



***Lawyer in the School-* Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary**

Legal Aid of West Virginia's ***Lawyer in the School*** Program works to stabilize the lives of Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary (Mary C. Snow) children by providing onsite family legal assistance on issues linked to childhood trauma like eviction, dilapidated housing, disrupted economic support, and lack of secure legal custody for children not living with biological parents. By targeting legal problems that reduce homelessness, hunger, access to health care, and custodial instability, the project supports collaborative community efforts centered around the school to reduce the impact of trauma and promote attendance, educational attainment, health, and well-being. You can view a video of the school at <https://youtu.be/p8kdsCn7S9c>.

Lawyer in the School staff and a pool of trained volunteer lawyers meet school families in a place they know and feel safe, and address issues in a holistic manner. The project is currently funded by a 2- year grant from the Legal Services Corporation. By mobilizing a significant number of volunteers, LAWV is engaging local private attorneys to make a community investment, responding to community needs, while also increasing LAWV's capacity to provide legal help in a neighborhood facing significant challenges.

What We Do: ***Lawyer in the School*** staff recruit, train, and organize volunteer attorneys to come to Mary C. Snow for regular school based legal clinics and provide back-up to volunteers.

- Clinics are held every Monday and Wednesday from 2-4 p.m. while school is in session.
- The clinics provide families the opportunity to talk to a lawyer about their problem for free, so they can receive information, advice or get help filling out forms.
- If a family needs more extensive legal help, volunteer attorneys refer cases to LAWV for additional assistance, or agree to handle the cases themselves.
- Common civil legal problems at the school are: custody, adoption, infant guardianship, eviction, housing, economic support issues, and employment issues.
- The Project also mobilizes local assets by directly connecting families to community partners for non-legal aid and resources that support family resiliency.

Partner Law Firms: Steptoe and Johnson, Jackson Kelly, Bailey Glasser, and Bowles Rice.

- "The opportunity to participate in this effort in a "hands on" manner, in the community, interacting with clients... was an exceptional and meaningful opportunity. Being able to provide assistance where it is truly needed was beneficial to both those served by the clinic and our firm. We look forward to our continuing involvement with this worthy and needed endeavor."-Michael Victorson, General Counsel to Jackson Kelly.

Community Partners: Catholic Charities of West Virginia, Charleston-Kanawha Housing Authority, Goodwill, Healthy Grandfamilies, Recovery Point, Union Mission, and YWCA Resolve.

By the Numbers:

- 104 school families have visited the clinic, since the program started in January 2017.
- 34 school families have received extended legal help.
- 59 volunteer attorneys have participated as part of Lawyer in the School.

Stabilizing Families: “I didn’t have anywhere else to go”- Quote from a Parent

- Kept 7 school families in their homes by helping to defend their eviction cases and connecting them to resources to help pay past due rent.
- Stabilized 14 school families by assisting them with infant guardianship or custody forms to keep a child in a safe situation.
- Secured approximately \$30,000 annually for school families in employment income and government benefits.
- Assisted school families in filing over \$80,000 in Water Contamination Claims.



“Winnie Davis” is a grandmother who is raising her grandson, Tyrone, a student at Mary C. Snow. Ms. Davis is a home health worker. She was suspended from work without pay or explanation. After two weeks of calling to see when she could return to work, only to be told to “call back tomorrow,” she came to the clinic. She was desperate. She had missed one paycheck. If she missed one more, she would not be able to pay her rent. The day after Ms. Davis’s visit, a **Lawyer in the School** attorney contacted her employer’s corporate headquarters to discuss the suspension. The HR officer agreed that the situation was not handled properly and reinstated Ms. Davis. Ms. Davis returned to work the next day. Because of the speedy resolution, she did not miss a second paycheck, enabling her to meet her monthly obligations, including rent, so that she and her grandson were able to remain in their home, enabling Tyrone to remain at Mary C. Snow, where he has attended since kindergarten.

“Dot Smith” is the great aunt of two students at Mary C. Snow. Ms. Smith was the sister of the children’s adoptive mother, who recently passed away. (The children’s biological parents had previously had their parental rights terminated). The adoptive father could not care for the children after his wife’s death. The adoptive father asked Ms. Smith to take the children. She was willing to care for them, but has limited means and is raising five grandchildren of her own. **Lawyer in the School** attorneys advised Ms. Smith that she could obtain medical cards and food stamps for the children by securing a form of legal permanency. After discussing legal options, Ms. Smith decided to apply to become the children’s foster parent. However, she was worried that she could not pass the required home study without a separate bed for each of the children. **Lawyer in the School** staff worked with community partners to secure twin beds for the two children so the family could pass a home study. Finally, a **Lawyer in the School** attorney worked with Child Protective Services to get the inspection completed so Ms. Smith could qualify as a foster parent and receive a monthly subsidy for the children’s care, as well as a medical card and food stamps. This family of nine is doing well. All the kids are thriving in school.

Moving Forward- Project Growth:

- LAWV is seeking to engage more law firms to participate on an ongoing basis.
- To enable parents to better advocate for their families, LAWV is considering holding workshops to educate parents about their legal rights and ways to deal with legal issues before they become a problem, enabling parents to more proactively address issues than can cause trauma.