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The Year(s) in Review

by Melissa A. Gertz, Esq.
Executive Director

As many of you know, the Community Justice Center is an innovative legal services non-profit based in Trenton, serving the low-income/homeless disabled, and returning disabled veterans and their families, primarily within Central New Jersey. We opened our doors to the public in March of 2009; it was and remains the *only* one of its kind in New Jersey, able to represent low-income disabled veterans before both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Social Security Administration. The Community Justice Center is transforming lives—not merely by providing legal assistance, but by providing something far more priceless: hope.



The past two years have been quite busy!! We welcomed our 370th client, said goodbye to outgoing Disability Rights Advocate Lisa A. Turowsky, and welcomed incoming Disability Rights Advocate Carrie Ann Young, Esq., who brings a refreshing optimism and energy to our team. We have solidified our presence and services in the traumatic brain injury community – becoming a fantastic ally with the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey (www.bianj.org) and other TBI providers. We have even added a dog to the mix (we did say innovative, didn't we?) –check out page 3 for her story!

Thanks to the foundational support of **The Bunbury Company** and **The Harbourton Foundation**, and ongoing collaboration with Elijah's Promise in New Brunswick, we have been able to greatly increase our services in Middlesex County, an initiative we started in 2011. Nebojsa Zlatanovic, Esq., a graduate of Seton Hall School of Law '09 and an Army veteran who was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, joined our team in Fall 2012. He is committed to providing excellent representation for our Middlesex County clients in their court hearings in Newark. This addition has allowed us to increase our overall caseload as well – in 2012, we fully represented 120 clients, and in 2013, we were able to increase it to 150 clients!

In Fall 2013, we were blessed with our very first corporate sponsor! **Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.**, awarded us with funds to expand our work in Hunterdon County. Time and time again, it has been made apparent that Hunterdon County residents – especially due to its rural character – are underserved, and we are excited to continue our relationship with the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services' Division of Senior, Disabilities & Veterans Services. In addition, we were selected to receive county funding for 2014-2015, under the Department of Human Services' *Human Service Community Programs*, to help sustain our work there.

Of course, this surge in popularity hasn't come without its growing pains. **Mathematica Policy Research** to the rescue! In addition to providing operating support, our newest corporate partner is working with our IT Technician Thakoon Tangtrakul, devising an extensive database to keep track of all of our fantastic work!

Your support, not only at our 2012 **Barbeque & Beer Benefit** and 2013 **UnWINEd** event, but throughout the year, is absolutely invaluable to us! We look forward to seeing you at one of our outreach events, or in 2015 at our next fundraiser. Please visit our website at www.nj-communityjusticecenter.org, join our mailing list by emailing info@nj-cjc.org, or find us on Facebook at 'CJC Trenton'. As you read more in depth about our work through these pages, we hope you find that we are meeting our overarching mission, of *Encouraging the Empowerment, Resiliency, and Rights of Those Struggling with Disabilities*.



It's been a wonderful experience, representing the clients I've had the privilege of advocating on behalf of, and working alongside the staff at CJC to make a positive impact on someone's life. ~ Nebojsa "Vic" Zlatanovic, Esq.

One week after graduating from Rutgers in 2002, Nebojsa Zlatanovic enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, a unit with a rich and storied history. As a paratrooper of "The Herd" he was stationed in Italy and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. After leaving active duty, he attended Seton Hall School of Law, graduating in 2009.

Chasing Dreams Leads to Home

by Carrie Ann Young, Esq.



I grew up in the public service lifestyle. To me, helping someone in need was commonplace – the norm. However, while an undergraduate student, I dreamed of working in Corporate America and for four years post-college I worked and lived in New York City as a market research associate.

My dreams changed with the gentle guide of a book entitled *Broken*, written by William Cope Moyers, the son of Bill Moyers. Yes, the famous news journalist and White House press secretary to President Johnson. Through his story I learned that “bad stuff happens to good people,” and that the most important thing for individuals going through a rough time is a good support system. I realized that I wanted to be a part of this support system; that I wanted to get involved in public service. Although my time at the Community Justice Center has been short to date, I am confident that I have found my new home and satisfied my dream. I enjoy getting to know our clients, learning their stories and ultimately helping them get the help they so badly need.

