Welcome from the Director
Emily A. Benfer, Clinical Professor of Law

In our fifth year, we have learned that our success is dependent upon each individual’s contribution. Poet Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, “We don’t want to be stars. We want to be part of a constellation.” Without each student, healthcare provider, attorney, teacher, and volunteer, we are less successful and our work less meaningful in our patient-clients’ lives. The dedication of each extraordinary individual — our stars — allowed us to remove social determinants of health, improve processes, add new partners, influence policy reform, and protect the rights of those who are oftentimes invisible and voiceless. Here are a few of the highlights:

- Collectively, students have addressed the legal and social needs of more than 1,800 low-income, predominately Hispanic, individuals and families. The majority of clients report that they would not have sought legal assistance without the recommendation of their medical providers. As a result of the medical-legal partnership, students increase access to justice for this underserved community (Health Justice Project in Action: Student Attorney Addresses Unhealthy Housing Conditions, Page 3).

- Over 160 students of law, medicine, social work and public health have participated in the Health Justice Project since 2010. These students learned the fundamentals of practice, their role in the achievement of social justice and health equity, and the tools necessary to effectively collaborate with other professions to attain their goals. They know what it means to be an advocate for another human being. Health Justice Project alumni often describe their time in the clinic as the most valuable class in law school and instrumental to their successful practice of law and ability to think creatively, deliberately and strategically to address their clients’ problems (Health Justice by the Numbers, Page 3).

- Students have trained over 455 health professionals and medical residents in the identification of legal and social determinants of health and effective advocacy on a patient’s behalf. In this issue, we highlight one of our medical champions, Dr. Beth Dunlap (Partner Spotlight: Dr. Beth Dunlap, Erie Family Health Center, Page 4).

- Policy students from the schools of law, public health and medicine have advised multiple nonprofits, including ChangeLab Solutions, the National Coalition to End Homelessness, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, Metropolitan Tenant’s Organization, and the Healthy Homes Healthy Communities Initiative. Most recently, Health Justice Project Policy Advocates worked with the Medical-Legal Partnership Working Group and hosted a roundtable discussion to advance health equity in Illinois (Policy Students Put Health Justice On the Table, Page 5).

The National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership celebrated these outcomes and our collaborative efforts by recognizing the Health Justice Project with the 2015 Outstanding Medical-Legal Partnership Award (Health Justice Project Receive the 2015 Outstanding Medical-Legal Partnership Award, Page 2). I am deeply grateful for the privilege to be a part of the Health Justice Project and look forward to every day spent working with our students and partners to achieve health justice in our communities.

"The Health Justice Project is, without a doubt, the most rewarding activity I have participated in at Loyola University Chicago. The clinic provides law students the unique opportunity to put legal theories and ideas to practice by working closely with clients and managing their own cases. The hands-on experience is unmatched by any other program. I hope to see the clinic grow and flourish, providing future law students with the opportunity to better themselves while helping those in need." Paige Steffen (Law 2015)
The National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership honored the Health Justice Project with the 2015 Outstanding Medical-Legal Partnership Award at the National Medical-Legal Partnership Summit in April. The Health Justice Project received the award for its fully integrated medical-legal partnership model, extensive collaboration to address health-harming legal needs, and efforts to transform policies that negatively affect the health of low-income individuals. The award is a tribute to the collaborative efforts between Erie Family Health Center and Loyola University Chicago School of Law and their work to address the social and legal needs of patient-clients. Health Justice Project faculty, staff, current and former students, attorneys and healthcare providers accepted the award together. Jessica Sance, Behavioral Health Coordinator at Erie Family Health Center, gave the acceptance remarks. She dedicated the award to the patient-clients “who have trusted the Health Justice Project” since its founding in 2010. As a social determinants of health specialist, Jessica conducts intakes with Spanish-speaking patient-clients who are referred to the Health Justice Project. In her acceptance speech, Jessica said,

I was asked to speak about a client I will always remember, but in reality I remember many. I remember a client who had a 7-year-old with asthma, asking her landlord to remove the mold in their bedroom, but he refused to do so. I remember a 35-year-old man who was denied worker compensation because his employer demanded he come back to work after two days, even though he was out for two weeks because of his work injury. I remember a 55-year-old woman who was denied SSDI because she “made too much money” when in reality she was barely surviving. I remember a family needing food pantry assistance, a family dealing with a utility shut-off notice, and a special education referral for a 4-year-old who was not speaking. These are a few of the many memorable clients we have served. This award represents all the clients who are unlikely to seek legal and social services because of immigration status, language barriers or lack of trust in the legal system, but who have been willing to trust us because of the compassion and respect we provide.

