



HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

Helping to Break the Cycle of  
Poverty and Homelessness

### HAP by the Numbers

**3,500**

Homeless clients, including 150 homeless veterans, who have been helped over the past twelve months with their civil legal needs by HAP.

**1,670**

Clients for whom HAP has secured rapid SSI disability benefits through the SOAR Project since its inception in 2007.

**1,517**

Veterans HAP has helped secure VA and other benefits since 2001.

**350**

Volunteer lawyers, paralegals, and law students engaged in direct outreach to homeless individuals in need of legal services each year by volunteering for HAP.

**125**

Legal clinics held each year by HAP in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, day centers, and transitional housing facilities, including 15 veterans-only legal clinics located throughout the city.

**25**

HAP legal service clinic locations throughout Philadelphia.

# HAPPENINGS

Summer 2016

## Letter from HAP Board President, Brian North, Esquire



Dear Loyal Friends, Supporters, and Volunteers,

This past year has been a busy one for HAP. In addition to ever-increasing activity in our Children and Families, SOAR, and Veterans Projects, HAP has enjoyed significant advocacy successes. HAP persuaded the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) to modify its rigidity in requiring birth certificates for every single member of an applicant's household as a prerequisite for admission to PHA public housing or to PHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Now, Philadelphians applying for PHA housing who were born out of state or at home — instances which make it challenging to procure a birth certificate, can submit alternate documentation. HAP will continue to work with shelter social workers to ensure that families are not automatically rejected from PHA housing when they are delayed in procuring birth documentation.

In recent months, HAP has been the beneficiary of several awards. **Executive Director Marsha Cohen** will be the recipient of the 2016 Philadelphia Bar Foundation Award which recognizes a public interest attorney who is dedicating his or her life to promoting equal access to justice for all by working in the non-profit legal services community.

**HAP Staff Attorney Michael Taub** was selected to receive the Rutgers Law School *Mary Philbrook Public Interest Award* which recognizes Mary Philbrook, the first woman admitted to the New Jersey Bar. As a tribute to her lifelong struggle for justice, the Mary Philbrook Public Interest Award is presented each year to a leading contemporary advocate of social justice and equality.

This summer, HAP also received the Alan J. Davis Award from Ballard Spahr for exemplary public service. The Award was given in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Ballard Spahr's partnership with HAP in helping homeless clients at legal clinics held at the Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission.

Please check HAP's website ([homelessadvocacyproject.org](http://homelessadvocacyproject.org)) or Facebook page for ongoing updates.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of the Homeless Advocacy Project. Together, we are helping to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness in Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

*Brian North*

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## Success for a United States Marine After his 40-Year Fight HAP Veterans Project

**HAP Staff Attorney and Duffy Fellow Neha Y. Chiaramonte** recently secured a favorable decision when challenging her client's "other than honorable" discharge from the Marines. Neha successfully represented "Bob," a Vietnam era veteran, before the Department of Defense Board for Correction of Naval Records. For more than forty years, Bob pursued a discharge upgrade and was represented by countless private attorneys who were unable help him. Then he met Neha.



HAP Veterans Project Attorneys (l to r):  
Neha Y. Chiaramonte, Alie Muolo, Michael Taub

Bob entered into active duty in the United States Marines in 1967. He was stationed in Da Nang, Vietnam for over a year where he was regularly exposed to the horrors of war, including the torture and burning of his fellow marines and friends. He also suffered extreme racism and abuse from his commanders and fellow marines. These events and exposure to countless similar traumatic experiences led Bob to exhibit erratic behavior during his deployment, resulting in his discharge from the Marines with an "other than honorable" discharge in 1970.

Fortunately, our country learned more about the effects of the extreme trauma experienced by Vietnam veterans, like Bob. In 1993, he was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which was directly linked to the trauma he suffered in Vietnam. Despite significant barriers resulting from his PTSD symptoms, including street homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health issues, Bob was resolute in his belief that he should be considered a Vietnam veteran and a marine. He began this fight immediately after his discharge in 1970 and never gave up.

Bob was referred to HAP in September, 2014. HAP had made the decision to begin representing veterans with discharge upgrade cases and Bob's was the first. A startling number of these petitions are automatically denied and veterans are often left with little to no recourse. Representation is essential, especially for veterans experiencing homelessness.

By November, 2015, Neha had gathered sufficient evidence to submit a brief to the VA on Bob's behalf. The Board requested a second brief, which Neha submitted, and Bob's petitions were reviewed twice. In May, 2016, the Board ruled in Bob's favor and granted him the discharge upgrade he had been seeking for four decades.

Bob – who is now 65 years of age – can finally proudly state that he served *honorably* as a marine in the Vietnam War and will be afforded all of the benefits that accompany this honor. Neha continues working on Bob's behalf to make sure that happens.



