

Pro Bono Program for Patients

An expanded medical-legal program at Kennedy Krieger Children's Hospital provides free services to help patients and families navigate complex issues.



Kennedy Krieger's Maureen van Stone works with a client through the Project HEAL program.

KENNEDY KRIEGER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL RECENTLY EXPANDED its medical-legal partnership, Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law), with the addition of a new staff attorney and regional law firm partnership. Providing free legal and advocacy services for low-income families and children with developmental disabilities, Project HEAL is a joint endeavor between the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities at Kennedy Krieger and Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, Maryland's largest pro bono legal service organization.

There are 35 children's hospitals in the U.S. with medical-legal partnerships, but the program at Kennedy Krieger is the only one located at a specialty hospital serving children with disabilities, an espe-

cially vulnerable population. A disproportionate number of people with disabilities are members of lower socioeconomic groups, and a large proportion of Kennedy Krieger's patient population is in need of legal support and advocacy. Project HEAL serves as a bridge among attorneys, doctors, social workers, educators and health care professionals to help patients with both their medical and legal needs.

Project HEAL has provided free, confidential advice, consultation, or direct representation to more than 900 families since it began in September 2005. Some of the areas in which Project HEAL offers assistance include special education and related service matters, public benefits, landlord/tenant problems, family law, and Social Security. Many families have

multiple needs—education, housing, health—and the program has experienced an increasing demand for services.

To meet the growing demand, Rachel Stafford, J.D., has left private practice as a trial lawyer to join Project HEAL Director Maureen van Stone, J.D., M.S., in providing legal and advocacy services to Kennedy Krieger's low-income patients. The program will also be able to serve a greater number of children and families thanks to a partnership with regional law firm Ober|Kaler, who is handling cases pro bono to help Project HEAL meet the needs of families.

The program is also committed to teaching low-income families how to navigate the medical-legal complexities that they might face through 25 different annual training opportunities for patients and their families, as well as health care professionals, local, state and national community groups, and pro bono attorneys. ✦

Kennedy Krieger Children's Hospital, located in Baltimore, is dedicated to improving the lives of children and adolescents with disorders and injuries of the brain, spinal cord, and musculoskeletal system. It provides inpatient, outpatient, home and community services for 16,000 children annually and has a team of investigators who contribute to the understanding of how disorders develop and pioneer new interventions and earlier diagnosis. To learn more, visit www.kennedykrieger.org.