Legal Aid—A Valuable Community Partner
by James M. Daniels, Director

“Mommy, Mommy, our electric is on. It’s really on, Mommy!!!!” Hearing her kids’ joy, the single mother began to cry and “felt like all the weight I have been carrying left off my shoulders.” Legal aid helps programs succeed that are funded to help those in need.

The single, working mother and her kids had been living place-to-place, sometimes in her car. She and her kids had landed a decent and affordable home in a subsidized project, but faced eviction soon after moving in because she could not get electric service due to a past due bill incurred while her husband was battling cancer. Fortunately, she contacted SEOLS.

SEOLS—working through her landlord, utility company, PUCO, the Department of Job and Family Services, and local charities—got her electric on, set up an affordable payment plan for her unpaid bill, and stopped the eviction. Each of these entities is set up, or has programs, to help those in need. But without legal assistance to pull it all together, this family, despite all these separate programs designed to help, would have slipped back into homelessness with all the resulting bad consequences that go with homelessness for the mother, the kids, and the community.

Legal aid does not just help people deal with the court system; it helps programs help those they are funded to help. This newsletter describes efforts by The Counseling Center in Portsmouth and SEOLS to work together to help recovering addicts resolve legal problems that hurt their chances for successful recovery. People battling addictions, by the time they seek help, are often facing seemingly insurmountable problems caused by their addictions: loss of a driver’s license to get to work, garnishments, harassment by debt collectors, housing, and domestic problems, etc. The Counseling Center can help those in recovery overcome their addictions. But they are still faced with trying to get back on their feet, pull their lives back together, and become productive members of their communities. SEOLS can help them navigate and overcome these barriers. Community services and legal aid, partnering together, increase the chances of success for the recovering addict and for the community efforts to battle the destruction of addictions.

To quote the Kresge Foundation:

Investing to help low-income people solve their legal problems is smart, results-oriented philanthropy. For decades, all over the country, legal aid groups have been a driving force that makes change real in millions of lives. They have answers when families need housing, food, health care. It’s their work that corrects bad policy and changes how society treats the most vulnerable.
LEGAL AID VOLUNTEER—Charlie Kirby

One of our volunteers is Portsmouth attorney Charlie Kirby, who regularly volunteers at the monthly Do-It-Yourself (DIY) legal clinic started by SEOLS at the main branch of the Portsmouth Public Library.

Charlie, a native of Portsmouth, is married and has four children with his wife, Summer. Charlie, a graduate of The Ohio State University and Capital University Law School, has been practicing law since November 2004. He began his career in private practice in Portsmouth and was appointed to the positions of Assistant City Solicitor and Assistant City Prosecutor for the City of Portsmouth.

In March 2005, Charlie began service as a staff attorney for the Ohio Bureau of Worker’s Compensation. During his time at the Bureau, Charlie contacted Southeastern Ohio Legal Services in Portsmouth and asked how he could help. Since then, Charlie has been a regular volunteer at the SEOLS-Portsmouth monthly DIY legal clinic.

Charlie’s perspective on helping SEOLS-Portsmouth is simple—it’s no big thing! In January 2014, Charlie joined the law firm of Cole, Kirby, and Associates, LLC, in Jackson, Ohio. He is now handling workers’ compensation, business, and probate and family law matters. He serves as a guardian ad litem (GAL) for the Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division of the Scioto County Common Pleas Court. In his GAL work, Charlie has visited many homes and families and has often been to the St. Lucy’s House in Portsmouth, a sober living house for women struggling with addiction operated by The Counseling Center in Portsmouth.

Volunteering with SEOLS-Portsmouth at the monthly DIY clinic is now routine for Charlie. He arrives and immediately goes to work providing help for people at the clinic who have legal issues. It is an easy task for Charlie, and a valuable benefit for those who attend the clinic.

In addition to his volunteer work with the DIY Legal Clinic, Charlie became a board member for STAR, Inc. in late 2013, and has served as their Board President since the spring of 2015. STAR, Inc., a nonprofit business that works closely with the Scioto County Board of Developmental Disabilities, provides adult services and assists individuals in obtaining employment. Charlie thoroughly enjoys his work with STAR, and believes it is a valuable service for the local community and families.

