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**END
HOUSING
BARRIERS
BASED ON
CRIMINAL
RECORDS**

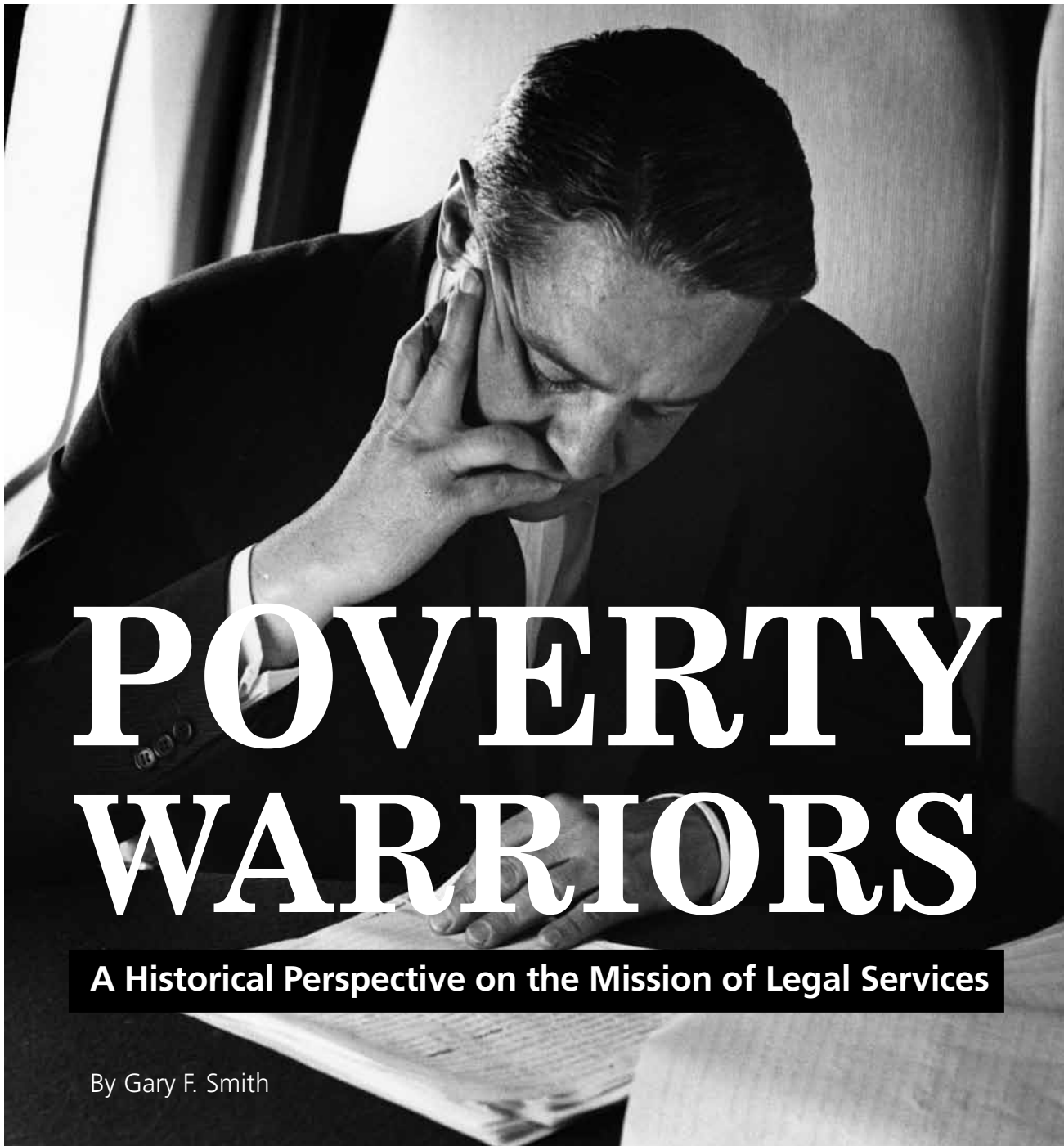


**APPLY
DISPARATE
IMPACT THEORY**

Ensure Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities
Reform H-2B Guest Worker Program
Consider Lump-Sum Settlements and Public Benefit Eligibility
Target Underlying Causes of Poverty
Protect Users of Electronic Benefit Cards
Offer Opportunities with Housing Choice Vouchers



Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law



POVERTY WARRIORS

A Historical Perspective on the Mission of Legal Services

By Gary F. Smith

Sargent Shriver in the 1960s.

