



The Progress Report



Issue 9 · Spring 2008

Breaking the "School-to-Prison Pipeline"

In October, 2007 our affiliate Texas Appleseed issued "Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline: Dropout to Incarceration - The Impact of School Discipline and Zero Tolerance", a report which examined how school discipline policies in that state impacted future involvement in the juvenile justice system. Texas Appleseed found that African American and special education students were over-represented in referrals to Disciplinary Alternative Programs (DAEPs) in comparison to their percentage in the overall school population. They also found that a small number of school districts were much more likely to make such a disciplinary referral than others.

Connecticut Appleseed's Board of Directors decided that similar research might prove illuminating here as well. Our state also has alternative public schools

that were created to provide education for children with disciplinary problems. But to date, there has been little research here on the likelihood that public school students with disciplinary problems and diverted to alternative schools will end up in the juvenile justice system.

"School-to-Prison Pipeline" (S2PP) refers to the impact of school disciplinary policies and practices on the tendency for certain students to "graduate" into the juvenile justice system. School-based behavior problems (such as suspensions, expulsions, or Disciplinary Alternative placements) are all-too-common entry points into the juvenile justice system, so looking at the related data is central to examining S2PP.

This project will examine state and district data on disciplinary rates with an eye towards answering this central question: Is there a "School-to-Prison Pipeline" in Connecticut? And if so, how do disciplinary policies (on the state and local level) and implementation of those policies affect that pipeline? Importantly, Connecticut passed legislation in 2007 that substantially expanded the in-school suspension track and which was originally slated to take effect on July 1, 2008. Given the controversial nature of this legislation, we also plan to research related "best practice" models from other states and perhaps offer recommendations to the General Assembly, the Rell Administration, the State Board of Education, Connecticut Department of Education, and education advocacy groups. We hope that our research would help to inform any future reconsideration of the 2007 law.

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Improving Access for Immigrants to Banking Services

Our year-old effort to integrate the state's immigrant communities into the financial mainstream is designed to help immigrants save, access credit, build assets and protect themselves better from theft and financial predation. A central component of this project is trying to encourage banks to improve their outreach and expand the products and services they offer to the immigrant community. An equally important component is working directly with immigrant groups to reduce any apprehension or discomfort about using financial services and eliminate any barriers to accessing those services.

We are fortunate that a pro bono team from financial services research firm Greenwich Associates (www.greenwich.com) has surveyed many bank community representatives to determine which products and services they already offer to Connecticut immigrants. We believe that increased knowledge of the competitive landscape will spur banks to respond more effectively to the immigrant market. We are equally lucky that Yale Law School's Community Development Financial Institutions clinic is helping us by surveying the financial services desired by immigrant communities

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Mission Statement

Our Mission is to develop solutions for the causes, rather than the symptoms, of our state's social problems. We will deploy volunteer lawyers and other professionals to achieve systemic changes through legal and legislative advocacy, negotiation, education and other initiatives.



Connecticut Appleseed

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Progress in Leveraging Pro Bono Resources

Leveraging professional resources to achieve "systemic changes" is the essence of our strategy. Since professional time volunteered through Connecticut Applesseed can help far more than a single client, our organization is a great vehicle for mobilizing skilled volunteers as varied as lawyers and dentists to "give back" a little. Pro bono work can be challenging and meaningful because it provides an intellectual outlet for attorneys who enjoy policy work. In the recent past our Education project has relied on a team of pro bono lawyers to conduct interviews, collect findings and make policy recommendations.

Firms, partnerships and private practitioners that partner with us benefit because we publicize your efforts and accomplishments. We also connect the private sector with a growing network of public interest groups, academicians and social justice advocates that may be fertile ground for future work. Examples of pro bono involvement in our projects includes:

Expanding Financial Access for Immigrants - A team from financial services research firm Greenwich Associates (www.greenwich.com) has surveyed Connecticut's banking community to determine what products and services they offer to immigrants. Among the drivers for banks to participate in our survey is an interest in fine-tuning their outreach to gain greater return on their investment to access immigrant communities.