In late 2014, Charlie also offered his volunteer (continued on page 6)

For more information about becoming a volunteer with SEOLS Portsmouth, contact SEOLS pro bono coordinator Melissa Skilliter at mskilliter@oslsa.org.
For many years, the lawyers of the Portsmouth office of Southeastern Ohio Legal Services have provided legal assistance—funded by a Legal Assistance Victims Grant from the U.S. Department of Justice and the Victims of Crime Act administered by the Office of the Ohio Attorney General—to survivors of domestic violence. SEOLS has provided survivors legal help in collaboration with shelter and counseling services available from local partners including:

- **Adams County**—Reach Out, Inc.; the YWCA of Clermont County;
- **Scioto County**—the Southern Ohio Task Force on Domestic Violence;
- **Lawrence County**—the Lawrence County Domestic Violence Task Force; and
- **Jackson County**—Serenity House and Community Assault Protective Services (aka CAPS).

The statewide Ohio Domestic Violence Network has provided training services to SEOLS and its partners to help improve their collaborative efforts. Here are stories of hope and appreciation from three survivors:

- Ms. R. was living in Scioto County in 2014 with her husband and their young child. Ms. R. knew that her husband had mental health concerns, and she had been threatened by him. However, with continuing mental health treatment for her husband, Ms. R. had hopes for a bright family future. But in late 2014, while in a drunken rage, Ms. R’s husband choked her, punched her in the face and threw her to the ground while she held the couple’s young child. Ms. R. knew she had to take action. She turned to Southeastern Ohio Legal Services for help. SEOLS helped her obtain a civil protection order and a divorce, custody and support. “I would not have made it through such a hard time without the support of SEOLS,” she said.

- L. D. has been through what psychologists would euphemistically call “stressors”—congestive heart failure, cancer, and ten years of marriage to a man with bipolar disorder who regularly berated her. The couple’s son was so often the victim of, or witness to, verbal, mental and emotional abuses by his father that he needed psychological therapy. By 2012, the husband’s erratic behavior and violence led L. D. to insist on a divorce and file a request for a domestic violence civil protection order. The husband seemed to understand that there were major problems and he agreed to move out of the family home, file a divorce, and consent to a civil protection order for L. D and her child. But then the husband later claimed that he did not understand what he was doing (concerning the domestic violence order). It would take two more years for L. D., with SEOLS’ help, to confirm the (continued on page 4)
domestic violence order and obtain a divorce that allowed visitation of the child by the husband only if he completed certain psychological therapy. He has never done so and hasn’t seen his child in over three years. L. D. looks back on these past years and still cannot fully explain what she and her child endured. Her perspective on these past troubles and those who worked with her is that “they helped me feel strong again… [and now] my son and I have a new lease on life.”

In 2009, S. D. was hit in the head with a bottle causing a deep gash. In 2012, her ribs were broken. Then in October 2013, she was attacked with a knife. The perpetrator of all these incidents was her husband. Today, S. D. is divorced and has had a domestic violence civil protection order in place for two years. The long road to protection and stability for herself and her three children has taken a toll on the family. One of the children has been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the abuse, and the others are afraid. S. D. and the children had to relocate out of state. With SEOLS’ help, the divorce petition will be finalized this month and S. D. will have sole custody of the children. Because of the children’s young ages (7, 6, and 4 years), it will take some time for S. D. to help them understand that they and their mother are safe. S. D. commented on how her “journey” could have ended in a very different place, “If it weren’t for legal assistance, I most likely wouldn’t have gone forward with my civil protection order. I knew that once I was armed with an attorney he [my husband] would be powerless from a legal standpoint. He knew how to control me mentally, but he had no control over my legal team. I am thankful to have such a caring and compassionate attorney who was there with me from the beginning of my journey all the way through the end. Words can never express my gratitude for her.”

Recognizing addiction as a disease allows the addicted person and their family to embrace a solution that is based on proven medical science and continued wellness care, as well as an understanding that an effective treatment program should address the individual’s ongoing physical, emotional, social and spiritual challenges.

So, we believe in a continuum of care that will support a healthy and lasting lifestyle change. We are integrating primary health care, addiction treatment services, individual and family counseling, job coaching, training and mentoring, and very important, access to affordable and safe housing. These are just a few of the programs and services we are offering to assist people in recovery.

What does it mean to be in recovery?

A recovering person has accepted the realities of their disease and has taken personal responsibility for his or her life. Taking personal responsibility will involve not only abstinence, but also efforts to become a fully functioning, independent person who is working to heal broken relationships, addressing continuing emotional, health and spiritual issues, and using their experiences to help others. There are many, many people in long-term recovery who are making a significant contribution to their family, employer, church, and community. Remember, people in recovery are some of the most responsible and employable in the community. They vote more often than the general population and they can pass a drug test. This means a person in long-term recovery is a contributor to the community.

Are you hopeful the community is making progress in dealing with our addiction problems?