[Editor's Note: This is an adaptation of an article in *Management Information Exchange Journal*, Spring 2011, and published here with permission.]

I do believe we can end poverty in America.
—R. Sargent Shriver, 1965

The recent passing of Robert Sargent Shriver, a true American hero of the twentieth century, is an opportunity to reexamine the original mission of one of his signature antipoverty programs: the first national Legal Services for the Poor program. The legal services community should contemplate, in particular, (1) how that mission became so diluted over the next half-century, in contrast to its initial vibrant vision, and (2) whether that mission remains viable for the current generation of legal services advocates. The original, undisputed objective of Legal Services for the Poor—to use the law to challenge and remedy the causes and effects of poverty—remains within the grasp of those legal aid programs and lawyers who are inspired to pursue it.

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Every so often within the national legal services community an article circulates to remind us—perhaps painfully—of our undeniable roots as antipoverty lawyers, whose mission, so hopefully launched by that first Legal Services for the Poor program within the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in 1965, was to use the law to help poor and disadvantaged communities, long excluded from participation in the mainstream American political process, to attack and overcome the social and economic effects of poverty. Typically such articles describe an ongoing “debate” within our community between two conflicting legal services missions, each struggling for prioritization, a dialectic once characterized as “law reform v. individual service” and more recently as “alleviation of poverty v. equal access to justice.”¹ This “debate” over the appropriate focus of our work is widely assumed to reflect some primordial tension that arose with the very creation of Legal Services for the Poor in 1965.

On the contrary, there should be no lingering ambiguity over the true goals and intent of the original federal legal services program. As director of the first OEO, Sargent Shriver oversaw the creation of Legal Services for the Poor, alongside the other OEO antipoverty programs—Head Start, Job Corps, Neighborhood Health Services, Community Action Agencies, and more—with an express mission to fund lawyers who would give entire poor communities a legal voice. That voice was intended to sound not only in the courts but also in the various corridors of power where decisions were made that affected the poor.² There was no “debate” over the proper mission of Legal Services for the Poor: it was an antipoverty agency that shared the same single goal as its many sister programs within the constellation of Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society,” a

goal that Sargent Shriver repeatedly articulated with his characteristic boundless optimism: “I do believe we can end poverty in America.”³

Thus, there was no dispute among the principal architects of that first federally funded legal services program for the poor—Sargent Shriver, Earl Johnson, Clint Bamberger, Edward Sparer, Edgar and Jean Cahn, and so many more—over the proper “mission” of that program. Legal Services for the Poor was conceived and constructed—explicitly and unashamedly—as a critical weapon in the “war on poverty.” No less a public figure than the attorney general of the United States, speaking forcefully in support of the new program in 1964, praised its potential for creating “a new breed of lawyers ... dedicated to using the law as an instrument of orderly and constructive social change.”⁴ A year later Sparer described the “new legal aid lawyer’s central role” in terms of “helping to articulate and promote the hopes, the dreams, and the real possibility for the impoverished to make the social changes that they feel are needed, through whatever lawful methods are available,” and he understood that role to be “defined by the broadest reaches of advocacy, just [like] the role of the corporation lawyer and the labor lawyer and the real estate lawyer.”⁵

Most astonishing, the broad antipoverty mission of the “new legal aid lawyers” was expressly endorsed by a sitting Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court:

[T]he lawyer in America is uniquely situated to play a creative role in American social progress. Indeed, I would make bold to suggest that the success with which he responds to the challenges of what is plainly a

¹See, e.g., Edward Hoort, *Equal Access to Justice v. Alleviation of Poverty: A New Version of an Old Debate*, MANAGEMENT INFORMATION EXCHANGE JOURNAL, Fall 1999, at 38, and my *Remembering Edward V. Sparer: An Enduring Vision for Legal Services*, 39 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 329 (Sept.–Oct. 2005).