Parents' Access to Legal Information - This project distills complex information on educational law issues into easy-to-understand guides for parents in multiple languages, then partners with existing parent leadership/support groups and school districts to provide "Ask a Lawyer Forums" where the guides will be distributed. Pro bono attorneys who volunteered to write the guides included:

Day Pitney: Allan Taylor (partner), Virginia Brown, Jennifer Montgomery, Adetokunbo Badejo, Andrea Thomas, and Margoth Rodriguez Caley

Robinson & Cole: Associates Ndidi N. Moses and Nicole Bernabo, and Linda Morkan (counsel)

Access to Dental Care - *The Connecticut Mission of Mercy ("CTMOM")* was a free weekend-long dental clinic, held in mid-April, whose fund-raising was led by Connecticut Applesseed Board member Dr. Mike Perl. *CTMOM's* purpose was to serve individuals living on small incomes or without dental insurance who cannot afford dental care. Two Aetna attorneys, Meggan Martin and Cynthia Bates, volunteered to play an absolutely critical but behind-the-scenes role by drafting waivers and/or releases relative to the services provided by volunteer dentists. *CTMOM's* immensely successful April 12-13 weekend employed 190 volunteer dentists to provide greatly-needed dental care to more than 1,000 state residents.

Elder Law - Workshops at senior centers across the state have been provided by these volunteer attorneys in 2007 and 2008:

Lea Shedd
Joel Melbaum
Linda Brown
Mark Connell
Richard Fisher
Christine Andrew
Connecticut Attorney General's Office
Nancy McLucas
Rebecca Eddy
Jan Rosenthal
Malcolm Burlow
George Bickford
Attorneys from Connecticut Legal Services
Marilyn Toland
George Guertin
Mark Connell
Whitney Lewdon
Lisa Davis
Gary Sklaver

Affordable Housing for Municipal Employees: A "One-Off" Pro Bono Request

Joe Williams, a partner at Shipman & Goodwin, volunteered to research the real estate law issue described below, which is of particular importance to non-profit "affordable" housing developers who use public funds.

In some parts of Connecticut, high housing costs and congested highways pose challenges for municipal and school district employees who would prefer to live closer to their jobs. Providing inexpensive housing for police officers, teachers and others in proximity to their jobs would relieve stress on employees and municipalities alike. Eager to determine the degree to which municipalities might be able to legally restrict some portion of housing units being developed as "affordable" to municipal employees, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation ("LISC") turned to Connecticut Applesseed to find pro bono legal help. LISC provides capital, technical expertise, training and information to help community-based development corporations create affordable housing, community facilities and commercial/industrial projects.

LISC plans to use Shipman's research when consulting with municipalities that may want to include a local employment "preference" in future affordable housing developments.



Connecticut Applesseed Thanks our 2007 Supporters...

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WK Kellogg Foundation
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund



Connecticut Applesseed

New Project Spinoff:

Handbook in Late 2008
Entitled: "Parent Guide for
Navigating Mental Health
Issues in the Criminal Justice
System"

With increasing frequency, one Applesseed project seems to lead to another. In May, 2007 we published our *"Mental Illness, Your Client and the Criminal Justice System"* handbook to familiarize attorneys with mental health issues under Connecticut law so they could work more effectively and sensitively with clients suffering from some aspect of mental illness. Then, last Fall, the Connecticut chapter of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) contacted us to say that they saw a great need for a similar handbook - but one directed at parents and other advocates rather than targeted at attorneys. After several conversations and continued encouragement for such a product, we recruited pro bono legal assistance from the NYC office of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton ("Sheppard Mullin"), a major international law firm headquartered in Los Angeles.

To be written at an easily-understandable sixth grade level, our guide will help parents know what to expect and how to navigate Connecticut's criminal justice system as it relates to adults (ages 18 and up) with a mental illness. Parents and personal advocates need to know right at the outset some key fundamentals about how the criminal justice system works and how to work to best advantage with an attorney.

NAMI-CT will help define the key issues and put Sheppard Mullin in touch with a broad range of mental health experts who could be helpful in developing the guide. Applesseed and our partners will ensure rigorous review of the draft guide by members of the state's legal and mental health communities to confirm its accuracy, as well as include an eye to clarity and graphic design to ensure user-friendliness. Connecticut Applesseed will finish the task by taking the lead in planning and executing the dissemination of the guides to parents, including convening sufficient partners to appropriately distribute the new handbooks.

