Legal Services of South Central Michigan

A Year of Growth;

Providing Hope for the Future

2008 Annual Report

Dear Friends,

In 2008, I celebrated 25 years as the Executive Director of Legal Services of South Central Michigan. I celebrated along with a great group of 25 year plus staff and board members. I am proud to be a part of the organization and present to you our 2008 Annual Report. As we move forward, we don't forget to look back and see where we have been.....

When I think back to the beginning of some of our work–efforts that have made significant and permanent changes in our communities–they all start with a client walking in the door or calling on the phone for an intake, or with an agency person calling with a referral. They start with a staff person recognizing an injustice and feeling passionately that something has to be done.

Today many of these community changes seem permanent and inevitable. But, as I look back, that's not how they looked at the beginning. In the beginning, they usually looked hopeless and often kind of scary. They looked like an individual client with a serious problem–often an insurmountable and unsolvable problem.

So while we see LSSCM as a strong and stable organization, it's not the stability that drives us and inspires us–it is the ability to take risks, the ability to be deeply involved in the most critical issues that impact the low income community.

I am personally grateful for the opportunity to work with talented people on issues that are so important. These remarkable people include the staff at Legal Services, people in the many other community organizations that we work with on a daily basis, pro bono lawyers, board members, donors and clients. We look forward to continuing to provide high quality legal services and work for systemic solutions.

Sincerely,

Bob Gillett
Executive Director

Dear Supporters,

As we reflect on the year of 2008, and the many accomplishments we have achieved, we are reminded of how far we have come.

In many communities, our lawyers were the first lawyers ever to represent tenants, welfare recipients, or victims of domestic violence. In many communities, our lawyers were the first women lawyers and the first minority lawyers who ever appeared in the local courts.

But now–when we see the connections that the program has in each of our communities–connections with state and local government, with the organized bar, with other community organizations–we see Legal Services as an effective and efficient partner in solving community problems. This is a remarkable change and we are all proud to have been a part of it.

LSSCM has seen significant growth in leadership, capacity, accountability, and staff over the years. This report will introduce you to the staff, the Board, and the partners that make the success of LSSCM possible. From the Board of LSSCM, thank you to our volunteers and funders. And thank you to our clients – for trusting us with your lives and letting us be part of the solution.

Sincerely,

Delphia Simpson
Board President

2008 SERVICES

TOTAL CASES HANDLED IN 2008:	**10,641**
Cases Handled and Closed in 2008:	8,609
Cases Continued into 2009:	2,032

TYPES OF CASES HANDLED	
Domestic	30%
Housing	28%
Consumer	14%
Health/Income	13%
Individual Rights/Elder	15%

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

36% of LSSCM clients are ethnic/racial minorities

21% of LSSCM clients are seniors

72% of LSSCM clients are female

49% of LSSCM clients have household incomes less than $10,000 per year

82% of LSSCM clients have household incomes less than $20,000 per year

26% (or over 410,000 people) of the population in the 13 counties served by LSSCM qualify for free civil legal aid

OTHER SERVICES

Presentations about legal rights to 3,855 individuals

25,788 legal education brochures distributed

Training provided to 200 attorneys and law students

Websites that experienced nearly 1.5 million page views

2008 SUMMARIZED FINANCIAL INFORMATION

REVENUE AND OTHER SUPPORT	
Legal Services Corporation	$1,835,756
Michigan State Bar Foundation	$1,697,497
Department of Human Services	$140,000
Other Governmental Funding	$369,424
Local United Ways	$255,550
Local Area Agencies on Aging	$101,273
Foundations	$343,389
Other Grants	$132,947
Contributions	$97,415
Pro Bono and In-Kind Contributions	$1,467,164
Miscellaneous and Interest Income	$64,197
TOTAL REVENUE	$6,504,612
EXPENSES	
Program Services	$5,636,041
Administration and Fundraising	$359,293
TOTAL EXPENSES	$5,995,334
Excess of Revenue Over Expenditures	$509,278
Opening Net Assets	$1,119,275
NET ASSETS	$1,628,553

Making a Difference in Our Communities

LSSCM provides free civil legal assistance to low income persons with an emphasis on homelessness prevention, domestic violence prevention, and assistance in accessing health care, food, and needs-based income programs.

In addition to representation in individual cases, LSSCM is part of a network of agencies providing services to the community's most vulnerable members. In many instances, the quality of life for the community's poorest individuals is affected by more general community initiatives and structures. LSSCM coordinates its services with those of other agencies and engages in systemic advocacy to help alleviate the barriers and hurdles faced by low income individuals.

PROVIDING HOPE FOR FAMILIES

LSSCM makes an important difference in the lives of vulnerable families and individuals.

LSSCM tracks outcomes in all cases. In 2008, LSSCM obtained positive outcome for over 96% of the clients that we were able to fully serve. Unfortunately, case statistics demonstrate that, for every case that LSSCM can accept for full representation, it must decline services in at least two cases due to a lack of resources.

Following are examples of the positive results we achieved for the clients we assisted:

- Preserving homes from illegal evictions or foreclosures;
- Assuring domestic violence survivors and their children live in homes free of violence;
- Increasing household income;
- Protecting the elderly from unscrupulous creditors;
- Helping individuals with disabilities access medical insurance and/or care.