²See my *Remembering*, *supra* note 1.

³DVD: *A Real American Chance: A Tribute to Sargent Shriver* (Chicago Video Project 2003).

⁴Nicholas de B. Katzenbach, *Address to the 1964 Conference on the Extension of Legal Services to the Poor*, cited in Alan Houseman, *Civil Legal Assistance for the 21st Century: Achieving Equal Justice for All*, 17 YALE LAW AND POLICY REVIEW 369, 374 (1998).

⁵Edward Sparer, *The New Legal Aid as an Instrument of Social Change*, 1965 UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LAW FORUM 57, 59–60 (1965).

new era of crisis and promise in the life of our nation may prove decisive in determining the outcome of the social experiments on which we are embarked.... Society's overriding concern today is with providing freedom and equality of rights and opportunities, in a realistic and not merely formal sense, to all the people of this nation: justice, equal and practical, to the poor, to the members of minority groups ... to the urban masses ...—to all, in short, who do not partake of the abundance of American life.⁶

Indeed, Justice Brennan echoed Atty. Gen. Nicholas de B. Katzenbach's understanding that the successful pursuit of an aggressive antipoverty mission would require a "new breed" of legal aid lawyers: "What we need are not narrow-minded, single track poverty lawyers" but rather lawyers equipped with "the background and breadth of understanding to recognize the scope of the poverty problem."⁷

To be sure, some of the leaders of that first generation of poverty warriors differed over the most effective strategies to implement Legal Services for the Poor's antipoverty objectives.⁸ However, they were united in the goal to achieve social and economic *justice* for the poor, in the moral sense, with all the stirring reverberations of the parallel civil rights movement giving full meaning to that term. The mission was to provide justice itself, not merely "access" to it.

The "Access to Justice" Model

The term "equal *access* to justice" is a modern formulation, unknown in the

1960s, that describes piecemeal assistance to handle the personal legal problems of disconnected individual clients who cannot afford lawyers, without necessary reference to the critical needs of the larger poor community. The resolution of these individual demands for personal service, either singly or in the aggregate, has no necessary correlation whatsoever to the causes or conditions of poverty. To Sargent Shriver and his contemporaries, a model in which the poverty of the client mattered only to the extent that it rendered the client unable to pay for a lawyer (to tend to some personal "legal problem") would have made no sense; for them, the poverty of the client was *itself* the "legal problem" in need of redress.

Of course, in the decades that followed, the political and social winds in America changed direction, bringing an end to that shining moment in our history when the collective social consciousness briefly supported a national consensus around the need, in Lyndon Johnson's words, "to free forty million Americans from the prison of poverty."⁹ The years passed, and optimism waned for the potential of achieving broad social improvements for disadvantaged groups through government intervention. In particular, the affirmative use of the law to provide, in the words of Justice Brennan, "justice, equal and practical, ... to all ... who do not partake of the abundance of American life" fell into political disfavor.¹⁰ So did the poor themselves. The same clients for whom Legal Services for the Poor attorneys fought to establish "welfare rights" in the 1960s were, by the 1980s, derided by prominent public figures as "welfare queens."¹¹ The Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which succeeded Legal Services for the Poor in 1974, responded to

⁶William J. Brennan Jr., *The Responsibilities of the Legal Profession*, 54 ABA JOURNAL 121–22 (1968).

⁷*Id.* at 124 (quoting Erwin Griswold, Harvard Law School Dean, Address to the Harvard Law School Conference on Law and Poverty (March 1967), quoted in HARVARD LAW RECORD, March 23, 1967, at 7).

⁸See my *Remembering*, *supra* note 1, at 330–32 (describing different approaches of Edward and Jean Cahn, Edward Sparer, Stephen Wexler, and other early leaders).

⁹DVD: A Real American Chance, *supra* note 3.

¹⁰Brennan, *supra* note 6, at 122.

