

# THE UNBEATABLE ADVOCATE

Fifth Edition

Winter 2012

Vol. 2, Issue 2

**W**elcome! This is the fifth edition of the newsletter for client board members of Massachusetts legal aid programs.

*In this issue, we give you an update on the new leadership at Greater Boston Legal Services. We also highlight the work that City Life/Vida Urbana has been doing to combat foreclosures in Boston, and report back on NLADA's 2011 conference.*

*On the right, you can see what's lined up in this issue for you – updates, profiles and client perspectives from around the state. Enjoy!*

## In this issue...

Jacqui Bowman is GBLS' new director

City Life's Anti-Foreclosure Movement

Report on NLADA's 2011 conference

Update on MLAC's strategic plan

...and more!

Submissions welcome! See page 2 for info.

## The First in 100 Years: Jacqui Bowman Takes Over at GBLS

By M. CEPEDA

You probably already know Jacqui Bowman, formerly the deputy director of Greater Boston Legal Services. She is an appointed member of the Access to Justice Commission; chair of MLAC's Retention Task Force looking into ways to retain attorney diversity in legal aid; and chair of the Board of the Management Information Exchange.

In 2010, Jacqui succeeded Bob Sable as the new executive director of GBLS. She is the **first woman** to hold the title for the organization, formerly known as the Boston Legal Aid Society, and the **first person of color** to hold the position since its inception more than 100 years ago.

Jacqui is well known and respected in the Legal Services Community, but as Client Board Members, especially outside of GBLS, we may not know as much about her as our attorney counterparts. So I asked her a few questions about herself and her new role at GBLS.

**Tell us something you want us to know about you.**

*I have been interested in the law since I was eight or so. I did detour for a brief moment and was a pre-med student*

*who wanted to do forensic pathology. When I went to law school, I wanted to do juvenile justice work representing children who were charged with delinquent (criminal) acts.*

*I was lucky enough to be able to do some of this work after law school in my first job, which was in Tennessee. I soon realized that changing the dynamics*

*for some of these children required more than having a good lawyer to defend them. Many of the children and their families needed support. Many of the families were headed by single women who had been victims of domestic violence and/or abandoned by the father of their children. They needed income, and they needed services. It was because of this that I came to specialize in family law. I combined my interest in advocating for children with the clear need for advocacy for poor families. I ultimately specialized in child welfare matters. Along the way, of course, I was heavily involved in*



Jacqui Bowman

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## The First in 100 Years

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*advocacy on behalf of victims/survivors of domestic violence and their children. I continue to do some of this work.*

**It has now been six months since you became the executive director at GBLS. However, you are not new to the program, having served as deputy director for several years, and managing attorney of the Family Law Unit. How do you see the program?**

*I see GBLS as a strong, effective program. It is one of the best in the nation. There is nothing broken here that requires change. The path that Bob has put the program on over the last 20 years promotes and supports our ability to provide high quality legal assistance producing systemic change for the communities we work in through individual representation as well as impact advocacy. It is a formula with proven success. We have dedicated, committed, highly capable staff who were willing to take a pay cut to enable our program to maximize its services during this time of critical need.*

**Do you bring a different perspective, new challenges?**

*Given my background and who I am, I do bring a different perspective to some issues. I know the challenges of being poor. I can appreciate the impact on individuals and communities of having advocates who can aid in systemic change. I understand the need to have a real connection between the work we do and the communities we serve. The real challenge is continuing to aggressively seek funding from a variety of sources to support the work we do and the people who do that work. Beyond that, I see opportunities. GBLS can improve and strengthen its connections to community groups, especially communities of color. We can do a better job retaining the diversity of our staff. We have a strong advocacy staff, many of whom are perceived as national experts in their substantive practice fields. We need to figure out how to continue to support them in their advocacy work but also assist them to pass on their institutional knowledge to future generations. I am also concerned about the future leadership of GBLS, not necessarily my replacement, but future advocacy leaders.*