### In Memoriam

Eugene M. Schloss, Jr. passed away on April 23, 2016. Gene was a dedicated supporter of the Homeless Advocacy Project and in 1995 served as HAP Board President. As General Counsel for Mediq, Gene was an early proponent of corporate counsel engaging in pro bono work and successfully reached out to other in-house corporate attorneys. Gene will be missed for his leadership, his can-do attitude, his good cheer, and for increasing HAP's outreach to law firms and area corporations.

## HAP's Annual Benefit

The Homeless Advocacy Project hosted its Annual Benefit on April 7, 2016 at the Sofitel Philadelphia. Led by Event Co-Chairs Sara Brandes and Larry Kotler, this year's Benefit raised \$220,000 through sponsorships, ticket sales, private donations, and a silent auction. Many thanks go to the Fundraising Committee consisting of HAP Board Members: Laura Grossi-Tyson, Margie Morris, Jeff Palazzese, Carol Nelson Shepherd, Madeline Sherry, Blaine Stanley, and Tom Wamser. Live music was provided by Bill Conkin and Marty Coleman.



**Save the Date**  
**HAP Annual Benefit**  
**April 6, 2017**

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HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

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## There's No Place like Home—In Philadelphia

by Lori Lasher, Esquire  
HAP Board Member and 2004 HAP Board President

Philly is at its best when our legal and social services agencies and their support teams come together to help someone in crisis. When Mrs. A (an elderly widow who was being badly abused physically and verbally by her daughter) came to the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP) legal clinic at Project HOME in February 2016, she was simply looking for help with replacing her citizenship documentation and Social Security card. These critical documents were destroyed when the place where she previously lived was condemned. When I met Mrs. A, she was sleeping on a couch in the hallway of her daughter's home. Mrs. A was trying to secure housing at Project HOME's new subsidized housing program called "Francis House of Peace."

Since Mrs. A's lost identification documents were needed to complete her housing application, Project HOME staff referred her to the HAP clinic for help. Mrs. A speaks minimal English as Cantonese is her primary language, so the intake started off a little rocky. Fortunately, Mrs. A showed me paperwork identifying Eddie Wong, a Francis House of Peace employee, as a person I could call. I reached out to Eddie and he not only helped to explain why Mrs. A was at the legal clinic, but also served as interpreter during the remainder of our intake. After talking with Mrs. A, I was astonished to learn that she was being abused by her daughter.

Mrs. A clearly needed much more than paperwork assistance. She needed a Protection From Abuse (PFA) Order. One of my first acts was to recruit help from Jon Chan, one of my firm's IT experts who is fluent in Cantonese. Jon was our interpreter as my non-existent Cantonese and Mrs. A's limited English failed us. Since HAP does not handle PFA cases, and since I was determined that Mrs. A would not go to the hearing without representation, HAP's Executive Director, Marsha Cohen, connected me with SeniorLAW Centers's (SLC) Dana Goldberg, one of the SLC's most experienced lawyers in these matters. Dana assisted me as co-counsel in the PFA matter, gathering the evidence that was needed to be presented at the hearing and showing great compassion toward Mrs. A, who was very afraid of her daughter.

While the PFA proceedings were pending, on the night of February 23, Mrs. A was locked out in the rain by her granddaughter who sat in the house, ignoring Mrs. A's knocking and cries to be let in from the rain. Mrs. A called me and I patched in Jon. Realizing the seriousness of the situation and that I was almost an hour away, I immediately called Project HOME's Outreach Coordination Center. Outreach workers immediately picked up Mrs. A in their van, and kept her dry and safe until I could arrive. That night, I convinced the police to force Mrs. A's granddaughter to let her back into the house.

On May 13, Dana successfully negotiated the maximum 3-year PFA order enforceable against Mrs. A's daughter, sparing Mrs. A the ordeal of going through a fact-finding hearing.

With the help of Sister Mary Scullion, Executive Director of Project Home, and Rachel Mak, Deputy Director of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, Mrs. A has been approved for housing and expects to move into a safe home with a real bed very soon.

I am honored to work in a wonderful city that has such a great network of legal and support organizations and truly caring people who made it possible for us to help Mrs. A and really make a difference in her life. Without the help of the organizations mentioned above, we could not have achieved these wonderful results. I hope that all who read this will be just a little more proud of your city and those who work tirelessly on behalf of the homeless, the abused, and the elderly. Please say thank you to each of them for Mrs. A and me.



Lori Lasher and Jon Chan

*Lori is a partner in the global law firm of Reed Smith and Director of the firm's Pro Bono and Community Services. Lori joined the HAP Board of Directors in 1996, served as Board President in 2004 and currently co-chairs HAP's Standards & Monitoring Committee. She is also the Adopt Coordinator for HAP's legal clinic at Project HOME where she has served as a legal volunteer for over a decade. Lori also serves on Project HOME's Board of Trustees.*



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