

Poor People Find Advocates At Legal Services

Free Non-Criminal Legal Counsel To Those Who Qualify

Last month, Jack Poisson and Mike McGee gave legal assistance to 102 clients who paid them nothing.

Poisson and McGee are lawyers. They occupy a little white building at 106 E. Grimes Avenue, on the corner of South Main, and they give their legal help free of charge.

Their office is High Point Legal Services, an independent project operated on a grant from the North Carolina Department of Social Services and the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Although six Legal Services offices exist in this state, only one other—that in Chapel Hill—is funded quite like the one in High Point.

The local Legal Services is here for one reason: to provide non-criminal legal counsel to persons who can't afford to hire a lawyer of their own.

All persons currently receiving funds or medicaid from the Guilford County Department of Social Services, and those whose income exceeds the county's maximum for assistance by one-third are eligible for Legal Services. All recipients must be either totally or permanently disabled, aged, blind, or have dependent children.

According to Poisson, senior attorney in the firm, the bulk of their work is to advise people about family or other personal problems, such as families breaking up, paternity suits, assaults, run-away children, landlord-tenant disputes, divorces, and non-support.

The much-publicized women's movement—brought even more into focus recently with the national political conventions—has been booed and praised. Some think that aggressiveness in a woman is unfeminine, that her place is in the home.

Others, however, feel that women must seek out her own place—do "her own thing," be it on the job, on the platform or on the ballot.

It might be said that Model Cities and these new and experienced female leaders have become partners, and the results have been beautiful.

In Model Cities, participation is not limited to a few of one race, age or sex. In fact, the involvement of those



MIKE McGEE, left, and secretary JULIA HORNE, discuss a case with senior attorney JACK POISSON (with back to camera) at High Point Legal Services.

Family law—dealing with all types of child and marriage problems from neglect and abandonment to annulment—constituted 148 cases in the month of June. Of these, divorce was involved in 70 cases, followed by separation in 31 cases, custody and guardianship in 19, and support in 15.

Thirteen cases involved contracts of some sort, such as insurance and taxes. Property disputes were an issue in 19 cases. Of these, eight involved arguments between tenants and their landlords. Foreclosures on mortgage, furniture or insurance were involved in



YVONNE McCALL

UNIQUE SKILLS

All bring a unique set of qualifications and skills to their job, and have made what is generally agreed is an outstanding effect on the work of Model Cities.

Ms. Jones, who was a double biology and chemistry major at A&T State University, has been with her operating agency, Guilford County Economic Opportunity Council, for 4½ years. She began as a counselor of the County-wide Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) and has since moved up to the director's position of the program.

Nellie Jones feels strongly about women's roles. "A woman should have the opportunity to pursue a career, of course," she says. "Women have an important contribution to make. Just because a woman is married, and has

community for the office to receive its HEW grant and to open its doors in March 1971.

Poisson, former deputy director of Model Cities, has been with Legal Services since it opened. McGee came on board last winter. A full-time secretary, Julia Horne, completes the staff.

Poisson and McGee, both graduates of the University of North Carolina Law School, do not defend criminal cases. Poisson defined criminal cases as any in which the state charges a person with an offense.

All of Legal Services cases involve civil disputes, on the other hand, in which one person brings court action against another. The criminal non-support laws, however, are useful to keep a husband in line, said Poisson, and are used when related to a family matter.

When clients need legal advice about a criminal matter, they are automatically referred to a private lawyer or the public defender.

COMMUNITY WORK

Not only do these two young attorneys defend poor people and give free advice, but they also feel a commitment to their community. Public education is an important part of their guidelines, and they welcome any chance to speak to clubs or groups about their work.

In addition, they attend Model

Cities planning meetings regularly—Poisson, the Housing Task Force, and McGee, the Crime and Juvenile Delinquency Task Force. Poisson, also a Model City Commissioner, was active in organizing public housing resident groups and drawing up a set of by-laws last winter. As a result, the residents meet more regularly and have established a more constructive dialogue with local Housing Authority directors.

Even with a full case-load, Poisson looks and hopes for more clients in the future. He is interested in contesting more cases such as those concerning Social Services rent orders last November, and currently, those which involve excessive water bills.

"I'm concerned with the procedures used in dealing with our clients, such as giving a tenant a fair hearing before he's evicted," said Poisson.

The office is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Clients may call for an appointment at 885-9181, or stop in the little white building. If they're eligible, the help they need is there.

Third Action Year Begins August 1

Tuesday, August 1, will go by unnoticed to most residents of High Point.

It is, however, when Model Cities marks the beginning of its third Action Year.

Model Cities goes into this third fiscal year with a total budget of approximately \$3.5 million. Of this amount, \$1.77 million comes directly from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The remainder has been attracted from other federal and state sources.

The federal grant from HUD is identical to the \$1.77 million awarded in each of the two previous action years. Administered by the City of High Point and the Model City Commission, the money is earmarked to implement a comprehensive program improving the social, economic and physical conditions in the target neighborhood and in the community at large.

By the end of the new fiscal year, the local Model Cities program expects to have spent in its lifetime better than \$5.27 in HUD funds, plus an additional \$4.75 million from other sources.

Free Band Lessons Given

Cultural Arts is looking for musicians and would-be musicians.

The center at 417 Walnut Street is offering free lessons on many band instruments this summer, and they need kids who want to learn.

Mary P. Browne and Raymond McAllister are the instructors. Ms. Browne, a public school music teacher, said the program to teach kids musical instruments was not to make them accomplished artists, but to prepare them to take band in school.

"Some beautiful talents go to waste because a kid flunks some test," she said. "They're told they don't have the aptitude. We're here to get them ready for band later on if they want to take it."

Cultural Arts has rented instruments such as clarinets, trumpets, trombones, saxophones and flutes on which kids can practice. Lessons go on all day, every day, at the center.

For this particular project, Ms. Browne said they are looking for youngsters aged 10 to 14.

To register for lessons, kids may simply drop by the Cultural Arts Center, she added.



NELLIE JONES