COMMITMENT TO LSSCM AND THE COMMUNITY

On November 18, 2008, LSSCM held a special event to honor the following individuals with 25 years or more of service to the community:

- Charles W. Borgsdorf, Board Member since 1974
- Hon. Carlene Walz Lefere, Staff member, Advisory Board Member and Board Member since 1976
- Blondeen Munson, Receptionist and Paralegal since 1976
- Ella Dickerson, Board Member since 1979
- Jack Taylor, Paralegal since 1979
- Bob Gillett, Executive Director since 1983
- William Godfroy, Board Member since 1983
- Dolores "Lani" Hiller, Legal Assistant since 1984

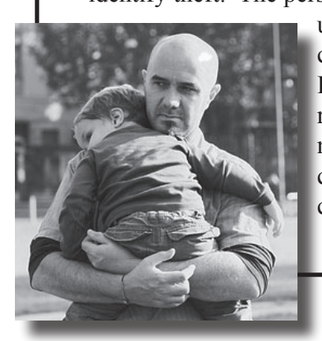
INCREASED CAPACITY TO MEET THE CRITICAL LEGAL NEEDS OF THE POOR

LSSCM is not able to represent everyone that needs and qualifies for assistance. We have strived to increase our capacity to serve more individuals through:

- Partnerships with University of Michigan Law School, MSU College of Law, Thomas M. Cooley Law School and other law schools to have volunteer law students working in our offices;
- Close working relationships with the State Bar of Michigan and local bar associations, including jointly sponsored pro bono programs and fundraising efforts;
- Increased pro bono support – in 2008, pro bono attorneys provided more than 8,500 hours of pro bono assistance to our clients;
- Pro Se clinics in most of our offices to teach individuals to represent themselves; and
- Fundraising campaigns in all 13 counties through the Access to Justice Campaign – a collaboration between the State Bar of Michigan, the Michigan State Bar Foundation and civil legal aid offices.

We represented an 81 year old woman whose home was foreclosed. During her redemption period, LSSCM worked with her mortgage company to negotiate a short sale. We also worked with another bank to obtain a reverse mortgage. LSSCM successfully negotiated an agreement and the second bank paid the mortgage company 60% of the amount owed in satisfaction of the mortgage. The client was able to keep her home and still remains in her home.

Our Farmworker Legal Services office helped a migrant farmworker, who was a victim of identify theft. The person who stole his identity was arrested and at the time of the arrest used our client's name and social security number. This situation caused great difficulty for our client with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services when trying to renew his legal permanent resident card. FLS helped clear up this matter and obtain the necessary legal documentation to prove that the arrest was not the clients. Our client was able to receive his legal permanent resident card.



Supporting Statewide Advocacy

Many of the challenges faced by vulnerable low income populations require systemic changes and statewide solutions. LSSCM has a longstanding commitment to state and national policy advocacy. In 2008, LSSCM was active in a number of state coalitions and served as the lead agency in three statewide coalitions. Our leadership and experience with administering statewide programs permitted LSSCM to launch and expand efforts to address critical problems that impact thousands of low income families living in every community in the state.

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

Michigan Poverty Law Program (MPLP)

- MPLP is a collaboration with the University of Michigan Law School.
- MPLP provides case consultation, training, technology and other support to local legal services programs throughout the state.
- MPLP has attorneys who are experts in each of the main substantive areas handled by legal aid offices in Michigan – family law, elder law, consumer law, housing, foreclosures, public benefits, immigration, and technology.
- MPLP sponsors both substantive and skills trainings, convenes regular taskforces, and administers websites and listserves so that the legal aid offices in Michigan can share resources and information.

Farmworker Legal Services (FLS)

- FLS provides services throughout Michigan to address the unique and specialized legal needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers.
- FLS is the "lawyer of first resort" for migrant farmworkers in Michigan. In addition to providing advice and services in the traditional legal services case areas, FLS provides expanded services in the areas of employment law, immigration law and civil rights advocacy.
- FLS services include representation, advocacy, outreach and education to migrant and seasonal farmworkers.
- FLS provides support to legal aid agencies in Michigan regarding language access issues, employment issues, immigration issues, and other areas affecting migrant farmworkers.

LSSCM's elder law specialist successfully advocated with the Department of Community Health to adopt an option under federal law to permit short stay Medicaid nursing home residents to use their monthly income to maintain their homes, thus ensuring they can go home again, instead of contributing that income to their cost of care. After the Department of Community Health approved the policy, we worked successfully with the Department of Human Services to overcome implementation challenges.

STATEWIDE ADVOCACY

LSSCM is the lead agency on the following collaborative statewide advocacy projects:

- ***Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Program (MFPP)***

  MFPP is a partnership with legal aid offices and housing counselors throughout Michigan, as well as the National Consumer Law Center. MFPP focuses on expanding legal representation to homeowners facing foreclosure, collaborating with housing counselors to resolve foreclosures early in the process, and coordinating statewide policy advocacy.

- ***Michigan Immigrant Rights Project (MIRP)***

  MIRP is a joint project with the Center for Civil Justice to improve statewide access for eligible immigrants and coordinate case and advocacy work for these clients throughout Michigan. The primary goal of this project is to effect long term systemic and social change to help alleviate and end the many disparities faced by Michigan's immigrant population.

- ***Michigan Statewide Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition***

  MPLP partners with the Michigan League for Human Services, Michigan State University, Michigan credit unions and many other local organizations to make sure people are able to obtain the tax refunds they are entitled to and claim the Earned Income Tax Credit. This initiative is funded in part by the Michigan Department of Human Services and brought over $25 million in tax refunds and credits back to Michigan residents for the 2008 tax year.

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(includes donations designated through the Access to Justice Campaign and local United Way campaigns)

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Hutchins Hall
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Website: www.mplp.org

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--Hon. Hugo Black, Griffin v Illinois, 351 US 12 (1956)

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