



# Legal Aid Society of San Diego: What We Do

**Presentation to the SSAB**

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# Mission

- Provide equal access to justice for poor people through quality legal services
- Empower clients to access and participate within the legal, governmental, and social systems
- Encourage self-empowerment in the fight against poverty and injustice
- Incorporated as a California non-profit corporation in 1953

# Overview of Legal Aid

- Specialized legal teams include housing, consumer, immigration, family, income maintenance, health care, and SSI
- 9,962 cases closed in 2013; 36% cases pertained to health care issues, 35% were housing related issues, and 9% were SSI/SSDI
- New grants received for the Shriver & Fair Housing Teams, as well as the Consumer Center

# Consumer Center for Health Education and Advocacy

- Contracted with the county since 1999 to provide education & advocacy services to eligible county residents
- County-designed Patients' Rights Advocate for outpatient mental health services
- Additional funding from various entities including The California Endowment, the Department of Managed Health Care, and Covered California

# Consumer Center for Health Education and Advocacy *cont.*

- Helped more than 3,500 individuals last year access:
  - Medi-Cal/LIHP
  - County Medical Services
  - Medicare
  - Behavioral health services
  - Private insurance
- Provided advice, negotiated with county staff, health care professionals and, when necessary, represented clients at hearings

# Special Projects: Scripps Health Medical-Legal Partnership

- Began in 2005 with a community benefit grant from Scripps Health
- Utilize 2 full-time bilingual advocates and in-kind contributions from attorneys and management
- On-site 3 mornings a week at the Hillcrest campus screening uninsured eligible patients for health care coverage

# Special Projects: Scripps Health Medical-Legal Partnership *cont.*

- Received referrals also from hospital staff of denied Medi-Cal, CMS, and LIHP applications
- Contacted all referred patients via phone calls, letters, and/or face-to-face interviews
- Represented patients at hearings
- Referred patients to other Legal Aid teams including SSI, housing, and consumer law

# Other Partnerships and Community Projects

- City Heights Family Health Centers
- PATH Depot: on-site once weekly since April 2013; soon to expand with new grant
- West Wellness Center: outreach & advocacy to low-income and homeless seniors in Downtown San Diego
- Mental Health Parity

# Legal Aid's SSI Advocacy Program

- Our advocates and attorneys represent GR recipients and non-GR consumers with mental health disabilities in applying for SSI and Social Security Disability
- We have 895 open cases as of today

# Benefits to the County of San Diego

- Reduction of GR caseload
- Reimbursement of GR expenses out of retroactive SSI benefits
- Reduction of future GR benefits
- Savings in health care costs, law enforcement, emergency services, and jail/prison services

# Benefits to Consumers

- Access housing, health care (linkage to Medi-Cal), and necessities of life
- Can help to eliminate and prevent homelessness

# Benefits to the Local Economy

## *Retroactive and monthly benefits spent locally*

- Spent for basic housing, food costs
- Strict resources limit (\$2,000) for SSI recipients
- One year of benefits: \$10,400
- Retroactive benefits can be as much as \$35,000
- Total benefits can add up to tens of millions \$\$ annually

# History of Legal Aid's SSI Advocacy Program

- Offering services since the 1980s
- Providing services under a county contract
- 1995-2000 only did initial applications and reconsiderations
- Since 2000 provided services at all levels
- Contract awarded in RFP process again in 2004 and 2011

# Clubhouse Contract Added in 2003

- Train and assist six psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouse SSI advocates
- Assist with applications and appeals to persons with psychiatric disabilities who are not receiving GR benefits

# How the Program Works

*Representing consumers through entire SSI process*

- Represent clients through the application, reconsideration, administration hearings, Appeals Council and federal court
- Complete application/appeal forms expeditiously and thoroughly
- Obtain medical evidence to prove disability
- Present evidence and legal arguments to SSA
- Provide referrals for medical treatment
- File post-hearing appeals as necessary

# How the Program Works *cont.*

- LASSD advocates stationed at HHSA Family Resource Centers that process GR applications: Downtown San Diego, Chula Vista, El Cajon and Oceanside
- Recipients given appointments by county GR workers (i.e., unemployable for 12 months)

# How the Program Works *cont.*

*Clubhouse cases sent directly to Legal Aid*

- Advocates complete applications and appeals
- Cases reviewed and processed by Legal Aid staff

# Legal Aid SSI Statistics

- 3,057 granted cases since 2003:
  - 1,632 GR recipients, 1,425 clubhouse cases
  - Annual reimbursements to county exceeded amount of GR contract
  - Total retroactive and annual SSI benefits in excess of \$120 million to date
  - Return on investment of over \$30 for every \$1 spent

# Anticipated Future Outcomes

- Increased staffing annually will provide:
  - More than an additional 200 cases granted
  - Increased annual reimbursement of \$750,000 to the county
  - An additional \$2 million in SSI benefits

# Questions?

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