

Q1 Please provide your contact information below.

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Q2 Please describe your company or organizations overall goals and mission.

Mercy Haven's mission is to acknowledge the dignity and potential of people who are homeless, living with mental illness or living in poverty by providing housing, advocacy, education and life skills development. Mercy Haven's goals are to offer a variety of housing options and an array of support programs designed to uphold the physical, mental and social well-being of our individuals and families, as well as members of the local community.

Q3 Please indicate which category your organization falls under.

Community Based Organization

Q4 Innovation Executive Summary. Please describe the innovation, and how it addresses the social determinants of health. Please identify how the innovation addresses the 6 innovation criteria (i.e. ROI, scalability, feasibility, evidence based support for innovation, relevance to the Medicaid population and speed to market).

Mercy Haven provides free comprehensive legal services to clients in times of a civil emergency through our Mercy Advocacy Program (MAP). These emergencies include securing, maintaining and maximizing eligibility for subsistence/disability income, securing access to essential health care through Medicaid and Medicare, maintaining basic nutrition through Food Stamps and securing emergency public assistance to prevent homelessness. Since 1997, our Attorney-in-Charge, John Castellano, has provided essential services to removing legal barriers that can prevent stable housing. He has provided free legal services to low income New Yorkers on their civil legal problems throughout his 40-year legal career. Since its opening, John has supervised this program, which has opened over 2,700 cases. Committed to maximizing access to subsistence income, health care and basic nutrition for the poor, his focus expands beyond achieving temporary relief for these individuals, moving into systemic reform. Not only has he addressed federal law which prohibits the termination of Medicaid benefits whenever a recipient moves from one county to another, and challenged a new state regulation which permitted the re-budgeting of countable income for needy children receiving Public Assistance when their disabled parent is receiving Supplemental Security Income, but he also won a class action lawsuit (Graves v. Doar) in 2008 which challenged the state's planned modification of the budgeting to determine Food Stamp benefits eligibility for nearly 20,000 recipients residing in group homes. Through this action, NYS secured an additional \$150 million in annual food stamp benefits. For those residents, a 350% increase in their monthly food stamp benefit from \$39 to \$176, meant more access to food security and healthier living.

Enabling our clients to focus on their journey to success, and not their legal emergencies, allows for improved mental health in low-income populations. This in turn, enables our clients to remain in their housing. Mercy Haven is also intervening on behalf of clients who have rent arrears, and has received funding from the Nassau County Bar Association's We Care Fund to not only assist with client's personal arrears, but to also create a fund to assist with future cases of the same nature.

This model of free legal services can be created for other housing agencies.

Mercy Haven is currently in consideration for funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation which would support a research study which aims to reveal the numerous health benefits of providing free legal services in times of civil legal emergencies to those with a diagnosed mental illness. In addition, this study will demonstrate how the availability of those services increases the stability of clients while also decreasing the prevalence of the symptoms of their complex diagnoses. By analyzing the population of MAP clients who have positive health outcomes due to the alleviation of legal stressors, this evidence then can be used to:

1. Providing a model of free legal services among other housing agencies which can be replicated. Advocacy for clients can be designed based on the Mercy Haven Advocacy Program.
2. Encourage and expand free legal services for those who are living with mental illness, homeless, or low-income. By increasing the menu of supportive services to this target population, there will be equity among access to health care in New York State and across the country.
3. Ultimately, results should drive increased funding, first for mental health programs at the state level and secondly at the federal level to provide free legal services for the poor. How health is researched, discussed and presented can shape policies which are reflective of the needs of the community and guides the work of improving health for those living with mental illness.

Q5 Was your innovation implemented? If so, please explain when, the number of people impacted, and the results.

Yes (please specify when and the estimated number of people impacted):

1983, 2700 cases opened, effecting over 20,000 people

Q6 Please identify the SDH Domain that your innovation addresses. (Select all that apply.)

Economic Stability

Q7 I give the Department of Health the right to share the information submitted in this application publicly (for example: on the DOH website). I understand that there is no monetary reward/reimbursement for my submission or for attending the summit should my innovation be selected.

I consent to have my innovation shared