¹¹Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's 1976 campaign speeches often referred to a mythical Chicago "welfare queen," who misused welfare benefits and drove a "pink Cadillac" (see Juan Williams, *Reagan, the South and Civil Rights*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO (June 10, 2004), <http://n.pr/dYtDPn>).

decades of political attacks by discouraging the second and third generations of legal aid lawyers from engaging in anti-poverty advocacy in an effort to deflect the relentless critique of their work as “social activism” (a characterization that Sargent Shriver would have warmly embraced).

By the first decade of this century, LSC had been reduced to a battered and tarnished keeper of the old Legal Services for the Poor’s antipoverty flame. Grateful for having survived political extinction in 1996, at the price of accepting humiliating and intentionally burdensome restrictions upon its grantees’ advocacy, LSC withdrew from the lofty aspirations of its original mission and formally downgraded its institutional focus from “justice” to “access.”¹²

Various social and cultural changes since the 1960s had by then conveniently produced vast numbers of people who perfectly fit the new client paradigm for legal services: individuals who had personal legal problems, not necessarily related to their poverty, and who needed to process those problems through the court system and were unable to afford private attorneys to help them do so. In the early 1960s the practice of “family law” was a relatively obscure specialty; the divorce rate was negligible, and the stigmatization attached to children born of unmarried parents made such births rare. But by the 1990s the cultural forces unleashed in the 1960s had wrought wholesale societal changes in attitudes toward marriage, divorce, gender roles,

and family relations, creating millions of new clients—rich and poor—requiring a court’s intervention to bring resolution to personal relationship disputes involving spouses, partners, and children. The sheer number of such clients, and the expense of their full representation, overwhelmed the ability and inclination of the private bar to assist them.¹³

Eventually this flood of unrepresented, often low-income litigants created an efficiency crisis for the family law courts, which turned, for the first time, to the legal services community for “collaboration.”¹⁴ Over the past ten years the bar and the courts have effectively redefined the primary mission of legal services, at least from their institutional perspectives, in terms of individual assistance to unrepresented litigants in family court.¹⁵ Today many of the legal services organizations that, like LSC, now pursue a mission of legal *access* for the poor find no shortage of work in this great multitude of unrepresented family court litigants.

The “Civil Gideon” Movement

In the national legal services community the new enthusiasm accompanying the quest for a so-called Civil Gideon model ultimately may serve to erode any remaining resemblance between today’s legal services “advocacy” and the antipoverty mission envisioned by the founders of the original legal services program. Civil Gideon is simply the logical—perhaps the ultimate—extension of the “access to justice” model; indeed, Civil Gideon is essentially “access to justice” on steroids.¹⁶

¹²See John McKay, *Federally Funded Legal Services: A New Vision of Equal Justice Under Law*, 68 TENNESSEE LAW REVIEW 101 (2000).

¹³The California Commission on Access to Justice estimates that more than 70 percent of all divorces begin without an attorney, and more than 80 percent end without an attorney. The California Judicial Council estimated in 2007 that more than 4.3 million litigants in California’s court system were unrepresented and that the average percentage of unrepresented plaintiffs in family court matters exceeded 75 percent (Kevin G. Baker, *Equal Access to Justice: Action Needed to Close the Justice Gap* 11 (Feb. 13, 2007), <http://1.usa.gov/dFdhOH>).

¹⁴The courts also discovered that, under the rubric of “access to justice,” they could help alleviate their efficiency problems in family court dockets by accessing streams of “legal aid” type revenue, funding in-house legal staff to try and bring some order (but not legal representation) to the family law chaos.

¹⁵With only a few exceptions, neither the courts nor the bar has perceived any similar crisis in the eviction dockets, even though 90 percent of defendant-tenants are unrepresented; that the vast majority of plaintiff-landlords are represented ensures that those courts operate very “efficiently” (see Baker, *supra* note 13, at 11).

¹⁶In 2006 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW devoted an entire issue to various Civil Gideon issues (see *A Right to a Lawyer? Momentum Grows*, 40 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 163 (July–Aug. 2006)).