I am very hopeful and certain that people can enjoy a full and joyful recovery from drug addiction. I witness people getting well and putting their lives back together. I am blessed to see families rejoice in the sobriety of their loved ones. I am also realistic. We have never been faced with an epidemic in our state and nation so devastating and broad as this opiate problem, and as difficult as the prescription drug problem has been, the heroin problem is worse. So, to make an impact that enacts lasting change, we believe in collaborating with other agencies to join forces on services, strategies and sharing information. We must remember that we are all in this together: the addicted person, their family, those trying to treat the addicted person, the health care community, law enforcement, churches, employers…we are all working together to heal our community, one person at a time.

How can legal services and partnering with SEOLS help the addiction crisis?

Legal aid assistance for our patients would create broad opportunities to address multiple social barriers that stand in the way of recovery and wellness. Our patients struggle with unresolved financial crises, lingering problems with current and previous relationships and an assortment of past wreckage that threatens their ability to benefit from addiction and health services. Legal services can effectively disentangle people from a troubled past, opening the door for a successful future.

Ed Hughes is a graduate of Ohio University with a B.A. in Sociology. He earned a Masters of Public Service Counseling from Western Kentucky University and is licensed as an Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor for the State of Ohio. Mr. Hughes served as Executive Director of The Counseling Center, Inc. from 1989–2013, and is currently CEO of Compass Community Health & The Counseling Center, Inc. Selected Administrator of the Year by the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Drug and Alcohol Counselors, he is a sought-after lecturer, educator and panelist on drug treatment issues and prevention activities, and has written a book, Baffled By Addiction, with Dr. Ronald Turner, MD.
“Legal Aid” came to Portsmouth after the Community Action Organization of Scioto County in 1967 announced that the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity had awarded a $15,186 grant to initiate a four-month program of legal aid services to low-income persons in Scioto County. The grant covered the cost of hiring an attorney, an investigator, and a legal secretary. At a time when the average household income was $7,200, eligibility for help was set at $35/week for single persons and $50/week for married couples with no children. William Howland, a local attorney, administered the program from an office on the second floor of the Scioto County Courthouse. The scope of the legal services included divorce, landlord/tenant disputes, wage claims, small loans, and debt problems. Almost 40 years later, the Portsmouth office of Southeastern Ohio Legal Services continues the proud tradition of legal services begun as part of the 1960s “War on Poverty.” The collaborative effort with social service agencies and with local private lawyers has been maintained and has grown.

Since its first office in the Scioto County Courthouse, SEOLS-Portsmouth has had several different office locations, but for the past 25 years, SEOLS-Portsmouth has been located in downtown Portsmouth at 800 Gallia Street, Suite 700. Services have expanded to include legal assistance for low-income persons and senior citizens in Adams, Scioto, and Lawrence Counties, especially veterans, and to domestic violence survivors in Jackson County. While the scope of services has also expanded, the office still focuses on the core issues of the poor: domestic violence, housing, income maintenance and debt problems.

The collaboration with local social services agencies and local private lawyers has also grown into long-term relationships benefiting the continued efforts to obtain equal access to justice for low-income persons. SEOLS-Portsmouth staff lawyers currently serve or have served on the board of directors of the Adams County Senior Services Agency, United Scioto Senior Services, Inc., Habitat for Humanity of Scioto County, The Counseling Center, Inc., Compass Community Health, Inc., the Salvation Army, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Southeastern Ohio, and the Adams County Homeless Shelter. Significant accomplishments of the SEOLS-Portsmouth staff, resulting in part from those agency relationships, have included the creation in 1994 of the Scioto County Homeless Shelter; the closure in 2002 of a dilapidated old city hospital-turned-residential slum; and a set of housing conditions lawsuits in 2010 that led to the redevelopment of an entire street of residential housing in South Point, Ohio, by the Ironton-Lawrence Community Action Agency for the benefit of low-income renters. More recently, SEOLS-Portsmouth has (continued on page 6)
partnered with The Counseling Center (servicing Adams, Scioto, and Lawrence Counties) to find grant funding to create and operate the first ever Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) to serve the civil legal needs of those in active treatment of drug and alcohol addiction, and to help in their recovery.

No mention of SEOLS-Portsmouth can be complete without mention of its current heart and soul—its staff. For 25 years, administrative secretary and Franklin Furnace native, Dawnita Spradlin has greeted clients, lawyers and judges at the SEOLS-Portsmouth office, making certain that clients, staff and outside parties are always greeted and treated professionally. The four full-time attorneys in the office have provided a total of nearly 58 years of services to SEOLS. Mark Cardosi, a native of County Tipperary, Ireland, is the managing attorney and has been for 23 years. Attorney Tammy Greenwald, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame Law School, has been with SEOLS-Portsmouth for 13 years, focusing much of her work on domestic violence survivors. Attorney Valerie Webb, a veteran of the U.S. Army, works primarily with veterans and public benefits recipients. Attorney Lauren Weller, a child of a U.S. Air Force veteran, grew up near Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and leads the SEOLS Family Law Team.

