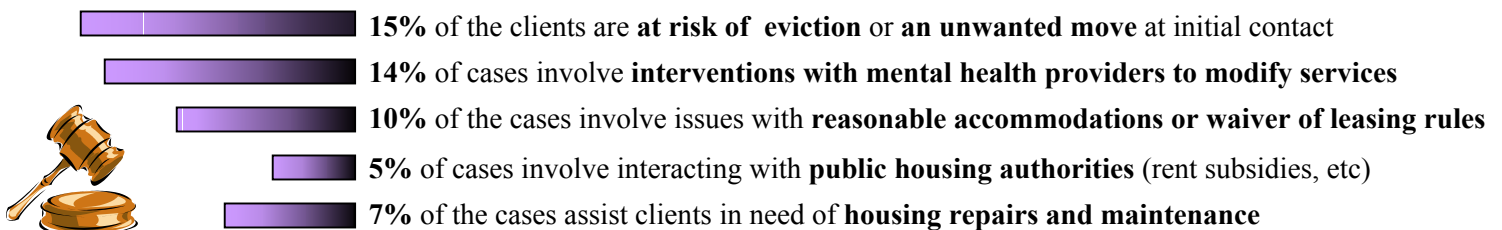


Stable Housing – Stable Lives

What is more basic than having a decent place to live? Stable housing helps sustain the recovery of persons with psychiatric disabilities. The havoc created by landlords who discriminate, harass, or illegally refuse to make reasonable accommodations can be devastating for persons doing their best to manage their illness, while struggling to survive on an income sometimes half of the poverty level. Given the lack of adequate housing in every region in Connecticut, maximizing access to available housing is a critical goal.

In the fall of 2001, with support from the Melville Charitable Trust, the Connecticut Legal Rights Project acted to achieve this goal by creating the **HOME (Helping Others Maintain Equity in Housing)** Project in Northwest Connecticut. Working in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and staff from DMHAS' Northwest Mental Health Authority, the HOME staff (a paralegal, community liaison and supervising attorney) have **assisted more than 500 clients** with housing related problems, and **trained more than 1,000 clients, advocates and providers** on housing rights and related issues. Approximately **25% of the HOME Project cases involve discrimination or harassment**, ranging from landlords refusing a rental to imposing illegal mandates on the tenants' activities.



Fortunately, the simple act of making the landlord aware that the tenant has the support of legal advocates is frequently all that is required to persuade them to respect the individual's rights. The project staff have developed an excellent track record of negotiating on behalf of clients, and problem-solving to address the needs of landlords and tenants. This advocacy particularly benefits individuals who have poor credit or rental histories due to their disabilities, or encounter landlords who impose income requirements on prospective tenants. This valuable legal tool is emphasized in training case managers and housing specialists.



One of the most egregious examples of harassment involved a landlord who charged \$75 for replacing a light bulb!!!!!!



Six percent (6%) of the cases involve the rightful return of security deposits. More outreach and training is needed in this area because it is such a persistent and preventable problem.

When necessary, of course, the staff attorney for the HOME Project is prepared to handle matters in court, or file complaints with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Having the capacity to enforce rights through the legal system when necessary is an essential component of the project. It is particularly critical in challenging landlords who simply refuse to respond to reasonable accommodation requests and to fight zoning barriers to housing or services.

There is no doubt that Connecticut desperately needs more safe, affordable housing. However, the HOME Project plays a critical education and advocacy role in the mental health system. In doing so, it promotes the recovery and self-sufficiency of DMHAS clients, and helps assure that their fundamental rights are respected.