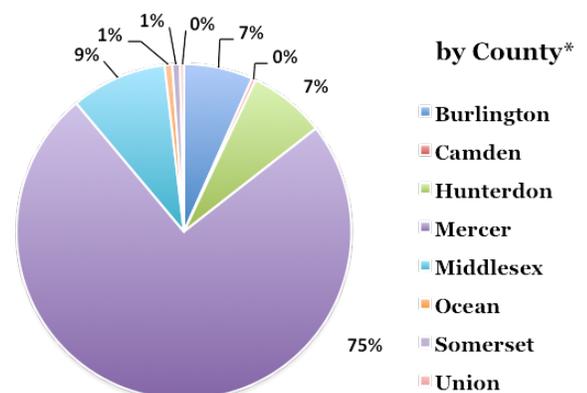
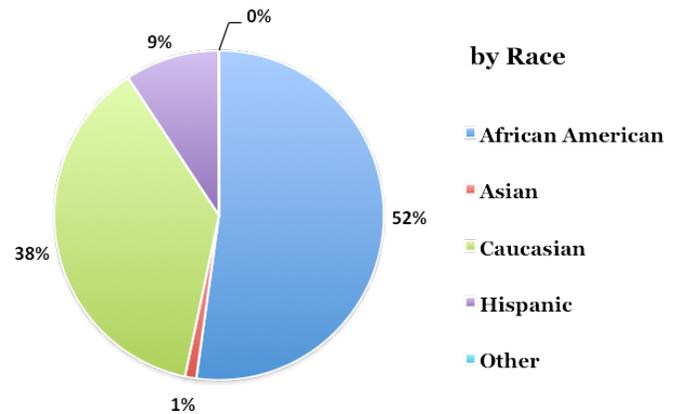
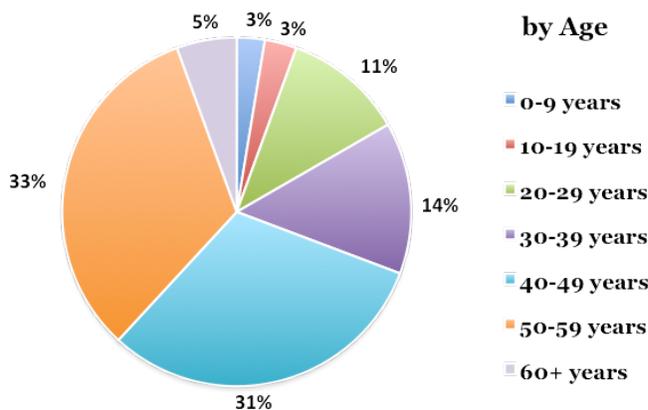
I am still learning about CJC and all it does for its community, but I relish in what I know: CJC helps people get the help and support they so badly need. Melissa understands firsthand what its like to overcome great challenges to getting access to the much needed support. Melissa also shares in my view that everyone deserves help. I have already experienced the gratefulness that clients show me when I listen to their stories at their intake appointments; they feel better just knowing that someone is listening to them, believes them and is willing to fight for them. I look forward to continuing my work at CJC as we collaborate with the local community to make the lasting changes to the system our clients need.

William Moyers challenges in his book: “[t]o break down the wall of shame, stigma, and discrimination that keeps people from finding paths to recovery, I invite my audience to take action in their communities.” This is my action and my success is each client who gets approved for benefits and gains access to the programs and treatment he or she needs.

Any Way You Slice It, We're Reaching the Community

The Community Justice Center assists the low-income disabled (that is, 175% of the poverty level or below), with an emphasis on veterans and the homeless. In addition to full representation and brief service, the Community Justice Center provides training and information sessions upon request to area agencies, government units, and consumer-run support groups.

Throughout 2012 and 2013, demand for services remained consistently high. In 2012, the Community Justice Center provided full representation to 120 clients – 68 cases were opened, and 46 were closed. In 2013, full representation was provided to 150 clients – 94 cases were opened, and 47 were closed. Our increased capacity to handle this larger caseload is directly attributable to our financial supporters, who allowed us to bring on additional staff and hours to meet higher demands. Represented below is the demographic spectrum of the **270 clients** for which it provided full-representation in both 2012 and 2013.



