
Special Ed Advocacy Center 2006 Annual Report

2006 was the Special Ed Advocacy Center's 2nd full year as an institution dedicated to ensuring that children with disabilities in the Chicago area receive all appropriate educational services provided under law.

Between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2006, the Special Ed Advocacy Center assisted 430 families by answering intake calls and representing parents and caregivers; conducted a dozen educational seminars at parent support group meetings, Centers for Independent Living and other disability groups; and attended numerous resource fairs for law students, teachers and the special needs community.

The Special Ed Advocacy Center continued to work on its seven major objectives in 2006:

- Providing free legal services to low-income parents and caregivers of children with disabilities seeking to obtain appropriate educational services for their children;
- Answering intake questions from parents and caregivers of children with disabilities on issues concerning special education law;
- Conducting educational conferences, lectures and seminars;
- Creating an informational website;
- Creating educational brochures and manuals;
- Creating an advisory committee comprised of parents and caretakers of children with disabilities as well as some current and former special education students; and
- Offering legal internships and volunteer positions to help train special education advocates.

Providing Legal Services

Since May 2004, the Special Ed Advocacy Center (“SEAC”) has provided free, competent legal advocacy and representation to parents and caregivers who might not otherwise receive legal representation. The SEAC focuses its services on parents and caregivers whose income is at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines.

The SEAC focused on the substantive and procedural aspects of special education law, and on a broad range of lawyering skills. The SEAC’s work encompasses factual investigation; extensive document review (Individualized Educational Plans (“IEPs”), school and medical records, and team assessments); drafting correspondence, complaints and pleadings; attending meetings; contacting and interviewing expert witnesses; conducting research; preparing memoranda of law; and handling the general disposition of cases.

The SEAC’s clients were obtained through outreach to PTAs, parent groups, child advocates, resource organizations, private practice special education attorneys, teachers, school administrators, churches and other religious organizations, as well as numerous community groups throughout the Chicago area.

Answering Intake Calls

The SEAC attorney and volunteer attorneys answered more than 200 questions from concerned parents and caregivers of children with disabilities such as:

- How do I get a case study opened for my child?
- What can I do when the school does not listen to me?
- What can I do if the school is not following my child’s IEP?
- How does a 504 Plan differ from an IEP?
- How does mediation work in a special education case?
- How do I go about trying to get my child placed in a private school?
- What happens when I disagree with the IEP developed for my child?
- What is meant by filing a “complaint”?
- Do the new federal regulations have any effect on my child’s education?
- Can I audiotape an IEP meeting?
- What can I do if the school no longer feels my child needs special ed services?
- Can I decide unilaterally to end my child’s IEP?
- How can I get the IEP team to give my child appropriate educational services?
- What can I do if my child’s reading level is regressing?
- What can I do if my child is not learning?
- Can my special ed child be suspended and/or expelled?
- What are transition services and how do I get them for my child?
- Does a student in a residential placement under an ICG lose residency in his home district when he turns 18 if the residential school is located in a different district?

Conducting Educational Conferences

In addition to providing free legal services, the SEAC sought to educate parents, caregivers, and school personnel concerning their mutual rights and responsibilities. The SEAC's staff conducted educational conferences free of charge with the intended purpose of transforming the complex area of special education law into simple, understandable language that parents and other non-attorneys can utilize. Additionally, the forums allowed parents and caregivers to ask questions concerning special education law and teaches parents and school personnel how to work together both cooperatively and effectively.

The SEAC's staff gives speeches, provides public comment, author articles for periodicals, author letters to the editor, and engages in dialogue with the general public so as to enhance general awareness and understanding of issues concerning the special education students being served in Illinois schools.

The SEAC conducted educational conferences, gave interviews, and participated in resource fairs with groups including the following:

January

- Participant, The North/Northwest Cook County and Lake County Work Group (Riverwoods) (January 19)
- Guest Speaker, Special Education Resource Group (Elmhurst) (January 26)

March

- Participant, 2nd Annual Resource Fair Kaneland HS (Elburn) (March 11)
- Guest Lecturer, Disability Law Seminar Kent Law School (Chicago) (March 21)
- Guest Speaker, Community Support Services (Brookfield) (March 23)

April

- Guest Speaker, Harper College Wellness Week (Palatine) (April 19)
- Participant, Transition Outreach Training for Adult Living Project (Skokie) (April 24)

May

- Participant, Options: LCCIL Transition Resource Fair (Lincolnshire)(May 4)

