

# Eastside Legal Assistance Program Annual Report | 2009

In 2009 Eastside Legal Assistance Program (ELAP) provided direct services to 1,295 clients: 889 people received legal aid through advice clinics and workshops, 396 received client plus services, support with wills, direct representation, lectures and legal aid through ELAP's Domestic Violence Legal Program (DVLP). In fact 181 women were served through DVLP in 2009. During 2009 ELAP also provided support via materials and phone referrals to 2,061 people. ELAP served more people in 2009 than it has since 2002, when many additional resources and staff were available. We believe it was possible to serve so many additional individuals because of our strong volunteer attorney recruitment efforts in 2009.



The most significant accomplishments of 2009 include the opening of three new clinics, two for DV survivors specifically and a third located at a day shelter for general legal aid needs. Other accomplishments include an increase in support by volunteer attorneys, paralegals, an information technologist, and two third year law student interns. All have allowed ELAP to increase brief services, pleadings preparation and direct representation. Another significant accomplishment was the permanent establishment of an experimental clinic at a day shelter in Bellevue, Angeline House. 10 clinics were held at Angeline House in 2009 and the attorney mentoring a Microsoft team of attorneys has completed the mentoring role, turning the clinic over to these attorneys to fully cover. Additionally, the clinic at the Redmond YWCA DV shelter was solidified in October via a new ELAP DV volunteer family lawyer. As a result this clinic takes place now twice/month addressing DV legal aid needs. Finally, Microsoft volunteer attorneys took on one direct representation case as a pilot project that has worked extremely well. These attorneys have logged over 80 hours of service to a DV client. This test case of using a team approach, we believe, will help address DV/Family Law services that are often overwhelming to a sole practitioner. We will bring this model to law firms in 2010.

The most significant emerging issue for ELAP in 2009 continued to be the increase in demand for legal help, particularly in the area of domestic violence. What was noted in mid-year reporting period remains to be true throughout all of 2009. This increase in need has been a trend since mid-2008. For instance, in 2008 we served a total of 110 clients through the domestic violence program. In 2009 ELAP served 181 survivors of DV. This is a 61% increase in demand that ELAP was able to meet. Requests in general for legal aid have increased as well. ELAP has seen a 60% increase in requests for legal aid in 2009 compared to 2008. Much of this increase has to do with employment, landlord/tenant issues and bankruptcy filings.

ELAP's numbers are in line with what we are seeing throughout the country. Tony Pugh of McClatchy Newspapers wrote an article on July 9, 2009 with the headline, "Growing numbers of poor people swamp legal aid offices." Further, as reported in The New York Times, Catholic Charities is also reporting a spike in domestic

violence (B. Ehrenreich, June 14, 2009). The trend of growing numbers of low-income folks needing civil legal aid in the state of Washington is expected to continue as well. 22% of workers living in King County do not earn a livable wage for themselves or their families. In East King County 10.9% lived in households without a living wage income. Further, "one-fourth of all low-income wage earners are immigrants or refugees..." (2000 US Census Report). It is predicted that the population over 60 will increase by 39% by the year 2015 in King County. In the City of Bellevue the population of 65 or older grew by 13.9% in 2006 (Human Services Needs, City of Bellevue, 07-08). It is well known that after retirement income typically declines because of fixed income levels and increases in cost of living. Further, in 2006, 48.5% of all assaults reported in the State of Washington were the result of domestic violence and that 24% of all people homeless in the county are victims of domestic violence. (King County United Way Needs Assessment 2008)

Given the economic downturn since 2008, the need for legal aid in 2009 was even greater than reported in the 2003 Washington State Supreme Court report. In fact, there exists a "justice gap" that, "...is more pronounced than ever. Despite legislative action to maintain state funding for civil legal aid since 2005, the number of people in need of legal aid continues to far exceed the capacity of the state-funded civil legal aid system to meet the need. As was the case in 2003, today the vast majority of low-income residents with compelling legal problems—problems that directly affect personal and family safety and security—cannot get the legal help they need." (WA State Office of Civil Legal Aid Report, June 2009)

To address this reality ELAP has been actively recruiting new volunteer attorneys, paralegals and interns to meet the increase demand. ELAP's board vice-president in 2009, Judy Jennison, who is the board president in 2010, has spearheaded this active plan of outreach. We have also improved our social media networks for recruitment including updating the ELAP website, opening a Facebook page and developed a new recruitment brochure.

In the last six months ELAP has welcomed 11 new volunteer attorneys, 4 new volunteer paralegals and a second law student intern. The volunteer attorneys have been mentored and have taken on brief services and direct representation cases, as well as giving advice via our clinics. The paralegal volunteers have revised and updated a resource book for our volunteers, helped with dissolution paper preparation and legal filing. The 3rd year law student from Cal State logged numerous hours providing case research for domestic violence clients. She also composed a talk track to assist clients with self-help family law actions.

An impressive board recruitment effort also took place in the later part of 2009. The result has been an addition of 6 new board members approved in December of 2009.

In sum, ELAP is in a very creative and growing stage, even though financial resources are small. Expect great things from ELAP in 2010 in order to better serve low-income residents of King County.

ELAP periodically is able to go beyond advice clinics and brief services. Here are a few examples of cases addressed in 2009:

- Hospitalized as a stroke patient, a single mother with potentially terminal diagnosis has two dependant teen-age children. The grandmother contacted ELAP for emergency guardianship, a healthcare directive and possible custody arrangements for the children in the event of her daughter's death. A new ELAP volunteer attorney was paired with a mentor family law volunteer who regularly offers a team approach to pro bono emergencies at ELAP. Both met with relatives to plan and discuss legal options around the potential tragic case. Much legal preparation was offset by the mother's slow and unexpected recovery. This is an example of how responsive ELAP attorneys can be in providing legal triage for our Eastside client's in time of need.
- A young Russian mail order bride attending an ELAP immigration legal clinic was assisted in filing for protection orders and bringing action to secure her legal status and free her from her abusive husband. Because of cultural sensitivity on the part of a 10 year ELAP certified legal Russian interpreter, the client was provided assistance at her DVPO hearing. Further a new Russian speaking family law attorney volunteered to take the client's family law case pro bono. This attorney is also collaborating with a long time ELAP volunteer, providing complete immigration services pro bono for the client. This is an example of the excellent "wrap around" pro bono legal services ELAP volunteers and staff are coordinating for the client's best interests.