**GBLS has one of the largest boards of directors of any legal aid program in Massachusetts, with 89 members. Among these members are 25 client-**

**eligible advocates and community representatives. How do you see their role at GBLS?**

*I think that GBLS is very fortunate to have an active Client Caucus whose members are concerned about GBLS as well as their home communities. The Caucus can play a strong role in helping GBLS to strengthen its connections with community groups. This is already happening in some areas such as Chelsea and Dorchester. We cannot afford to go back to the concept of neighborhood offices, but having an active involved Caucus can aid us in keeping our eyes and ears focused on community needs and appropriate roles for our advocacy staff in supporting the community to address the needs.*

**How do you see this role changing/expanding during these economic times and beyond? Will there be new volunteer opportunities, fundraising or advocacy efforts?**

*Several of the Caucus members already volunteer at GBLS. Their presence has certainly enhanced our capacity to respond to the overwhelming demand for our services. Members of the Caucus have also been actively engaged in legislative lobbying which is always helpful in humanizing the impact of the work we do. I think that Caucus members could play a similar role in our private fundraising efforts. As I stated earlier, the best way for GBLS to strengthen its role in the communities we serve is through the Caucus. They can help staff stay informed of developments and issues that may benefit from our legal expertise. They can introduce our staff to communities where we have a limited presence and can educate people in communities we serve about the nature of the services we provide. Many of the Caucus*

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## Something to Share?

Then send it in for the next *Unbeatable Advocate*!

All photos, submissions, comments, and news tips can be sent to:

David Pearson: [dpearson@shawmuteducation.org](mailto:dpearson@shawmuteducation.org)  
617-304-4035 or toll free at 877-625-0282

Mic Cepeda: [my\\_air2@hotmail.com](mailto:my_air2@hotmail.com)  
617-401-5496

The next *Unbeatable Advocate* will be due out in June 2012. All submissions must be received by May 15.

## State of Legal Aid: Client Reports on the 2011 NLADA Conference

*The National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) is a non-profit organization. Its members are legal service lawyers and clients as well as civil and criminal legal aid programs.*

*NLADA sponsors a conference each year to provide their members and other legal organizations with the opportunity to collaborate with their counterparts from across the country and exchange and update information on legal issues of concern to those who benefit from free legal services.*

*The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) awards annual scholarships to cover the costs of attending the conference to select clients who serve on the Board of Directors for MLAC- and LSC-funded programs throughout Massachusetts. The recipients for 2011 NLADA scholarships were **Barbara Burgo** (South Coastal Counties Legal Services), **David Pearson** (Volunteer Lawyers Project), **Elaine Marin Ruff** (Greater Boston Legal Services), and **Leonard Spinner** (South Coastal Counties Legal Services). The Unbeatable Advocate wishes to congratulate this year's recipients and thank them for submitting the following reports on the conference.*

My name is Barbara Burgo and I am currently a client board member of South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS). I began at the suggestion of an outgoing board member who thought that I'd make a great addition to the Board due to my background and ethnicity as a Cape Verdean Woman.

I have been on the Board for eight years and have served as an at-large member, Vice-Chair of the Board, Chair of the Nominating Committee and also now as a member of the newly-titled Board Affairs Committee. I have also assisted SCCLS with their annual fundraising activities.

Over the past five years, I've witnessed SCCLS make major staff reductions, merge twice and hire a Director of Development. The Board has had to focus a great deal of its time on our fiduciary responsibilities with precious little time left over for doing more with less for our clients and staff. I had every confidence that attending the NLADA Conference would help me to be a more effective and efficient member of the Board and allow me access to other people across the nation who could be of service with this, including lawyers, fellow board members and NLADA staffers.

