

Helping Foster Youth Succeed

Mental Health Advocacy Services (MHAS) is part of both statewide and local efforts to create a brighter future for foster youth. This year, MHAS will play a key role in a comprehensive initiative to create models for greater collaboration between public education and child welfare, as well as launch a local program to provide direct assistance to foster youth with mental disabilities.

When children are placed in foster care, it is done out of concern for the child's immediate safety, yet this upheaval can wreak havoc not only with the child's emotional well-being, but also with his or her education. According to



one teenager, "There are 15 people responsible for my education, but not one of them reads my report card or calls my teacher."

In fact, 46% of foster youth do not complete high school, and as many as 52% are placed in special education (compared to 10-12% of the general student population). They

are significantly more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems, and within two to four years of aging out of the foster care system, more than half will be unemployed, and one in four will be homeless.

"We know that educational outcomes for children in foster care are far below those of their peers, but the question is, how can we create a more supportive, integrated system that will help these children to succeed?" says MHAS Senior Attorney Nancy Shea.

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Safe at Home

A woman with mental illness is at risk of losing her apartment until MHAS steps in to help.

Without the Mental Health Advocacy Services benefits advocacy team, many men and women with debilitating mental illness would be living on the streets, unable to afford food or medicine. More than 40% of applications for disability benefits are denied by the Social Security Administration (SSA), but MHAS' clients have a success rate of more than 80%. MHAS' expertise in navigating the application and appeals processes for disability and other benefits has made a world of difference for thousands of people with mental disabilities.

"Angela" is a 56 year-old woman diagnosed with major depression. She sought help because her Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments had stopped, and she could not pay her rent. Even more terrifying, the SSA had informed Angela that she had to return \$20,000 in SSI payments she had previously received.

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Dodger Night!

June 18 - Save The Date

Mark your calendars for our annual Dodger Night event, Thursday, June 18, 2009. Join us as the Dodgers take on the Oakland A's. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Visit www.mhas-la.org for details or contact Nicole Roberts at 213-389-2077, ext. 25, or nroberts@mhas-la.org.



Foster Youth

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MHAS and the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning spent two years leading the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care funded by the Stuart Foundation. The Collaborative worked with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to create detailed plans for improving outcomes for children in foster care. Their report, "Ready to Succeed," includes recommendations such as the creation of a statewide foster youth database, extensive training for caregivers, and early intervention and mental health services for children with emotional problems.



Visit www.mhas-la.org to read the "Ready to Succeed" report.

Now MHAS' work will continue as part of a new initiative funded by the Stuart Foundation, Ready to Succeed: Improving Education for Children and Youth in Foster Care, which will implement those recommendations at demonstration sites in Fresno, Sacramento, and San Diego Counties. MHAS will measure the results of the counties' efforts and continue to work toward systemic change and the creation of a vibrant learning community.

In Los Angeles, MHAS' new project, Education Advocacy for Transitional Age Foster Youth, supported by a grant from The Carl & Roberta Deutsch Foundation, will focus on high-school-age foster youth with significant mental health needs and provide them with intensive legal advocacy.

Says Shea, "We will ensure that they receive the education, mental health and other services they need to achieve their education goals. We hope to bridge the communication gaps between agencies and provide the consistent support these young people need to succeed."

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY SERVICES, INC.

is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation. The mission of MHAS is to protect and advance the legal rights of children and adults with mental disabilities, in order to maximize autonomy, promote equality, and secure the resources needed to thrive in the community.

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Safe at Home

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MHAS Benefits Specialist Sherrill Martin investigated the case and learned that Angela's estranged husband had died five years earlier, but Angela had only recently learned of his death. They had owned a small property in central California, and the SSA determined that Angela's ownership of the property had made her ineligible for benefits from the date of the husband's death.

"Angela" was in danger of losing her home.

Martin immediately filed an appeal and succeeded in convincing the SSA that Angela was eligible for conditional benefits until the property could be sold. At the same time, Martin gathered the medical evidence for Angela to successfully apply for Disabled Widow's Benefits to supplement her SSI.

Thanks to MHAS, Angela was able to keep her apartment and continue the treatment she needed.



Protecting and advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities since 1977.

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