
Special Ed Advocacy Center 2007 Annual Report

2007 was the Special Ed Advocacy Center's 3rd 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, 2007 and December 31, 2007, the Special Ed Advocacy Center assisted 484 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 2007:

- 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.

2007 Accomplishments

- Providing free legal services to 484 low-income parents and caregivers of children with disabilities seeking to obtain appropriate educational services for their children;
- Averaging two to three new client request for services per day;
- Conducting almost two dozen educational seminars;
- Guest Lecturer, Disability Law Seminar Kent Law School; and
- Adjunct Professor of Law, Special Education Law Seminar, Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

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.

During 2007, the SEAC staff and volunteer attorneys provided free legal services to 484 low-income parents and caregivers of children with disabilities seeking to obtain appropriate educational services for their children.

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

During 2007, the SEAC staff and volunteer attorneys answered more than 250 questions from concerned parents and caregivers of children with disabilities such as:

- How do I get special education services for my child?
- Can I refuse to consent to have my child tested for special ed services?
- 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?
- Can the IEP team change my child’s classroom without my permission?
- What happens when my child ages out of special education?
- 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”?
- Does the new state laws have any effect on my child’s education?
- What is meant by Delegation of Rights?
- What happens if my former spouse and I disagree about our child’s special ed?

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 events with groups including but not limited to the following during 2006:

January

- Speaker, Arlington Heights Lion's Club (January 2)
- Speaker, McHenry Peer Support Group (January 11)
- Speaker, Aspire Children Services (January 17)
- Participant, Lake County Center for Independent Living Annual Meeting (January 30)

March

- Guest Lecturer, Disability Law Seminar Kent Law School (March 20)

April

- Speaker, McHenry County Mental Health Board Family Care Support Group for Teens (April 12)
- Speaker, Rock Falls Parent Respite Group (Center for Independent Living) (April 14)
- Speaker, CPS Autism Support Group for Social Worker Venus Austin (April 26)

June

- Speaker, McHenry County Mental Health Board (June 1)
- Speaker, Local Area Network 65 (June 20)

July

- Attendee, 4th Annual Disability Pride Parade (July 21)

August to November

- Adjunct Professor of Law, Taught Special Education Law at Loyola Law School

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October

- Participant, North/Northwest Cook County and Lake County Work Group (October 18)

November

- Speaker, Lake County Center for Independent Living (November 1)
- Speaker, Midwest Adoption Conference (November 3)
- Speaker, Special Kids, Special Families (November 5)
- Participant, Loyola's Meet the Public Interest Employer's Reception (November 13)
- Speaker, Hanover Township Mental Health Board (November 17)
- Speaker, NAMI DuPage Parents Group (November 28)
- Speaker, Ups for Downs (November 29)

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.

In 2007, the SEAC continued its attempt to make our website more user-friendly, more informative and more interactive. The website will continue to be expanded into 2008 to include podcasts, weblogs, educational brochures, manuals, informational articles, copies of press releases and links to other special education resources.

Creating Educational Brochures

In 2007, the SEAC's staff continued to design and distribute free educational brochures and manuals. Currently, the SEAC is concentrating on creating materials to explain recent special education related state regulations that took effect on June 28, 2007.

Creating an Advisory Committee

In 2007, the SEAC continued to foster 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

In 2007, the SEAC had numerous volunteers who assisted the SEAC staff in ensuring that children with disabilities in the Chicago area receive all appropriate educational services provided under law.

Leadership and Staff

2007 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

2007 Staff:

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

Support, Contributions and Donations

The SEAC's financial support came from numerous individual donations and grantmaking foundations including:

The Blowitz-Ridgeway Foundation
Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Foundation
Illinois State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division Children's Assistance Fund
Donald P. and Byrd M. Kelly Foundation
DuPage County Bar Foundation
Roberts Charitable Foundation
Rice foundation

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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1935 South Plum Grove Road
PMB #274
Palatine, IL 60067
Phone (847) 736-8286

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

Attachment 8

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.