

PRO BONO SPOTLIGHT - HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

There is No Place Like Home in Philadelphia

By **Lori L. Lasher**

PHILADELPHIA 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 just looking for help with replacing her citizenship documentation and Social Security card. These critical documents were destroyed when her former home was condemned. When I met Mrs. A., she was sleeping on a couch in the hallway of her daughter's home, trying to secure housing at Project HOME's new subsidized housing program, 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. I called Wong and he not only helped to explain why Mrs. A. was at

the legal clinic, but he then served as interpreter during the remainder of our intake. After talking with her for a while through Wong, I was astonished to learn that she was being abused by her daughter.

Mrs. A. clearly needed a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA) in addition to paperwork assistance. I sought help from Jon Chan, one of my firm's IT experts who is fluent in Cantonese to act as our interpreter. HAP does not handle protection from abuse cases, and since I was determined to secure Mrs. A. representation, HAP's Executive Director Marsha Cohen, connected me with SeniorLAW Center's Dana Goldberg. Goldberg assisted me as co-counsel in the PFA matter, gathering the evidence to be presented at the hearing and showing great compassion toward a very scared Mrs. A.

While the PFA proceedings were pending, on the night of Feb. 23, Mrs. A. was locked out in the rain by her granddaughter who sat in the house, ignoring her knocking and cries to be let in from the rain. Mrs. A. called me and I patched in Chan. I was almost an hour away, so I immediately called Project HOME's Outreach Coordination Center (OCC). OCC workers rushed to pick up Mrs. A. and kept her safe and dry 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, Goldberg successfully negotiated the maximum 3-year PFA order enforceable against Mrs. A.'s daughter, sparing her 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.

Without the help of the organizations mentioned above, we could not have achieved these wonderful results for Mrs. A. I hope that all who read this will be just a little prouder of this city and those who work tirelessly on behalf of the homeless, the abused and the elderly.

I am honored to work in a wonderful city that has such a great network of legal and support organizations and truly caring people that made it possible for us to help Mrs. A. and really make a difference in her life.

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