

When injustice tears lives apart, We help people put the pieces back together



LAW Advocates is a non-profit organization that has served Whatcom County since 1987. With the volunteer help of 200 local attorneys, LAW Advocates provides legal services to about 1400 low-income residents each year.

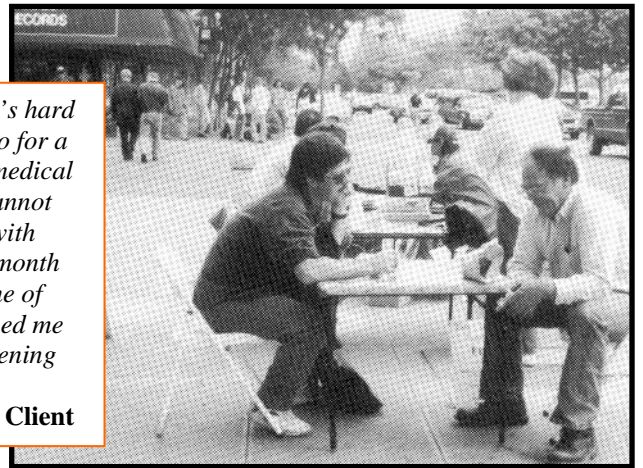


Summer Street Law and Street Law at the Library – On two Saturdays

per month, three volunteer lawyers sit at tables offering free legal advice on a first-come first-serve basis, to anyone who asks. Originally designed to reach low-income street people and street kids, Street Law increasingly provides free legal advice to Whatcom County's "working poor." Summer Street Law is on the corner of Railroad Avenue and Magnolia Street, and during the rest of the year Street Law is at the downtown Bellingham Public Library.

"I live downtown and I am disabled. It's hard for me to get around, but every day I go for a walk downtown. I lost my job and my medical insurance. I owe large medical bills I cannot pay. Bill collectors call and scare me with threats. I tell them I can pay \$10.00 a month and they just laugh. I went to talk to one of those lawyers on the street and he helped me write a letter to get them to stop threatening me. I mailed the letter that same day."

Street Law Client



Direct Representation – Two hundred Whatcom County attorneys volunteer to


represent low-income clients referred by LAW Advocates, including clients like an illiterate man talked into deeding away his home or a family who had their water cut off due to the landlord's unpaid bill. Our mission is to ensure that our clients are equal participants in the legal system. While the cases our volunteer attorneys handle do not necessarily make headlines, they are critical to our clients.


A client was traveling from the south to relocate in Whatcom County when he had to stay overnight at a national motel chain midway. Disabled from Vietnam and in a motorized wheel chair, the client received promises from the motel that they would arrange transport of the very heavy chair to the train the next morning. The company broke its promise, and he had to leave without his chair. Then the company refused to ship it unless he advanced the costs, which were beyond his means. Our volunteer attorney contacted the company's national headquarters, and the chair was on its way. The client said, the lawyers' office... "really bent over backwards to help me...I'd like to thank you very much too."

Direct Representation Client



Law Clinics – Every month at the LAW Advocates' office, a volunteer attorney devotes an afternoon to assisting clients in a specialty area of law. During these clinics the attorney reviews papers, provides advice and assessment and determines what next steps the client needs to take to address the problem. Specialty clinics include family law, immigration law (with volunteer interpreters for non-English speaking clients), and debtor/creditor law.

 **Domestic Violence Self-Help Clinic** – Three or four times monthly, LAW Advocates hosts a clinic devoted to victims and survivors of domestic violence. Local family law attorney, Paula McCandlis provides these clients with advice and in depth assistance with their parenting plans ultimately providing protection to these victims and survivors as well as their children. This clinic also uses student interns currently enrolled in the paralegal program at Whatcom Community College to assist with interviewing and document preparation.

 **Help for the Homeless: Disability Benefits Advocacy** – LAW Advocates helps mentally ill, homeless people obtain state and federal disability benefits. With this assistance, homeless members of our community have hope of obtaining a modest income and medical benefits to treat and stabilize their conditions thereby ending their homelessness. We help the people who are least able to navigate their way through the complicated disability application process on their own. In so doing, we connect clients to various support services helpful to them in their struggle for stability.




“It was so nice to have an attorney come to the nursing home to help my dad. He didn’t have much, but it meant everything to him to leave something to his grandkids. Facing his long illness was scary; settling the legal details was very reassuring. Thank you.”


Daughter of Will Program Client



The Will Program – The Will Program is a cooperative project between LAW Advocates and Senior Information and Assistance. The program serves low-income seniors age 60 and older, as well as those living with HIV/AIDS, otherwise disabled, or facing life-threatening illness, who need a will or other estate document.

 **Whatcom Civil Rights Project** This project is a collaborative effort between LAW Advocates, the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force, and students in a law and justice curriculum at Fairhaven College, Western Washington University. The project provides legal assistance and advocacy to persons facing discrimination and civil rights abuses in Whatcom County.

A Mexican American man inquired about an apartment advertised for rent with a local property management company. The company would only rent the unit to the man and his family if they paid \$50 per month more than the advertised price, with no lease. A Western student and a volunteer from the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force interviewed the client and prepared the case. The pro bono attorney contacted the property owner who, subsequently, changed property management companies and agreed to negotiate a refund of the increased rent charged to this family.

 **Courthouse-based Tenant Clinic** - Our newest program is the courthouse based tenant clinic. Our clinic attorney-coordinator teams with a pro bono attorney at a courthouse based clinic for housing clients on a first-come, first-serve basis. The clinic is held every Friday that the Court hears evictions and other tenant related matters. The clinic will serve clients who are in danger of losing their housing due to situations ranging from mobile home park closures to foreclosures against landlords.