At the conference I attended several workshops and training sessions and viewed exhibitions from different supporters of legal aid and justice agencies. One idea that kept coming up was adding a committed time slot on each month's board agenda to discuss and/or address client issues, concerns and success stories. This would allow programs to more effectively identify cities and towns having problems with education or immigration issues, for example, or with access to legal aid due to an emerging ethnic population that they

otherwise wouldn't have known about.

The ideas shared at this conference, the contacts shared for later follow-up and the confidence building exercises to enable us to courageously address these issues with the larger board upon return to our respective states were an invaluable bonus of the conference for me and many other first-time attendees. We all agreed that client members must be considered equal partners with the lawyers and others who participate as one team to help provide equal access to justice for every resident of our country. That's what makes America and NLADA so great!

This conference not only met but totally surpassed my expectations.

*-Barbara Burgo*

My name is Elaine Marin-Ruff and I live in Roslindale. I am in my fourth year as a member of the Client Caucus and Board of Directors of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS).

I was nominated to the board by my GBLS attorney. I became a client of GBLS in 2005 after my landlord opted not to renew his Housing & Urban Development contract. He began renting only to market rate tenants and refused to accept Section 8 housing vouchers. This is discriminatory to low-income people, people of color, and especially single women heads of household. We have been in litigation for the past six years, and it is ongoing.

I wanted to attend this year's NLADA conference to learn about the history of NLADA, since it was a

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## State of Legal Aid: Client Reports on the 2011 NLADA Conference

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celebration of their first 100 years, and to learn about the direction of the next 100 years. At the conference I attended two particular workshops that were very informative and might be useful to other board members.

The first was a client workshop, "Courage: Moving through Fear toward Community, Power & Transformation," facilitated by Charles (Chuck) Wynder, Jr. He is a former Vice President for Programs for NLADA and is from Cambridge, where he works with the Darryl Hunt Foundation for Freedom and Justice. He led and facilitated an interactive dialogue aimed at addressing the fundamental value of courage, which is developed in relationship with others and helps to equip us to move beyond our fears toward reflection and action. It was a community forum intended to grapple with courage in the face of economic uncertainty, political instability, personal challenges and communal hope for change.

In the second workshop, "Media Advocacy 101," we learned how to map out our personal stories in a way that allows us to tell them with passion and conviction. This is a great tool to use in fundraising. We also learned that outlining the key points of your story on paper can provide the confidence you need to speak in public."

I enjoyed my opportunity to interact with others on a national level and to learn about issues being faced by other programs.

- Elaine Marin-Ruff



**Representatives from Massachusetts legal aid programs at the NLADA conference. Back row, from left: Myrnairis Cepeda, GBLS board; Elaine Marin Ruff, GBLS board; Magalys Troncoso, GBLS Board. Front row, from left: Barbara Burgo, SCCLS board; Shams Mirza, Chair of the GBLS Client Caucus, Jacqui Bowman, Executive Director of GBLS, Sheila Hubbard, Executive Director of VLP.**

My name is David Pearson and I have the privilege to serve on the Board of Directors of the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP). VLP is the federally funded legal service program that covers the greater Boston area.

My service to the Board started with the assistance of the Community Liaison Project (CLP) of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation. A major focus of CLP was the identification and introduction of potential client board members to legal service programs in Massachusetts.

Like many, I look forward to the annual NLADA conference in order to connect with colleagues from around the nation, gain insight on new trends, and learn from workshops about issues that impact VLP

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## State of Legal Aid: Client reports on the 2011 NLADA conference

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and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as to revitalize my spirit in the fight for access to justice for all.

One workshop I found particularly inspiring was "Answering the Call: Incorporating Mobile Devices into Your Service Delivery System," which addressed the use of mobile applications by legal services programs. The facilitators pointed out important statistical information on the use of mobile phones. The analytic data is compelling, and while a legal service program may not be able to take the plunge, the statistics warrant that program directors and boards at least consider it. The "Mobile Web Development Guide for Legal Aid" is a good place to start.