Improving Access

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in New Haven. Combining the bank survey with information on immigrants' response to targeted banking products and services should enable our project team to present valuable recommendations to the state's banking community as the project progresses.

Expanding Community Outreach

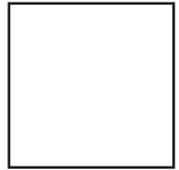
Drawing on results from both surveys, we plan to identify key New Haven immigrant groups with whom we can follow up over the summer.

One purpose for engaging these groups is to disseminate Applesseed's financial education materials, which include a series of 9 bilingual brochures that are specifically targeted to the immigrant consumer. We also hope to learn more about the immigrant communities' response to financial product and service offerings. Preliminarily, we have learned that banks are

spending lots of time and money on outreach that has not been particularly successful. Rapport and trust can be difficult to establish with immigrants. So our conversations with immigrant communities will try to gather useful feedback how financial institutions can build a stronger relationship with immigrants and help them feel comfortable about the range of products and services available.

A Fairfield County Partnership

Connecticut Applesseed is also partnering with Stamford's Housing Development Fund (HDF) to provide them with our brochures and financial education materials for inclusion in their planned "HDF Direct" website. The HDF expects that distributing our literature will assist with their mortgage counseling efforts. Through this collaboration we will borrow from the HDF's contacts to reach more members of Fairfield County's immigrant communities.



A PART OF THE APPLESEED NETWORK

Appleseed, a non-partisan and non-profit organization, is a network of public interest law Centers working to identify and address injustices in their communities. Appleseed works to build a just society through education, legal advocacy, community activism and policy expertise, addressing root causes and producing practical solutions. As one of the nation's largest legal pro bono networks, Appleseed Centers work both independently and collectively, bringing their own experiences to create local solutions that are nationally relevant. We connect the top private practice lawyers, corporate counsel, law schools, civic leaders, and other professionals to tackle problems locally, at their root cause.

Elder Law Grant

Connecticut Community Foundation Leverages Volunteered Legal Help for Seniors

Connecticut Appleseed's distribution of "Connecticut Elder Law Resources" at attorney-led senior center workshops has already helped over 700 seniors become more knowledgeable about their legal rights and assisted with their future-oriented legal planning. During 2007 our elder law education work was supported by small grants from the NewAlliance Foundation, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Washington Mutual Foundation.

Now, after a \$5,000 grant from the Connecticut Community Foundation has enabled this project's extension to senior centers in the Waterbury and Litchfield areas, elder law workshops have recently been held in Prospect, Litchfield and Wolcott. While beginning these workshops during April and May in the Connecticut Community Foundation's region, an additional 4 workshops were also held in the Hartford area and a fifth in Fairfield County.

Together with Connecticut Appleseed's original collaborators, we have also begun planning a second Senior Citizens Law Day in the second half of 2008. Senior Citizens Law Day II will be a catalyst for the review and revision of "Connecticut Elder Law Resources".

Many of the pro bono attorneys who will be teaching seminars at that event have authored chapters in this book. We will work with those individuals to update "Connecticut Elder Law Resources" as well as hopefully to translate the revised book into Spanish.

We anticipate that a translated and updated version of our resource book will help Connecticut Appleseed to further broaden our book's distribution and better answer the legal questions and needs of the state's senior citizens. Because these workshops answer commonly-asked questions related to Consumer Fraud, Medicaid, Advance Directives, Estates and Wills, Housing and other issues of concern to seniors, both the books and workshops have been met with a high level of interest. We look forward to getting this valuable information out to even more seniors across the state.

Pipeline

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We have begun the process of recruiting pro bono attorneys to perform:

1. Qualitative analysis in the form of interviews with school district officials and state-level stakeholders and policy makers;
2. Research on models for state legislation and/or policies related to school discipline; and
3. Research on individual school district/school discipline and code of conduct policies, including analysis of whether schools have adopted a no-tolerance policy within such codes of conduct.

Texas Appleseed's project benefited greatly by assistance from a network of nine pro bono partners, including Vinson & Elkins and ExxonMobil. So, if this core S2PP project is of interest to you or someone in your firm, please let us know!