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Contact:
Jeffrey Thomas, Deputy Director
East Bay Community Law Center
(510) 548-4040 x319
(650) 888-0587 – mobile phone
jthomas@ebclc.org
www.ebclc.org

Law Center's amazing Gracie honored by LAAC peers

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA April 8, 2008 The Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) announced this week that Gracie Jones, Housing Intake Specialist/Paralegal at East Bay Community Law Center is among seven recipients to receive the statewide LACC's Awards of Merit for 2008. Since Gracie joined the Law Center in 2002, she has worked daily demonstrating her commitment to provide under-served community members access to meaningful and quality legal services. As the current foreclosure crisis squeezes an already tight housing market, low-income people are bearing the brunt and losing the bedrock of their stability: housing. Gracie has helped thousands of Alameda County residents enforce their housing rights and defend against unlawful evictions by providing vital information, referrals, advocacy and support. LAAC recognized Gracie for her remarkable dedication to her clients, the community, and the cause of justice.

"Gracie, as her name implies, handles the stressful work of being on the frontlines of a busy community legal center and law school clinic with exemplary grace," says Executive Director Tirien Steinbach. "This grace is tested regularly, as the Law Center's clients are often under unimaginable pressure. Yet, Gracie treats both clients and the law student interns with respect, consideration and professionalism," Steinbach adds.

The Law Center is the community-based component of Boalt Hall's Clinical Program, providing law students with a unique opportunity to learn about the responsibilities of practicing law while reflecting on the lawyer's role and the lawyering process. Each year, the Housing Practice provides clinical training to a dozen University of California at Berkeley law students and free legal services to more than two thousand clients, offering workshops, brief services, *pro per* assistance, and representation primarily aimed at preventing unlawful evictions and fighting discriminatory or illegal treatment of low-income tenants. The majority of housing clients are African American or Latino families coming from communities traditionally underrepresented in the legal system.

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Gracie helps clients by drafting materials or making calls to landlords and properties managers to explain tenants' rights (under an attorney's supervision). Over time, Gracie has taken on additional responsibilities, including successfully representing clients at administrative court hearings. Always, Gracie aids clients by being a sympathetic and non-judgmental ear – she is a witness to their lives and a restorer of their hope. Whether clients need information, advice, advocacy, representation, or simply a hug, Gracie is there with arms open.

"It's inspirational to witness her tenaciously negotiating on behalf of tenants with landlords," says third year Boalt Hall student Daniel Schacht. "It's worth a semester in negotiation class," he continued. Housing Practice director Laura Lane says, "Gracie reminds us each day why we went into the social justice work in the first place: to serve our clients and to work for justice in our communities."

Steinbach recalls one particularly difficult day when Gracie got the staff to take a pause from its normally frenetic pace while she lifted her voice to sing "Amazing Grace." (In addition to working at the Law Center and rearing two children with her husband, Gracie sings in the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir). "Gracie's beautiful voice singing those simple but true words encapsulates why Gracie is such a worthy recipient of this recognition," Steinbach says. She adds, "At our best, legal advocates help the blind to see and save not only our clients, but ourselves. She is truly Amazing Gracie!"

The Awards of Merit will be presented at the annual LAAC and State Bar of California "Pathways to Justice" Conference gala dinner, Thursday, June 5, 2008 in Los Angeles. For more information about the conference:

<https://secure.lenos.com/lenos/calbar/PathwaystoJusticeConference2008/home.htm>

ABOUT THE LAW CENTER The East Bay Community Law Center was founded in 1988 by students at Berkeley Law School (Boalt Hall). Today, the Law Center is the East Bay's largest provider of free legal services and a nationally-recognized teaching clinic. With its motto "Justice through education and advocacy," each year more than 5,000 community members receive free legal advocacy from more than 100 students under the supervision of a dozen full-time EBCLC staff attorneys. Law students come from Boalt Hall and from law schools around the country to train at the Law Center and provide assistance to clients in the areas of housing, health care, immigration, income, community reentry, and economic justice.

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