We are grateful to those who helped establish legal aid in Portsmouth 40 years ago. Today, the work of the SEOLS-Portsmouth staff extends to multiple counties and to thousands of economically disadvantaged individuals and families. But, as was true in 1967, access to justice for low-income households dealing with threats to their family, housing and income remains a focus of the SEOLS-Portsmouth office.

The Ohio State Legal Services Association Board of Trustees is a tremendous asset to SEOLS. They are committed to helping us find resources to support our work and to expand our ability to make sure that economically disadvantaged people in our communities have a voice and access to the justice system. We want to congratulate OSLSA Board member John Stevenson, who was voted “Best Lawyer” in The Portsmouth Daily News 2015 Reader’s Choice Awards.

time to the St. Francis Outreach Center. He became a volunteer board member of a collective effort organized by local Portsmouth charities. Out of a building once used as a monastery, Charlie and his volunteer colleagues have helped the few paid staff of the numerous charities create a “continuum of care” for low-income families in need of counseling, food, clothing, hot meals, and heating and rent assistance. Charlie’s thought about the new St. Francis Outreach Center is that his contributions have been minimal, and he is excited about the outcome and the future of the Center.

It is a happy coincidence that as Charlie Kirby’s volunteer efforts were added to highlight in this issue, he also received a much deserved award for his community activities. On September 9, 2015, in Chillicothe, the Ohio State Bar Foundation awarded Charlie its Community Service Award for Attorneys under 40. The Award is recognition for the substantial time and effort provided currently without compensation by a younger attorney at a local social service, civic, artistic or cultural organization.

Charlie’s volunteer efforts with SEOLS-Portsmouth, STAR, Inc., and the St. Francis Outreach Center represent the ideals of the legal profession. Simply put, Charlie is a credit to the legal profession and a true friend to those in need.


Mark your calendars!

The 7th Annual National Celebration of Pro Bono will take place during the week of October 25-31, 2015

Do Good. Do Justice. Do Pro Bono.
The National Celebration of Pro Bono is sponsored by the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service.
CLE for Volunteer Pro Bono Attorneys from The Legal Aid Society of Columbus

In celebration and as a thank-you to all of its many volunteer pro bono attorneys, The Legal Aid Society of Columbus is offering many sessions to gain CLE credit at no charge. Attorneys volunteering pro bono with Southeastern Ohio Legal Services may register and participate in these sessions, also, at no charge. Click here to register for any of these CLEs, or email Dianna Howie for more information!

- **Justice for All? How you can use your legal skills to help clients in need**—Friday, 10/30/15, 9 a.m., Capital University Law School
- **Family Law Primer**—Friday, 11/6/15, 1:30-4:45 p.m.
- **PACO Wills Clinics CLE**—Wednesday, 11/18/15, 1:30-4:45 p.m.

Access to Justice in Ohio

The **Task Force on Access to Justice** has worked since August 2014—after it was established by Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor—to identify barriers to Ohio’s civil justice system, and finalized its report to the Ohio Supreme Court in April 2015. As stated in the executive summary, the task force found that “gaps in and obstacles to accessing the civil justice system can be classified as funding, structural, and cultural.” Specifically, the decrease in legal-aid funding at a time of increased demand; a need for standardized forms; and a lack of understanding among Ohioans about the role of attorneys, the judiciary, and organizations that may be available to provide assistance. Read the full report here.

The Ohio State Bar Association has an active Access to Justice Committee website here.

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Yes! I want to help SEOLS advocate for equal access to justice and human dignity.

The hourly cost of placing and supporting an attorney in one of our offices is about $120 per hour. More people need our services than ever before.

You can help us serve more people by making a voluntary, tax deductible contribution. Contributions may be in the form of money and/or time volunteered. You may use this coupon or visit http://seols.org and click the PayPal donation link.

I want to help SEOLS advocate for equal access to justice and human dignity.

Name__________________________________________________________

Address_______________________________________________________

Contribution enclosed:

☐ $120 (one hour) ☐ $240 (two hours) ☐ Other: ________________

Optional:

☐ I would like to designate my contribution (e.g., in memoriam, domestic violence, senior citizens, …):

________________________________________________________________

If you would like information about volunteer opportunities at Southeastern Ohio Legal Services, please list your email address:

__________________________________________________________________

≡ Contributions are tax deductible. ≡

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services
555 Buttles Avenue
Columbus, OH 43215
Thank you!