After the initial overview of statistical information I noted the key being the research of the Pew Research Center, "Internet and American Life Project 2011." Obviously if clients are using cell phones to get information from legal service program websites, such sites need to be mobile-ready, and some programs need to develop mobile applications. The question of how clients would like to be contacted has taken on new importance.

Nan Heald, Executive Director of Pine Tree Legal Services in Maine gave a presentation on what they are doing to have a mobile-ready web site. Anyone can log on to their web site homepage and click on a link at the bottom left to view their mobile site. The facilitators also spoke of work being done in Illinois on mobile application development. Illinois Legal Aid has a mobile application that can be downloaded to the iPhone and Android phones. It's a field guide to Illinois law designed for non-lawyers. Anyone can get easy-to-understand legal information on divorce, custody, criminal records, small claims, eviction, foreclosure, unemployment, and other legal issues.

Something I particularly liked about this year's conference was the freedom to move from one workshop to another. The conference provided me with the opportunity to revitalize my spirit and mind. Overall, it was a much needed retreat as we continue our fight for equal access to justice for all.

*-David Pearson*

My name is Leonard Spinner and I have been a member of the Board of Directors of the New Center for Legal Advocacy (NCLA) for the last 12 years and a joint member of the NCLA and South Coastal Counties Legal Services boards for four years. I became involved in legal services through a church friend who worked at legal services. They needed a board member and she recommended that I apply.

I have attended the NLADA Conference before and wanted to attend again this year to get updated on current trends to bring back to my Board and to continue the work I've started on the national level. There were two workshops of particular interest to me in regards to the current work I am performing within my community.

I have been involved in the HIV/AIDS movement since the late eighties and was Chair of the New Bedford AIDS consortium, the local agency that distributes AIDS money, for nine years. I currently work in the county prison with HIV inmates and I also work with parents of children with disabilities. I am also working on a project to start up a Legal Clinic for parents of children with disabilities.

The first workshop, "Stemming the Schools to Prison Pipeline," talked about how schools were using the courts as disciplinarians instead of handling problems in-house and about how zero tolerance policies have had a disastrous effect on our society. They discussed effective ways to address these issues, such as collaborations between legal aid and public defenders. As it is now, a juvenile offender would need two attorneys: one to handle the school issues and one to handle the criminal charges. Most people have no idea what our youth are going through in the schools.

The second workshop, "Helping Defender Clients with Civil Consequences," opened my eyes to the plight of those who are incarcerated. I do work in Massachusetts county prisons with HIV positive inmates, setting them up with services upon release. Many of the people I work with after prison don't realize that they can jeopardize their benefits when they are released. Those with HIV are in jeopardy of losing Medicaid, housing and other penalties. It is extremely important that inmates have a plan when

## The Sword and the Shield: City Life's Anti Foreclosure Movement

By ROBBIE ADJEI

The poor and working class has been victimized by unlawful foreclosure and predatory lending by banks. The resistance against these social injustices is taking place in our courts, our communities and in our State House. Numerous legal aid service providers in Massachusetts are now working with community organizers, tenants and homeowners to stop the banks' illegal practices against tenants and homeowners in Boston.

The Anti Foreclosure Movement (AFM) is a social justice group organized by City Life/Vida Urbana in 2007. The AFM is made up of tenants and homeowners who are facing unlawful housing foreclosures due to predatory lending and other unlawful procedures by banks such as Deutsche Bank and Bank of America. The movement is guided by City Life/Vida Urbana,



City Life members protest against foreclosures in Boston.

a community organizing group, and works in coalition with legal service attorneys from several Massachusetts agencies such as Greater Boston Legal Services, Harvard Legal Aid Bureau and Wilmer Hale Legal Services Center. The movement's objective is to stop both the displacement of families and the decline of Massachusetts neighborhoods where housing foreclosures are taking place. City Life and legal services have formed a partnership with Boston Community Capital (BCC), a community bank located in Roxbury, which is one of the neighborhoods facing multiple foreclosures. A program has been started with BCC in which homeowners can buy their homes back at their current value with an affordable and maintainable mortgage provided by BCC.