The Civil Gideon “movement” was fueled initially by the efforts of various legal academics and civil rights lawyers and public interest lawyers to establish, through a “test-case” litigation approach, an entitlement to counsel in civil cases as a matter of state constitutional interpretation. The movement has since spurred the drafting of model “right-to-counsel” statutes.¹⁷ California has also enacted a pilot project to fund partnerships between courts and legal aid programs to represent poor litigants in certain kinds of cases.¹⁸

For the most part, the Civil Gideon model seems even more narrowly focused than the “access to justice” model upon a single forum—the courts—and seems primarily concerned with assisting unrepresented *defendants* in court, and this is not surprising, given the public defender model that it emulates.¹⁹ Some thoughtful leaders within the Civil Gideon movement have acknowledged that a comprehensive right-to-counsel model should include “representation in administrative forums, nonlawyer assistance, advice and counsel, and self-help assistance.”²⁰ The overall focus, however, remains centered upon assisting unrepresented litigants (primarily defendants) in court, and, as in the “access to justice” model, the poverty of the litigant is primarily relevant only to the extent that it renders the litigant unable to afford an attorney.

The Civil Gideon movement has gained momentum over the last decade in large part because of support from prominent members of the judiciary.²¹ Although these individual judges no doubt are genuinely concerned over the plight of low-income *pro per* litigants, the judiciary’s growing

institutional support for a Civil Gideon model not surprisingly coincides with the undeniable efficiency crisis in the courts, precipitated by the ever-increasing flood of *pro per* filings, particularly in the family courts. Indeed, no Civil Gideon model could successfully be implemented, let alone funded, without the strong support of a state’s judiciary. Because the courts simply have no institutional interest in supporting any right-to-counsel model that does not directly and positively affect their caseloads, a model that does not specifically target those concerns will not likely succeed.

Notwithstanding the Civil Gideon momentum, the continuing national discussion around this effort is mostly silent on how such a model might cause a massive paradigm shift in the way existing legal services programs understand their missions. More specifically, there is little discussion of a Civil Gideon regime’s impact on the advocacy of those remaining legal aid programs that (1) prioritize the use of the law to challenge the causes and effects of poverty and (2) consider their primary “client” to be the entire poor *community* they serve.

The Myth of LSC’s Role in the Decline of Antipoverty Advocacy

The major cause of the discontinuance of antipoverty work by many legal aid lawyers is widely assumed in our national community, and especially among the community of legal services programs funded by LSC, to have been the relentless, decades-long pressure from LSC to abandon “impact” advocacy for the poor, culminating in the regime of restric-

¹⁷See, e.g., Clare Pastore, *The California Model Statute Task Force*, 40 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 176 (July–Aug. 2006).

¹⁸See Kevin G. Baker & Julia R. Wilson, *Stepping Across the Threshold: Assembly Bill 590 Boosts Legislative Strategies for Expanding Access to Civil Counsel*, 43 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 550 (March–April 2010). The program was named the Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act, and Shriver’s son-in-law, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, signed the bill into law (*id.* at 553).

¹⁹For Civil Gideon enthusiasts, however, not all unrepresented civil court defendants are necessarily created equal. At a recent meeting of California legal services directors discussing the drafting of a model Civil Gideon statute, the participants excitedly gave examples of the kinds of “cases” that should receive priority in a Civil Gideon regime, including tenants in eviction actions and *pro per* victims of domestic violence seeking restraining orders. I asked, “And will we also provide representation to the low-income alleged ‘abusers’ in such cases, and if not, why not?” The room went silent; no one had a response to either question.

²⁰See Pastore, *supra* note 17, at 178.

²¹See, e.g., Baker & Wilson, *supra* note 18, at 552–53 ; Pastore, *supra* note 17, at 176–77.

tions imposed by Congress in 1996.²² On the contrary, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, most LSC-funded programs already had abandoned their original antipoverty missions, mostly by default rather than by design or compulsion.²³ From my observation, there is one *primary* reason for that abandonment: most of the second (and now third) generation of leaders and advocates of the legal services community simply lacked the desire or the creativity or both to pursue such a mission under vastly different and challenging legal, socioeconomic, and cultural circumstances.

