

[\[back\]](#)



AIDS legal project celebrates 10 years

The Herald-Sun

January 5, 2006 5:26 pm

In a perfect world, the Duke Law School's AIDS Legal Project would have gone out of business years ago. No one associated with the clinic would have cared because it would have meant that a cure for AIDS had been found.

Too bad the world isn't perfect. AIDS is still a very serious problem even though welcome progress has been made in extending the lives of people infected with the virus. We are grateful that students and faculty running the legal clinic -- now in its 10th year of operation -- remain committed to guiding AIDS patients through the tricky legal paperwork that can make difficult times even more so.

Carolyn McAllaster started the clinic -- at the time it was Duke's only in-house legal clinic -- after her brother died from AIDS. She got the idea after talking to her brother about the legal problems he and other people infected with AIDS faced.

In the past decade, the clinic has given free legal assistance to more than 1,000 people with HIV infection at sites in central and eastern North Carolina. The help has been valuable to low-income residents who would have been forced to negotiate complex legal matters on their own.

More than anything else, the clinic is run like a semester internship for law students, who must work a minimum of 100 hours. Each semester 10 students enroll in the for-credit course to help clients file disability benefit claims, prepare wills and fight discrimination. In benefits cases, the students actually represent clients in hearings before an administrative law judge.

In addition, the clinic offers end-of-life planning, including living wills, plans for guardianship of children of HIV-infected parents and legal action to counter discrimination in jobs, housing or services.

Unfortunately, the clinic receives quite a few discrimination complaints. And as AIDS patients began to live longer, thanks to advances in drugs and treatment, legal issues have arisen about returning to work after an AIDS diagnosis.

The 1,000 or more people helped by the clinic have been lucky to have someone with legal expertise advising and speaking for them. But let's hope the world moves a little closer to perfection in the next decade to put the AIDS Legal Project out of business.

URL for this article: <http://heraldsun.com/opinion/hsedits/56-686333.html>

© Copyright 2006. All rights reserved. All material on heraldsun.com is copyrighted by The Durham Herald Company and may not be reproduced or redistributed in any medium except as provided in the site's Terms of Use.

[\[back\]](#)