June

- Participant, The North/Northwest Cook County and Lake County Work Group (Riverwoods) (June 15)
- Guest Speaker, Self-Advocacy Group of McHenry County (McHenry) (June 15)

July

- Participant, Disability Parade (Chicago) (July 23)
- Guest Speaker, Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (Chicago) (July 26)
- Participant, Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal Pro Bono Reception Chicago) (July 24)

Attachment 1

September

- Guest Speaker, Asperger Support Group (Rolling Meadows) (September 12)

October

- Guest Speaker, LAN 65 Steering Committee (Chicago) (October 18)
- Participant, 3rd Annual Transition Fair (McHenry)(October 24)
- Guest Speaker, Respite Provider Meeting – Orchard Village (Skokie) (October 25)

November

- Guest Speaker, Midwest Adoption Conference – Harper College (Palatine) (November 5)
- Guest Speaker, Lake County Center for Independent Living (Mundelein) (November 15)

December

- Participant, Illinois Bar Foundation Breakfast (Chicago) (December 8)
- Participant, The North/Northwest Cook County and Lake County Work Group Legislative Breakfast (Wheeling) (December 12)

Creating a Website

The SEAC's website (www.specialedadvocacycenter.org) operates as a free public resource and information center for issues concerning special education law.

The website will continue to be expanded to include educational brochures, manuals, informational articles, copies of press releases and links to other special education resources.

During 2006, the website was re-designed for ease of usage.

Creating Educational Brochures

During 2006, the SEAC's staff began to design educational brochures and manuals to reflect recent changes to federal special education law.

Creating an Advisory Committee

During 2006, the SEAC continued its creation of an Advisory Council comprised of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, school representatives, doctors, child psychologists, speech and occupational therapists, and social workers.

Offering Legal Internships and Volunteer Opportunities

During 2006, the SEAC had numerous volunteers who assisted the SEAC staff.

Leadership and Staff

2006 Board of Directors:

President:	Ms. Terry Pastika	Secretary:	Ms. Bethany Thompson
Vice-President:	Ms. Bethany Thompson	Treasurer:	Ms. Michele Fugger
Director:	Ms. Jill M. Dressner		

2006 Staff:

Ms. Jill M. Dressner, Executive Director/Attorney at Law

Support, Contributions and Donations

The SEAC's financial support came from individual donations and grantmaking foundations. In addition, the SEAC received support from corporate contribution programs in response to formally submitted proposals.

The SEAC would like to thank all the individual donors for their support during 2006.

The SEAC would like to thank the following foundations for their support during 2006:

The Blowitz-Ridgeway Foundation	Donald P. and Byrd M. Kelly Foundation
Col. Stanley R. McNeil Foundation	Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Foundation
The Illinois Bar Foundation	

The SEAC would like to thank Mr. Terry Norton, Esq. and Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP for their offer of pro bono legal support during 2006.

The SEAC complies with all record-keeping and filing requirements mandated by state and federal law. Our corporate records are available for inspection at our office and are on file with the appropriate governmental agencies. The SEAC does not release the names of our individual donors nor do we sell our mailing list to other groups.

For further information about the SEAC, please contact us at:

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Fax (847) 397-7011
Email seac@specialedadvocacycenter.org
Website
www.specialedadvocacycenter.org

Attachment 1

Special Ed Advocacy Center Intake Form (Client Request for Services Form)
Return form by mail 1935 Plum Grove Road PMB 274, Palatine, IL 60067 or fax (847) 397-7011.

DATE _____ FILE NUMBER (assigned by office mgr) _____

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

HOME TELEPHONE _____ OTHER PHONE _____

EMAIL _____ FAX _____

CHILD'S NAME _____

CHILD'S DATE OF BIRTH _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

ETHNICITY _____ RACE _____

SPECIAL NEEDS _____

TOTAL FAMILY INCOME _____ NUMBER OF INCOME EARNERS _____

NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS _____

INCOME SOURCE: PUBLIC BENEFIT \$ _____ SALARY \$ _____

CHILD SUPPORT \$ _____ SS/SSI \$ _____

OTHER \$ _____ SOURCE _____

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT _____

POSITION/TITLE _____

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT _____

POSITION/TITLE _____

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT SEAC? _____

REASON FOR NEEDING ASSISTANCE FROM SEAC (attach additional sheet(s) if necessary):

FORM OF REPRESENTATION

____ Advice Only; ____ Information Only; ____ Brief Service: _____;

____ Attend IEP; ____ Mediation; ____ Administrative Hearing; ____ Litigation.

NOTE: INFORMATION IS GATHERED FOR STATISICAL PUPOSES ONLY.