* Please note that roughly half of CJC's clients are homeless—they have been included in the county in which they receive emergency services.

The Chance to be a Hero

by Eric J. Marin, Rutgers School of Law-Camden, '14
Summer 2013 Intern

With a name right out of a comic book, the Community Justice Center gave me the chance to be a hero to disabled people while learning a great deal about legal practice. What separated my internship here from other legal internships was the heavy amount of client interaction. During my summer, I talked to a cross-section of people of low (or no) income in need of the slight bit of rope that a small disability check would provide. I dealt with all types of people cast aside by society due to ailments beyond their control, from the catatonic schizophrenic who lost a son to a former security guard who had permanent physical and brain damage due to numerous beatings endured as a result of that line of work.

These interactions helped me gain a much better sense of the human side of law that ink, pixels or a classroom cannot bring forth. It was seeing this human side that reminded me of why I went to law school in the first place and will further fuel my desire to clean up some of the mess in our society. The most surprising part of my time here was the clients themselves, how strong they are in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, how open and trusting somebody with paranoid schizophrenia or brain injury could be if you just offered a helping hand. In an age of rabid bailouts and subsidies for corporations, it was more than rewarding to help speed up the glacial process of getting assistance for individuals in desperate need. It was my chance to be a hero, and I will carry that with me in my own legal career.

While attending law school at Rutgers School of Law-Camden, Eric jumped at the chance to do pro bono work to help those who suffered domestic violence obtain final restraining orders against their abusers. At first he volunteered for the pro bono work to learn more about the law through hands-on experience, in a setting more akin to a laboratory than a classroom. However, that pro bono work sparked in Eric a true interest in helping those with limited access to services, which in turn, drew him to the Community Justice Center.



Kenna's Korner

Well, hello there! My name is Kenna, and I joined the CJC Family in the Summer of 2013. Some days, when everyone is busy writing writing writing, I just sleep, but most days, I spend time with clients and their families, making them feel comfortable. Even through their tears I've been able to make some smiles appear! Maybe it's because I humor them with their silly jokes about my ears. And I pretend not to mind when they call me Fred. Or worse, a *dachshund*.

Let me tell you, it's been quite a journey getting here! I was supposed to die Christmas Eve 2012, but this great organization Tri-State Basset Hound Rescue saved my life! Let's just say I was abused and neglected my whole life. I had been living in horrible conditions in a not-so-legal outdoor breeding kennel 1800 miles away. The owners didn't give me much food or water, so I was severely underweight. They never took me to the doggie doctor, so I had all sorts of health problems. After I got rescued, I had to spend 4 weeks in the doggie hospital. I was scared, but I pulled through. Lots of

you know what that's like.

I didn't really know how to interact with people, or how to live in doors. Turns out, I love both! I had a great foster family who taught me lots of new things. Then I met Ms. Melissa, and she told me all about her story – I just knew we'd make a good team paying it forward, for I was rescued not too far from her car accident down in rural Mississippi. She'd been waiting for almost a decade for me. What are the chances of that! (And yes, this makes me a Saints girl – who knew indoor living came with football and popcorn, my new favorite things!)

Well, like I said, it's been a long journey. It's been hard but I've overcome lots of obstacles. CJC is the perfect place for me, because they understand what it's like. Come visit me sometime, I'd love to meet you. And if you bring me a treat, I'll even give you a tour!



Here I am, showing a client some brochures.

Community Justice Center

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO ITS 4TH ANNUAL BENEFIT

UnWINEd

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2013
2:00PM TO 7:00PM

ROSE BANK WINERY | 258 DURHAM ROAD | NEWTOWN, PA





And the Verdict Is In!

