

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA)

At a meeting held by the Law Project of EPA on May 13, 2002, Elizabeth Jackson, a resident of East Palo Alto, since 1978, started to create and founded Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (CLSEPA). The Law Project board members entertained a motion to close the Law Project due to the lack of funds to continue to operate. Elizabeth Jackson and one of the students from Stanford University voted not to close the Law Project. Elizabeth Jackson voted "no" to help the over 10,000 residents then living under the East Palo Alto Rent Stabilization ordinance, to have access to justice in matters of Housing Law. Elizabeth requested the board to reconsider their decision and allow members in the East Palo Alto community to reorganize the Law Project. On May 14, 2002, she called upon Mr. William Webster, a local housing activist, and Mrs. Barbara Mouton, East Palo Alto's first Mayor, for support. She continued to recruit other residents of EPA by inviting them to attend the next Law Project Board Meeting. Consequently at the next Board Meeting on June 2nd, over fifteen people attended. There, the Law Project Board members reconsidered their decision to close the Law Project on August 31, 2002. Instead, they requested a plan of action from Elizabeth. On June 3, 2002, she hired a lawyer from The National Economic Development & Law Center Organization from Oakland, CA., to help manage the project. After reviewing her plan, the Law Project board still voted yes to close the Law Project.

She set up the following:

- Community Law Transition Committee and invited EPA residents to join
- Used her personal funds as seed money
- Used \$5,000 capital to pay the lawyer's fees from Martin & Hunter Enterprises, her small vending company since 1978
- Used her 401(k) for back up funds
- Set up a fundraiser committee
- Hired fund raising consultants, Mr. & Mrs. Shaw from Oakland, CA.
- Requested seed money from IKEA, \$3,000 was given
- Retained Sally Smith, a well-known grant writer
- Conducted a need assessment survey in EPA
- Recruited over 45 people for a Board of Directors and Advisory Board for CLSEPA
- Retained Melvin Hodges, a lawyer from Oakland, CA., to help select members to join Community Legal Services, a new organization, which consists of 10 Advisory Board members and 21 Board of Directors members
- Elizabeth and Community Law Transition Committee & the Fund Raising Committee raised \$25,000
- The funds were matched by a lawyer when \$60,000 was collected
- CLSEPA opened Sept. 9, 2002
- Today the organization is 11 years old with an annual budget of \$500,000 and over 20 employees and hundreds of volunteers
- The organization has raised \$5M over 10 years