Professor Emily Benfer, the founder and director of the Health Justice Project said, “This award is a testament to the enormous contribution of our incredible students and partners and the inspiring resiliency of our patient-clients. We are extremely fortunate to attract exceptional law students and to work with compassionate and dedicated providers. Providers like Jessica Sance are central to our success. Together, every semester, we move one step closer to making health justice a reality in our community.”

The Health Justice Project extends an enormous thank you to the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership for recognizing our collective efforts and inspiring us to embody the tenets of this award. Going forward, the Health Justice Project is even more committed to eliminating the obstacles that stand between vulnerable Chicagoans and their health.

Health Justice Project AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) fellows and students, Sumaya Noush (Law 2016) and Ali Gross (Law 2015), traveled to Washington D.C. to accept the Outstanding Medical-Legal Partnership Award and participate in the summit. At the National Summit, students met with prominent leaders in health care, law, public health, social work, and government. The interprofessional nature of the National Summit allowed attendees to share best practices on the integration of the legal team into the healthcare setting to address the social determinants of health for vulnerable populations. Reflecting on the conference, Sumaya Noush said, “I learned the importance of articulating the purpose of medical-legal partnership to others, how to build a strategy big enough and meaningful enough to benefit the lives of many people, and decided what values I want to stand for on my own journey into a health law career.”
Patricia Smith,* a single mother of four, scheduled an appointment with her physician at Erie Family Health Center for help with severe anxiety. During the exam, Ms. Smith expressed concern about her daughters’ physical safety and overall wellbeing. Dr. Caitlin Lassus, an active medical champion in the Health Justice Project, asked about the family’s living situation and quickly identified substandard housing conditions as the root cause of the family’s health concerns.

After living in her apartment for a year, the building was sold to another management company. Instead of honoring her lease, the new landlord converted the tenancy to a verbal month-to-month agreement, giving the landlord the right to force the family out of their apartment with only a 30-day notice.

Compounding Ms. Smith’s problems, her apartment was extremely unsafe for children as it was infested with mold, bedbugs, and cockroaches. Further, the apartment did not have locks, smoke or carbon monoxide detectors. The building was also experiencing break-ins and vandalism. Ms. Smith notified the management company of the conditions on several occasions, but the landlord refused to make repairs.

Dr. Lassus immediately referred Ms. Smith to the Health Justice Project and the case was assigned to Student Attorney John Harig. John learned that the landlord served Ms. Smith with a five-day eviction notice for non-payment of rent, even though the landlord had accepted her rent for the month. Ms. Smith was very concerned about having an eviction on her record.

John acted quickly, filing a motion to dismiss the case. John knew that, even if the eviction case was dismissed, the landlord could still give Ms. Smith a 30-day termination of tenancy under the month-to-month lease. One month was not enough time for the family to gather funds for a security deposit and the family was facing homelessness. John immediately opened negotiations with the landlord’s counsel.

John’s advocacy resulted in an additional two rent free months in the unit and the parties agreed to petition the court to seal the record. This was particularly important because an appearance in eviction court on a tenant’s record, regardless of the outcome, almost always guarantees the denial of a rental application. This was the ideal outcome for Ms. Smith as it gave her time to save money for a security deposit and allowed her children to finish the school year before moving to a new school district.

A month after moving into a safe and secure apartment, Ms. Smith reports that her anxiety is well managed, allowing her to focus on other aspects of her life, “Before the Health Justice Project got involved, I was very stressed. After John went over my case many times to find the best option for me, I was able to move into an apartment where my daughters feel safe and confident. I was even able to find a job. Now things are great.”

* All clients’ names have been changed throughout this publication to protect client confidentiality.