### *The Sword*

I spoke to Dave Burt, a representative from City Life/Vida Urbana, who made the following comments regarding City Life's role in the fight against the housing foreclosure crisis.

*"City Life is basically a housing rights organization. We were founded in 1973. ... City Life began as a small collective of community organizers working on housing issues in Jamaica Plain. ... We provide a place where people can come to meet other people that are facing foreclosure or eviction. ... When people come to City Life, they become part of a group of people supporting one another with the same housing*

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## Update on MLAC's Strategic Planning Process

Drawing from the extensive and inclusive information gathering process that MLAC has engaged in over the past two and a half years, the Strategic Planning Committee has submitted a draft strategic plan to the MLAC board and staff. MLAC will release the draft and request comments and questions in the very near future. All client board members will receive a copy of the draft by mail. Please contact Pat Swansey at MLAC if you do not receive your copy.

Everyone is invited to submit written comments and questions and, to the extent possible, the staff will be glad to discuss the draft with anyone who has questions. The board will invite public comments during the regular meeting of the Board on February 23. Written comments may be submitted through March 2. A final version of the plan will be issued after the Board Planning Retreat in late March.

## The Sword and the Shield: City Life's Anti Foreclosure Movement

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**Founded in 1973, City Life/Vida Urbana now includes several thousand members throughout New England.**

issues. ... As a whole they become a stronger unit in which to fight back.

*"The movement has grown from a few people in 2007 to about two or three thousand people, especially if you include the other cities and towns that we are working with ... basically the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts and other parts of New England such as Providence, Rhode Island. ... We have a coalition of organizations ... other than the legal service agencies we work with ACE, the Chinese Progressive Association, and the Massachusetts Alliance Against Predatory Lending (MAAPL) was very instrumental in helping to get legislation passed last summer that helps to protect tenants from displacement. ... This crisis has hit the working communities really hard, especially communities of color. ... We haven't ended predatory lending or stopped the foreclosures, but we've made a huge dent ... in addition to helping some people to get their homes back and stopping the displacement of others."*

While City Life has been the "Sword" in the housing foreclosure crisis, their partnership with legal services agencies has been the legal "Shield" that protects the tenants and homeowners against the banks unlawful procedures.

### *The Shield*

I also spoke to David Grossman an attorney with Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. He made the following comments regarding legal services' role in the housing foreclosure battle, and their efforts to end predatory lending by the banks.

*"Our work with the current foreclosure crisis began in 2007. We began to notice that the identity of the complainants filing for evictions was changing from private landlords to banks. ... That's when we realized that something was happening. ... City Life/Vida Urbana is our partner in this battle and we are the lawyers for the movement ... and jointly we fight the banks together."*

*"We've provided representation of different kinds to at least 500 families a year ... the actual number of people impacted by this crisis is approximately in the tens of thousands across the state ... and it's not just the number of foreclosures because each foreclosure can impact many families, especially those living in multi-family buildings."*

*"As with all of the legal services involved in this crisis, we have limited resources; our office turns away just as many people as we serve because we just don't have the*

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## The Sword and the Shield

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*resources, and at the moment we're technically closed for new domestic relations cases and new housing cases because we and many other legal service agencies have reached our capacity. ... Although during this foreclosure crisis we have made a special commitment to the AFM, the Bank Tenant Association, and to City Life/Vida Urban never to close for people in the movement facing foreclosure. ... However, the coalition has received a three-year grant from the "Oak Foundation" in Europe ... and the movement itself receives funding from national and international supporters.*

