

McKinney Alumni Building Awareness for Disability Legal Services

by Alicia Carlson

Fourteen years ago, Margaret Jones, J.D. '88, conceived of a legal practice that would provide much-needed free and low-cost legal assistance and educational advocacy for adults and children with disabilities in education matters.

Jones, who is executive director of Disability Legal Services of Indiana, co-founded the organization in 2008 in response to a concern over the lack of educational advocacy and legal services for children and adults with disabilities in Indiana, particularly in education law.

Today, DLSI has grown, providing expanded services with a growing staff. But the need, according to Jones, is great. Indiana has more than 175,000 children, many living below federal poverty levels, receiving special education services.

The laws governing the education of persons with disabilities are complex, Jones says.

"Students with disabilities and their families often need assistance to understand their rights and responsibilities.

Our goal is to improve the educational outcomes for students with disabilities and give them a voice in their education," Jones says. "I love the work we do. It combines my love for education, my respect for the law, and my passion to help children reach their potential."

DLSI's services often have far reaching impact beyond assisting an individual client. DLSI successfully represented a family of a child with autism recently which resulted in an Order from the Indiana Department of Education requiring the school district to retrain all special education and administrative staff on special education laws and regulations. In addition, the school district was required to review and revise its policies and procedures regarding the discipline of students with disabilities to ensure compliance with federal and state laws. Thus, all students with special education needs in that school district and future students with special education needs entering the school district will benefit from DLSI's work.

Other IU McKinney Law alumni have worked on behalf of DLSI to further the mission. Mary Jo Wedding, J.D. '88, of counsel at Norris Choplin Schroeder LLP, and Michael Moore, J.D. '99, assistant executive director of the Indiana Public Defender Council, co-founded DLSI in 2008 with Jones.

Wedding is currently president of the board, and Kate Juerling, J.D. '16, an associate attorney at Norris Choplin Schroeder LLP, also serves as a board member. Brittany Kelly, J.D. '16, deputy director of the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, serves as a board advocate.

Mylene (Mimi) Huybers, J.D. '93, practices education law at DLSI, advocating for the appropriate education of students with a disability. She represents parents and students in legal matters arising under the



Margaret Jones, J.D. '88, (left) and Mylene (Mimi) Huybers, J.D. '93, advocate for students through their law practice, Disability Legal Services of Indiana.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Article 7, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Huybers practiced environmental law until becoming a parent to a child with a disability. For the past decade, she has advocated for the rights of students with a disability and is a frequent presenter to families, school staff, and professional groups on issues such as special education, procedural safeguards, bullying, IEP meeting preparation, transition to adult life, Section 504, and school discipline. ♦

Students and families needing help, as well as volunteers, can contact DLSI at (317) 426-7733 or by visiting disabilitylegalservicesindiana.org. DLSI is also seeking board members to provide leadership and vision to help DLSI achieve its goals. If interested, contact DLSI or Mary Jo Wedding at MJWedding@ncs-law.com.