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**HEALTH JUSTICE PROJECT SUCCESS: Student Attorney Addresses Unhealthy Housing Conditions**

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**HEALTH JUSTICE BY THE NUMBERS**

- **1,800+** Erie Family Health Center patients assisted by the Health Justice Project since December 2010
- **$125,000** outstanding medical debt forgiven for Health Justice Project Clients in Spring 2015
- **$557,000** awarded in medical reimbursement to patient-clients
- **100%** success rate in all disability cases with appealable issue
- **160+** students of law, medicine, social work and public health participated in the Health Justice Project
- **$57,000** in housing and utility expenses recouped for patient-clients
- **$200,000** awarded in disability benefits to patient-clients
- **455+** health professionals trained by Health Justice Project in effective client advocacy

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“Working with Ms. Smith taught me the importance of legal aid clinics like the Health Justice Project. My client was unaware of how to protect her rights in this situation. The Health Justice Project provided her access to legal services that would not be available otherwise.” John Harig (Law 2015)
Dr. Beth Dunlap remembers her first home visit as a physician at Erie Family Health Center. After a series of severe strokes, patient Scott Meyers became legally blind, diabetic, cognitively delayed, and speech impaired. At risk of immediate homelessness, Mr. Meyers needed support that went far beyond medical treatment. According to Dr. Dunlap, “acute social, legal, and financial issues were making it impossible to improve Mr. Meyer’s chronic health conditions.”

Scott received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as his only source of income. However, due to automatic deductions for child support, Mr. Meyers was unable to pay his rent every month and faced certain eviction. Dr. Dunlap referred him to the Health Justice Project. She explained to the Client Advocate, Emma Swinford, that Mr. Meyers is occasionally unable to recall words and provided suggestions on how to trigger his memory to help him complete his narrative.

The Health Justice Project worked with Mr. Meyers to find subsidized public housing to minimize the threat of homelessness and helped provide a sustainable living environment. Unfortunately, a previous eviction on his record disqualified him from public housing. Health Justice Project advocates collaborated with Dr. Dunlap to request a reasonable accommodation in the form of an exception to the application requirements, arguing that Mr. Meyers could not be penalized for his medical conditions. As a result, Mr. Meyers moved into public housing in March 2015.

To ensure that Mr. Meyers would not be at risk for homelessness in the future, Emma was also able to address his income level. Since the child support case was based in Wisconsin, Emma reached out to local legal aid attorneys. As a result, the Health Justice Project partnered with an advocate who provided pro bono representation. The legal aid attorney modified Mr. Meyers’ child support order so that his payments would be more manageable. With smaller deductions from his SSI check, Mr. Meyers is able to afford his portion of the rent and basic necessities.

Reflecting on the outcome of Mr. Meyers’ case, Dr. Dunlap notes, “I can give Mr. Meyers medication, but I can’t find him affordable housing. Having a legal team on site has made all the difference. Now that these issues are resolved, I can focus on providing Mr. Meyers with preventative care, such as stroke prevention and hypertension management.”

Mr. Meyers reports that he is very happy in his new apartment. Not only is it more affordable and accessible, but it is also located closer to grocery stores and pharmacies. Now that Mr. Meyers is living in stable and sustainable housing, he is exploring his passion for graphic design.
Health Justice Policy students and the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children co-hosted “Putting Health Justice On the Table” on May 12, 2015. During the event, students engaged stakeholders in a dialogue about how medical-legal partnerships can work together to achieve health equity and social justice in Illinois. Currently, thirty-nine counties in Illinois have medical-legal partnerships, leaving sixty-three counties without medical-legal partnership services.

Sumaya Noush (Law 2016) and Alexandra Gross (Law 2016) presented how social and legal factors, such as income, educational attainment, access to food and housing, and employment status contribute to the high prevalence of poor health outcomes. Representatives of the legal, medical, social work, and public health fields participated in the event. They described their experiences working with individuals that would benefit from a medical-legal partnership approach.

Rebecca Boudos (Lurie Children’s Hospital) and Karen Barnes (Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council) discussed the limitations of medical treatment due to social and environmental issues that affect patients, including substandard housing conditions, lack of transportation, and limited access to social services. Stephanie Altman (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law) and Amy Zimmerman (Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children) described clients who would have had a better outcome if the attorney had the ability to intervene earlier in the case and collaborate with other professionals.

