

Melissa L. McWhinney

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EMPLOYMENT

Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) Director, Advocacy and Community Services Program

January, 2004 - present

Improve the lives and economic stability of low-income residents in Somerville by:

- Successfully defending against eviction in 50% of the 300 low-income tenant eviction cases that come to CAAS annually, through the use of bilingual in-court lay advocacy, negotiation, and education; obtaining time given and rent arrearages waived in another 30% of cases
- Providing bilingual advice and assistance on applications and appeals on non-eviction poverty issues relating to benefits, immigration, sanitary code, unemployment and social security
- Creating a Medical-Legal Partnership with Cambridge Health Alliance network, thereby placing an attorney in local health clinics to train medical staff to screen and refer for basic needs
- Placing a community organizer in public housing developments, resulting in election of tenant-led associations, and creation of a community garden; creating foreclosure prevention project to do outreach to at-risk private properties, providing assistance to both owners and tenants
- Developing, implementing and managing innovative programs and trainings for clients, providers and the public on primary housing and welfare issues, including a bedbug summit
- Managing peer leadership program for Latino/a youth, addressing immigrant occupational safety and health concerns and advocating for policy change to reverse health risks; opposing anti-immigrant/youth sentiment and unconstitutional laws and policies
- Creating a work-force development program with local adult education providers to increase the skill level and employability of unskilled workers
- Building coalitions among residents, human services non-profits, immigrant service providers, local and state government, and elected officials to effect policy changes which protect interests of low-income people and oppose harmful policies such as the "Secure Communities" initiative;
- Supervising and managing eleven multi-lingual employees and many interns, reporting to funders, and managing \$800,000 budget.

City of Somerville

Director, Mayor's Office of Human Services

March, 2001 – June, 2003

As manager of city's social service policies and programs:

- Developed programming to address concerns of low-income and disenfranchised people relating to the rights of immigrants, disabled people, women, and other disenfranchised groups, using coalitions, one-on-one and large-scale advocacy, policy development, education and outreach, complaint investigation and resolution, financial assistance, and information and referral
- Supervised nine professional and administrative staff members, and managed \$325,000 budget.

City of Somerville (continued)

Director, Human Rights Commission

April, 2000 – March, 2001

Chief anti-discrimination enforcement officer, reporting to Mayor, Human Rights Commission and all municipal citizens, and effectuating changes in policies and attitudes, through:

- Investigation, mediation and resolution of individual complaints, education of and outreach to municipal government including police department and schools, private business and individuals, and creation of strategies to advance understanding of human rights and empower disenfranchised residents
- New programs, including voter registration workshops for non-English-speaking and LEP citizens; class on “You and the Law” for ESL students; Black History Month series in local newspapers; Speak-Out on Racism held at high school; community meetings on hate crimes; first urban city qualified under ADL’s “No Place for Hate” program; ongoing dialogue with school superintendent and immigrant community leaders on race/immigrant issues in education.

American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts (ACLU/M), Boston, MA

Director of Legal Intake

September, 1994 – March, 2000

Manager of department handling civil rights/civil liberties complaints; supervised Intake Attorney and volunteers; interviewed clients and investigated matter, attempted resolution of matter or determined appropriate referral; evaluated and presented potential cases to screening committee, advising litigators of strength of civil rights/civil liberties issues; responded to media inquiries.

Intake Attorney

November, 1991 – August, 1994

Interviewed clients and investigated potential cases; advised litigators of strength of civil rights/civil liberties issues.

Title IX Advocacy Project, Boston, MA

Staff Attorney

October, 1998 – June, 1999

Grant-funded part-time position writing legal manuals to train attorneys about litigation under Title IX, the federal law prohibiting gender discrimination in public educational institutions.

Superior Court of Massachusetts, Boston, MA

Law Clerk to the Justices

September, 1990 – August, 1991

With one-year appointment, assisted Justices in all phases of civil and criminal litigation, prepared draft decisions, legal memoranda and proposed jury instructions; worked extensively with Justices on trials, hearings and motion sessions.

EDUCATION

Northeastern University School of Law, Boston, MA: J.D., May 1990

Temple University, Philadelphia, PA: B.A., English

Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY

MEMBERSHIPS and HONORS

Martin Luther King Award 2010, Somerville Human Rights Commission, with citations from Massachusetts House of Representatives and Massachusetts Senate

2008 Friend of Adult Literacy Award, SCALE (Somerville Adult Education Center)

Institutional Review Board for Social, Psychological and Educational Research, Tufts University, Member
2009 – present

Board of Directors, Gentle Giant Rowing Club, Member, 2009 - present

Census 2010 Committee, City of Somerville, Steering Committee, 2008 – 2010

Steering Committee, Tufts/NIH Immigrant Obesity Study, Member, 2007 - present

Cambridge and Somerville Welfare and Housing Coalition, Co-Chair, 2003 – present

Somerville Homeless Providers Group, Co-Chair, 2003 – 2006

Board of Directors, Walnut Street Center, Member, 2004 - 2006

Board of Directors, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Member, 2000 – 2003

Otto M. Stanfield Scholarship, 1989

Admitted to Massachusetts Bar, 1991