*"As the shield for the movement we are focused on making a systemic impact on how banks do business by getting new legislation passed involving foreclosure. For example, the bill that was passed in 2010 (Mass General Laws 186A), "Just Cause Eviction Protection for Tenants after Foreclosure," says a tenant can only be evicted after foreclosure if the tenant has not paid rent, has caused damage to the property, etc. ... then these are causes for eviction.*

*"The bill that we are pushing for currently is "Mandatory Mediation Prior to Foreclosure" ... and the other is "Just Cause for Tenant Protection for Homeowners after Foreclosure," which sort of parallels the tenant law from last year and would be an addendum to the "Just Cause Eviction Protection for Tenants" bill ... I think we have been very successful in changing the behavior of banks here in Boston. However, around the country I know there are still a lot of shenanigans. But in Boston to a large extent the banks have cleaned up their act ... and are being more careful as to how they proceed with a foreclosure because now they know that we are keeping an eye on them. ... I believe the change is due to our joint efforts.*

*"Unfortunately the work being done here in Massachusetts has little impact on the legislative process regarding the foreclosure issue in Washington, DC ... the various programs established through legislation in Washington to address the foreclosure crisis nationally have resulted in no significant impact on a statewide basis. ... Disappointingly, the current administration, as their predecessors, has done nothing to introduce any kind of lasting legislation that could affect the lives of millions of folks facing foreclosure across our country."*

I want to thank Mr. Burt and Mr. Grossman for taking the time to speak with me regarding the housing foreclosure crisis. I believe that true social justice can

## Want to learn more about City Life?

Anyone needing further information is invited to attend one of City Life's meetings in Boston or East Boston. Boston meetings are every Tuesday at 6pm in Jamaica Plain at 284 Amory St. in the Brewer Building. Anyone from the surrounding cities and towns can attend a meeting in East Boston on Wednesdays nights at 6pm located at 28 Parish St. at the Lutheran church right next to the Maverick T-Station.

be achieved as long as there are people in this country and around the world who are willing to stand against social injustice and wield the "Sword" of social justice. Hopefully there will always be a legal aid attorney marching along side carrying the "Shield" of social justice too.

## State of Legal Aid

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they are released. [The following database can be used to get information regarding legal barriers the State of Ohio law imposes on individuals with criminal records. The Ohio Civic Database: Using Technology to Track Collateral Consequences of Conviction. Civic is designed for use by all citizens of Ohio and all others with an interest in its subject matter.]

I think one way all client board members can benefit from attending the NLADA Conference is just by being with other people who share the same mission of equal justice and the experience of learning from each other.

*- Leonard Spinner*

## Jacqui Bowman

*Continued from page 2*

*members belong to and are quite active in community groups or coalitions. GBLS staff can tap into this and work with the Caucus to increase our community connections.*

In conducting this interview I found that Jacquelynne Bowman is a very interesting, capable person with her own ideas and plans for the future of GBLS. In my humble opinion, those who have been worried about the new direction of GBLS shouldn't worry so much. Bob left it in excellent hands.

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## Interested in serving on the MLAC Board of Directors?

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation currently has an opening for a client-eligible board member. Client-eligible members participate fully in the work of the Board of Directors and provide invaluable assistance to the other members of the Board and the MLAC staff. The Board typically meets 10 times a year, usually in Boston. Members may, when necessary, participate by phone.

Board members are appointed by the Supreme Judicial Court. To apply for appointment, send an application letter stating your qualifications and why you want to serve on the Board to:

Pamela B. Lyons  
Administrative Attorney  
Supreme Judicial Court  
John Adams Courthouse  
One Pemberton Square  
Boston, MA 02108

For more information, please contact MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers at 617-367-8544 or [lpowers@mlac.org](mailto:lpowers@mlac.org).

## You're Invited

### GBLS Client and Staff Lobby Event

Bring a friend and come show  
your support for increasing  
civil legal aid funding in the  
Massachusetts budget!

*Tuesday, January 24, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Massachusetts State House*

*For more info, please contact  
Linda Lank at 617-603-1606.*