Ultimately, participants agreed that medical-legal partnerships are necessary in the effort to achieve health equity. As Sharon Gates (Senior Director of Community Engagement at Rush University Medical Center) stated, “A medical-legal partnership with faculty and students would be powerful. It is needed. It would make a difference for people with no access.” The event culminated with an agreement to form an interprofessional working group to explore the advancement of medical-legal partnerships along with the achievement of health equity and social justice in Illinois.

Renters with an appearance in eviction court on their public record are often blacklisted by landlords, regardless of whether the claim for possession was decided in the tenant’s favor. As a result of this practice, prospective tenants with a history of eviction are forced into rental housing with substandard conditions that pose a threat to their health and safety. In addition to moving to a more disadvantaged, high crime neighborhood or rundown housing, consequences of eviction often include prolonged periods of homelessness, job loss, depression and the subsequent deterioration of health. The Health Justice Project frequently represents Erie Family Health Center patients who experience the negative health outcomes of eviction.

Shamica Wilson, a client of Health Justice Project partner, Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing (LCBH), knows the issue all too well. The Circuit Court of Cook County granted possession of her apartment to her landlord without giving her the opportunity to present her defense to a jury. When LCBH appealed the case, it was dismissed as moot because Ms. Wilson vacated the premises and possession was no longer at issue. However, Ms. Wilson could still be granted relief: the Order for Possession could be reversed, removed from her record, and the record could be sealed, preventing future landlords from seeing it.

The Health Justice Project submitted an amicus brief, a brief written by a third party introducing concerns on larger legal ramifications, in the case. The Health Justice Project student Paige Steffen (Law 2015) addressed five issues: (1) that erroneous eviction orders are of great public interest, (2) tenants with eviction records face barriers to renting, (3) barriers to renting are exacerbated by the scarcity of affordable housing options, (4) eviction records ultimately threaten the health and well-being of tenants, and (5) sealing eviction records help to achieve health equity. The brief urged the court to consider these threats to health when ruling on the appeal. While the case has yet to be decided, the brief sheds light the serious health inequities that many low-income clients experience as a result of eviction records.
Emily Benfer was cross-appointed to the Loyola University Chicago School of Medicine Department of Public Health.

Emily Benfer and Allyson Gold presented Interprofessional Clinics at the Forefront of Change and Achieving Health Equity for Low-Income Clients: The Effect of Legal Intervention on Health Outcomes at the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) Clinical Teaching Conference in May 2015. They also presented Advancing Population Health: An Overview of Law School Based Medical-Legal Partnership at the 10th Anniversary National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership Summit in April 2015 and You Are Where You Live: The Housing Market and Health Equity at the Norman Amaker Public Interest Law and Social Justice Retreat in March 2015.


Health Justice Project Student Fellow, Client Advocate, and Student Attorney, Erin Sutton (Law 2015) received an Equal Justice Works Fellowship sponsored by Discover, Inc and Mayer Brown, LLP. Erin’s project will establish a medical-legal partnership between Rush University’s Road Home Program and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago with the goal of improving mental health outcomes for veterans and their families, so that they can lead healthy, stable civilian lives.

Health Justice Project Policy Advocate, Amanda Walsh (Law 2014, LLM 2015) received an Equal Justice Works Fellowship sponsored by Walgreen Co. and Baker & McKenzie, LLP. Amanda’s project will establish the Family Preservation Project to expand the reach of the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children to improve the overall mental health outcomes and family stability of children living with mental illness.

Congratulations to Skadden Fellow Sarah Hess on an outstanding first year of legal fellowship at Erie’s teen and school-based sites.

Congratulations and thank you to AmeriCorps VISTA Fellows Salima Sewani and Emma Swinford on completing their term of service and for extraordinary contributions. Thank you to AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow Rachael Viale who completed her first term of service and will continue to serve at the Health Justice Project for the 2015-2016 VISTA service term.

The Health Justice Project welcomes AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow Sara Sherrard and Schweitzer Fellow Hannah Riley.

THANK YOU TO OUR STUDENTS