The 1996 LSC restrictions did pose some frustrating and irritating impediments to traditional legal services “impact advocacy,” but they were not fatal impediments. For too long, our community has wrongly blamed LSC for our collective loss of interest and initiative in using the law to challenge the causes and effects of poverty. Proof of this hypothesis is easily found: First, a small but still significant number of LSC-funded programs have continued to engage in very inspired and effective antipoverty advocacy, all in full compliance with LSC’s rules.²⁴ Second, although most of the legal services organizations today are *not* subject to LSC regulation, relatively few of *those* organizations aggressively pursue an antipoverty agenda, even though they are unconstrained in their ability to do so.²⁵

The LSC restrictions have been around for fifteen years; the national legal services community no longer should hide

behind them to excuse its own collective uninterest in going to war against poverty. Indeed, to its credit, LSC itself took a significant step toward redemption with the 2007 publication of its “performance criteria,” which actually *encourage* programs to engage in advocacy that will achieve systemic benefits and create broad legal remedies not only for individual clients but also for similarly situated low-income persons and indeed for the poor community as a whole.²⁶

Antipoverty Advocacy in This Century

Two generations after the founding of Legal Services for the Poor, antipoverty advocacy remains a viable mission for legal aid programs. The following is a brief description of how that mission is pursued in one such program: Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC). The use of LSNC’s work as an example is illustrative, not prescriptive; as noted, a significant number of legal services programs continue to prioritize antipoverty advocacy, many no doubt doing so with greater consistency and effectiveness than LSNC.²⁷ But having been employed in various capacities by LSNC for twenty-three years, I am most familiar with LSNC’s work and operations and with how it has attempted to remain connected to its antipoverty roots over its fifty-five-year history.

LSNC adopted its mission statement decades ago: “To provide quality legal services to empower the poor to identify and defeat the causes and effects of poverty

²²See my *Remembering*, *supra* note 1, at 332.

²³E.g., in the early 1990s, during a brief window of relaxed Legal Services Corporation (LSC) oversight and well before the 1996 restrictions, I served as a “peer reviewer” for LSC’s Office of Program Performance; I accompanied evaluation teams visiting six different programs located in different parts of the country. Some were large, some were small; some were well funded, some were not; some were urban, some were rural. They all shared a common characteristic: they did not even attempt to articulate, let alone pursue, any semblance of an “antipoverty” mission.

²⁴See my *Remembering*, *supra* note 1, at 333–34 (describing numerous and multifaceted antipoverty strategies pursued today by progressive legal services programs).

²⁵In California only eleven of the more than one hundred legal services programs funded by IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts) receive LSC funding, but few of those “unrestricted” programs affirmatively prioritize antipoverty policy advocacy over individual legal assistance.

²⁶Remarkably the Performance Criteria, which incorporate the 2006 ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid, now support and even prioritize “impact” litigation, legislative and administrative advocacy (consistent with LSC restrictions), and community lawyering advocacy (e.g., the representation of community organizations and the support of economic development activity) (see Legal Services Corporation, Performance Criteria (March 2007), <http://1.usa.gov/h8i5Lm>).

²⁷See my *Remembering*, *supra* note 1, at 333–34 (describing examples of antipoverty strategies adopted by various programs); see also Hoort, *supra* note 1, at 39–41 (describing the antipoverty advocacy of Legal Services of Eastern Michigan).

within their communities.” That formulation has served as a consistent beacon to guide the allocation of resources and the prioritization of advocacy within the program. LSNC long ago embraced a “community lawyering” model for its advocacy and delivery structure (spanning a geographical area the size of Ohio), and over time the program has established deep roots within the many different poor communities that it serves.²⁸

Although LSNC self-identifies as an “antipoverty” program rather than an “access to justice” program, it nevertheless annually provides some level of legal assistance to tens of thousands of poor individuals, regularly closing more cases than many programs with much larger staffs and far greater revenue. LSNC respects its institutional obligation to provide some level of individual assistance for as many of its low-income constituents as possible not only because it is the right thing to do but also because part of LSNC’s ongoing assessment of the larger legal *needs* of the low-income community involves a review of trends and changes in client *demands* for personal legal services. LSNC thus allocates significant resources both to systemic, antipoverty advocacy *and* to brief assistance to large numbers of individual clients with critical legal needs. LSNC does *not* allocate significant resources to the *extended* court representation of individuals with personal legal problems unconnected to the causes or effects of poverty.

