. I saw what was involved: testimonies at budget season, campaigns. I have shared my story at the DC City Council. I wanted to let them know that their idea of me as being homeless is wrong. It's my reality. It's different than that of others. I realized this was not a quick fix. What else can I do? I have the time, opportunity, leverage.

The Legal Clinic started asking me to do different things -- go with Kristi to present to college classes, "Would you mind being interviewed?" They saw that I was passionate about the work and my story could make a difference. I got more and more involved.

In terms of the Legal Clinic's relationship with Mayors Office and City Council, they know who to turn to, who is for what issue, where we need to advocate more. They know how to call and meet in person with key people. They are very good at figuring out the challenges they are going to face.

I also always loved how they go the letter with a client to figure out what a client can do to participate. You can protest. Call a person at this number. Testify. This means a great deal for a community that doesn't believe it has power.

I now see how talking can be used to my advantage. I have spoken on NPR. I have been interviewed by El Jazeera. I have appeared in the Washington Post and in Legal Clinic blogs. I have talked with professors at George Washington and Catholic Universities. I didn't know this world existed until I had that first phone call with Kristi. I didn't know anything about advocacy, about policy, about client lead change. I now live in a different reality.

IV. Lessons learned

A number of lessons can be learned from the Legal Clinic's experience over the years in the area of education and community engagement:

1. The importance of reaching out to people experiencing homelessness and poverty where they are

A fundamental premise of the Legal Clinic – be it having lawyers meet with individuals experiencing homelessness who need legal assistance or delivering training to individuals who are experiencing homelessness – is that it's more effective for clients to be reached in an environment that they frequent, where they are most comfortable. It is for this reason that Rights Trainings and other trainings, as well as Legal Assistance Project Intake, are provided in shelters, at dining programs and clinics that see people experiencing homelessness.

2. Many people who have never had contact with people experiencing homelessness, or only in a limited fashion, tend to have negative stereotypes. It is important that these stereotypes be identified and dispelled.

For many, who haven't had prior contact with individuals experiencing homelessness, the term "homeless" conjures up stereotypes: among them an individual who is mentally ill, who is addicted, who is lazy and doesn't want to work. A key component of the Legal Clinic's Homelessness 101 training programs – which is delivered to Metropolitan Police Department police recruits, Criminal Court Judges from the DC Superior Court, Officers from the National Park Service and others --is assisting those receiving the training to dispel these stereotypes. A variety of tools are used: stimulating a discussion among attendees who have had direct contact with individuals who are experiencing homelessness in which these individuals share what they have learned; naming common stereotypes that training attendees may be too uncomfortable to raise themselves; having someone who himself or herself has experienced homelessness share their story. As Sergeant O'Bryant of the Metropolitan Police Department very appropriately stated when interviewed for this case study: "*We are all just a pay check*

away from being on the street. This might be a bad day. The person might have a PhD. Everyone should be treated the same."

3. Training is most effective when it is interactive

This applies in general to any training provided. In all of the trainings that the Legal Clinic provides, be it to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or individuals who have little or no experience interacting with people who are homeless, the trainers go out of their way to engage the individuals they are training. Techniques vary depending on the type of training and the audience receiving the training: simulations, sessions involving Q&A; putting participants in hypothetical situations to see how they feel/react.

4. Drawing from personal experience is very powerful:

What stands out most in the memories of police recruits interviewed for this case study that received Homelessness 101 training is the presentation provided by an individual who has personally experienced homelessness: the individual's situation before becoming homeless, how the individual fell into homelessness, the individual's experience while homeless and what it felt like to experience homelessness, how the individual was eventually able to get out of homelessness. For individuals receiving training from Kristi Matthews, who herself has experienced poverty and who has family members who are experiencing homelessness, her background gives added credibility to the training she provides.

5. In the ideal world, all trainings, especially if the objective is to help the person trained apply what s/he has learned, should be accompanied by one or more follow-ups.

This is a tall order for organizations like the Legal Clinic given that their target population that is constantly being forced to move which makes it hard to stay in contact with those who have been trained. Putting in place a follow-up system is also time consuming and expensive. In the case of Homelessness 101 training for police recruits, every trainee interviewed, when asked how the training could be improved, said they recommended a follow-up that would permit them to spend time in homeless communities in order to see first-hand what individuals experiencing homelessness have to deal with and to be able to put themselves in the shoes of these individuals.

6. People need to be given a chance and a platform to use their voice so they will be able to hold those in charge of systems accountable for the services they are responsible for administering.

This message comes through loud and clear from the individuals who were interviewed for the case study where the Legal Clinic reached out to them to help them be able to tell their own stories - in presentations, at DC Council Hearings, at rallies and protests. In addition to finding platforms for their voices and being supported in speaking out about their concerns, it was gratifying to those community members to find others carefully listening - and responding - to what they had to say.

7. Importance of believing in people

Kristi Matthews said it very well when she stated while being interviewed “*A lot of people who are homeless have the sense that they aren’t in control of what’s happening to them, and it’s very powerful to see them take control over their destiny. The fact that someone believed in them, told them that they had an important story to tell, was very powerful.*”