"I sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury on March 11, 2008 when a fallen piece of metal hit my head. I came to Melissa during the darkest hours of my enduring experience, as this was a devastating blow to my life. Melissa was the first 'professional' TBI person I knew and I felt a huge relief when I found out Melissa understood me. Melissa's experience she shared with me was invaluable and watching her work and talk to me was inspiring. Her work is exemplary, advocating for a TBI person like me in this complicated process." ~ S. T., Bloomfield, NJ

"Service was professional and personal. I was educated and included on all issues. I would recommend you to others." ~J.M. Trenton, NJ

"Lisa was caring, patient, knowledgeable, always called back. She was more than I could have asked for. Lisa, you were the best. God bless you." ~J.H., Trenton, NJ

"I really appreciate Ms. Melissa taking my case. I had had a hard time getting someone to take it, but she stepped up to the challenge and won it for me." ~ K.Y., Trenton, NJ

"I'm so happy someone finally recommended CJC or I may still be sitting in limbo. I'm very happy. Everything ran smoothly and quickly. My day in court was as stress-free as possible. Melissa has been a Godsend." ~ N.W., Ewing, NJ



*Thakoon & Carrie Ann,
modeling CJC's new jerseys –
Same Struggle, Different Difference.*

"Lisa was great and answered all my questions. Melissa is a joy to work with - polite and fun and very knowledgeable - very good change for the younger generation - she speaks the way WE understand." ~ E.R., East Windsor, NJ

"Lisa did more than I expected, considering my long struggle. She did everything and more than I thought was possible. I'm just so thankful to have met her." ~ S.R., Trenton, NJ

"I am very satisfied with the services. The staff have always been fully respectful and compassionate. We need more programs like the Community Justice Center to help the disadvantaged and disabled." ~ M. M., Hamilton, NJ

"All the Community Justice family made me feel very comfortable at all times. They took the time to explain what I didn't know and they fought for me when no one else would. They did a wonderful job keeping me abreast of all issues. Melissa got me a good settlement and I can't thank her and her staff enough." ~ T. S., Ewing, NJ

"Lisa was such a pleasure to work with and you all have taught me so much moving forward in a positive direction. I feel better about being able to handle new situations regarding related issues....because you have already empowered me to be able to take more control!" ~ E. E., Morristown, NJ

"Definitely satisfied, and not just because of a favorable decision. Melissa was the calm and hope in my wrecked and humiliating situation. I felt validated." ~ B.C., Port Murray, NJ

"As I walked into the office, Melissa was very friendly. You feel warm, comfortable, and next thing you know, you start talking, and off you go. Melissa is positive. She sent me home happy. Every time I went home, all I could think about was what she said, and it made me confident. Once Melissa looks at your case, she will tell you if she can help you or not. I tell people on the street to come to her, because she can help them. She can really help the people." ~ L. W., Trenton, NJ



After four-plus years at the Community Justice Center, it is time for me to return to my home state of Massachusetts. Carrie Ann Young will be taking over my caseload. She will bring a fresh perspective and new energy to CJC. I will miss our organization and its supporters but know that CJC will continue to do great work!
~ Disability Rights Advocate **Lisa A. Turowsky.**

*We all wish Lisa continued success in her endeavors in Massachusetts.
She will be greatly missed!*

Our Support

As always, thanks to each and every one of our donors for believing in the Community Justice Center and the vital role it plays in the health and well-being of Central New Jersey's low-income disabled and veterans. Special thanks to our venues – for our 2012 Barbeque & Beer Benefit, **Tir Na Nog**, in Hamilton, NJ, and for our 2013 UnWINEd Benefit, **Rose Bank Winery**, in Newtown, PA – and to all of the musicians who graced the stage and entertained us all both years. Below you'll find our supporters from 2012 and 2013.

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Lisa Turowsky & John Anderson

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Tir Na Nog
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State of New Jersey,
Division of Family Development
Mercer County Division of
Community Services,
Office on Homeless Services

2012 Barbeque & Beer Benefit





*Encouraging the
Empowerment, Resiliency, and Rights
of Those Living with Brain Injury.*

**Are you or someone you love living with a brain injury?
Are you trying to qualify for disability benefits,
but find it too overwhelming and frustrating?**

Founder and Executive Director Melissa A. Gertz, Esq., a TBI survivor, understands the unique challenges of brain injury, and can help you navigate the system.

For more information, or to make a tax-deductible donation,
visit www.nj-communityjusticecenter.org.



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