Over the past two decades LSNC has attempted to pursue a multiforum, community-based, antipoverty agenda. For example, its attorneys serve as corporate house counsel for dozens of nonprofit organizations across our service area, assisting them to achieve their own agendas, such as affordable housing development, microlending and microenterprise business creation, and job training opportunities. LSNC’s land-use litigation and local

legislative advocacy have directly resulted in the development and construction of more than 20,000 new apartment units that are affordable to very low-income families. In the areas of housing, health care, and public benefit programs, LSNC’s statewide legislative and administrative advocacy (all done in full compliance with LSC restrictions) has resulted in tangible benefits for literally millions of poor Californians. For example, LSNC played a critical role in extending statewide from thirty to sixty the number of days a landlord has to give notice before a no-cause eviction. “Impact” litigation continues to be an effective antipoverty tool. In July 2010 alone, LSNC lawsuits (1) prevented unlawful reductions in a county’s state-mandated indigent health care program, providing relief to nearly 30,000 very poor patients, many with life-threatening illnesses and disabilities, and (2) required a county to correct its unlawful processing of emergency food stamp applications, directly benefitting over 4,000 needy and hungry persons.

To be clear, LSNC’s implementation of an antipoverty mission always has been imperfect, halting, and periodically ineffective, but we persevere. We facilitate our efforts with particular structural mechanisms, including (1) a rigorous, regular, and informed priority setting and needs assessment, which now employ sophisticated demographic data and GIS (geographic information systems) technology to understand multiple socioeconomic trends better in the poor community, and (2) a biannual All Staff Conference, where the entire program takes stock of our past work and, given the changing circumstances of our client communities, decides where our advocacy efforts should be concentrated over the next two years. For more than two decades, LSNC has used an all-staff conference to launch broad and innovative antipoverty advocacy initiatives in areas such as child support enforcement and

²⁸For more discussion of community lawyering, see the special issue *Economic Development Strategies for Individuals and Communities*, 37 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 123 (July–Aug. 2003).

collection, education, economic development, community lawyering, and race equity.²⁹

Notwithstanding program culture, community engagement, careful hiring practices, and structural support, one simple factor has allowed LSNC to continue to prioritize antipoverty advocacy: the core of the management and the core of the advocate staff strongly believe in this work; they are personally motivated to engage in this work; and they are given the freedom and encouragement to *do* this work.



Creating and supporting an antipoverty mission in a legal services program is not easy. It is hard work and requires the willingness, and occasionally the courage, to move in new and uncomfort-

able advocacy directions if the needs of the larger poor community so require.³⁰ Certainly programs may legitimately choose *not* to pursue such a mission. Organizational missions are value-neutral; one legal aid mission is not “better” or “worse” than another so long as both are carefully considered, thoughtfully articulated, and faithfully implemented. A mission of “access to the courts for the poor” is a vital and noble mission; indeed, it is a fundamental governmental obligation of a democratic society.

But it was not Sargent Shriver’s mission, nor was it the mission of the first federal legal services program. The good news is that the continued pursuit of that original mission also remains possible, a half-century later, for those legal aid lawyers and programs who want to pursue it.

²⁹For recent examples, see, e.g., William C. Kennedy et al., *Cultural Changes and Community Economic Development Initiatives in Legal Services: What Happened in Two Programs*, 33 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 440 (Nov.–Dec. 1999); Mona Tawatao et al., *Instituting a Race-Conscious Practice in Legal Aid: One Program’s Efforts*, 42 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 48 (May–June 2008); Tammi Wong, *Race-Conscious Community Lawyering: Practicing Outside the Box*, 42 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 165 (July–Aug. 2008).

³⁰E.g., a number of years ago Legal Services of Northern California (LSNC) advocates had to master the byzantine and overlapping state and local bureaucracies ultimately responsible for making public transportation decisions in rural California in order to advocate successfully the inclusion of additional bus routes—a critical need for the rural poor. Engaged in complex environmental justice advocacy before the state public utilities commission, LSNC staff members are representing a neighborhood organization opposing a proposal to store billions of cubic feet of explosive natural gas in caverns directly underneath a low-income community of color.



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