2018 Celebrating Solutions and Roth Awards Nomination Form

Legal name of organization: **Unity House of Troy, Inc.**

Year established: **1971**

Name of program being nominated (if different): **Unity House Law Project (UHLP)**

Year established: **2000**

Address: **2431 Sixth Avenue**  
City/State/ZIP code: **Troy, NY 12180**  
Agency phone number: **518-274-2607**

Name and title of contact person: **Diane Cameron, Director of Development**  
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How did you learn about the Celebrating Solutions Awards? **Originally, we received notice from a colleague. We have applied several times in the past.**

Brief description of organization: **Unity House offers comprehensive services to people living in poverty, adults living with mental illness or HIV/AIDS, children with developmental delays, and victims of domestic violence. Unity House has been sheltering and counseling victims of domestic violence since its founding, and is the only licensed provider of domestic violence services in Rensselaer County. The Unity House Law Project provides a full spectrum of free civil legal services emphasizing victim safety, client choice and empowerment.**

Geographical area served: **New York State Capital District, especially Rensselaer County.**

Is the organization tax-exempt under IRS 501 (c) (3) guidelines or a public agency/unit of government? **Yes, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.**

Please check up to five descriptors that best apply to the program you are nominating:
Release of Information

As one of the goals of the Mary Byron Project is to disseminate information about cutting edge programs and best practices, we wish to post exemplary Celebrating Solutions Award nominations on our website (www.marybyronproject.org).

Those posted will include the organization's website address, telephone number, and email address. If you have concerns about this request, please address them to kathypaulin@marybyronproject.org, prior to submitting a nomination.

By my signature on this letter, I grant the Mary Byron Project permission to use the contents of my nomination for the Celebrating Solutions Award in the manner and for the purposes set above. I further affirm that I am fully authorized to grant such permission to the Mary Byron Project.

Signature ______________________

Date 2-12-18
2018 Celebrating Solutions and Roth Award

Program Outline

1. Describe the work of the nominated program and explain how the mission of the program is accomplished. (We want to know the specifics of how your program works.)

Unity House of Troy, NY, Inc. nominates its Unity House Law Project (UHLP) program for the Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions award. Unity House is a multi-program human service provider located in Troy, NY, which serves people residing throughout Rensselaer County and the Capital District (Albany, NY, and surroundings). Unity House manages the only licensed domestic violence service program in Rensselaer County, providing comprehensive residential and non-residential victim services. UHLP is a client-driven, wraparound, holistic legal services program for eligible domestic violence victims.

Unity House of Troy’s Story

Founded in 1971, Unity House boasts a long history of serving domestic violence victims and vulnerable, disadvantaged people. Unity House was the brain child of Mary Jane Smith, a nun, and two Franciscan friars, Regis Obijiski and Peter Callaghan, whose ambitious vision was to open the doors of a dilapidated building on Eighth Street in Troy to serve as the base of their effort to reach out to the community and help the poor. Though the founders had few resources, they were determined to establish a community base that would “be everything to every man, woman and child who walked through the door.” During those exciting first years, Unity House grew simply by responding to whatever need seemed to present itself, from collecting and distributing food and furniture to providing shelter for victims of domestic violence. Troy residents could turn to Unity House for help in cutting through the red tape of the welfare system; and securing housing, shelter, and jobs regardless of limited skills.

Today, Unity House is a multi-program human service provider dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people living in poverty, victims of domestic violence, adults with mental illness, people living with HIV/AIDS, children with developmental delays and their families, and others. Unity House Domestic Violence Services (UHDVS) provides a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, pet sheltering; short and long-term rental assistance and housing support; counseling, therapy and group support; social services waivers; education assistance; employment and training services; intensive case management; crisis intervention; children’s services; transportation; advocacy and accompaniment in criminal justice, child protective services, social services, family court, and medical settings. UHDVS provides services to more than 1,200 victims and their children annually; answers more than 2,500 hotline calls each year; and operates a licensed 33-bed domestic violence shelter.

The geographic area we serve is home to a high-poverty population with a significant percentage of minority residents. According to the U.S. Census, Troy, N.Y. has a population of 49,933 people with a poverty rate of 26.1%; and is composed of 66.5% White, 14.9% Black, and 8.78% Hispanic residents. Albany, N.Y. has a population of 98,468 people with a poverty rate of 26.8%; and is composed of 51.2% White, 28.3% Black, 9.6% Hispanic residents, and 7% Asian residents. Both cities’ poverty rates and percentage of Black residents are well above the national average of 13.5% and 13.3% respectively.
About Unity House Law Project

The UHLP has been in operation since 2000 and is a critical component of the UHDVS program’s comprehensive model. Attorney Milinda Reed founded the program after a former law professor, who knew Milinda wanted to start a legal services program within a domestic violence program, put her in touch with Unity House. Today, UHLP serves domestic violence victims by incorporating a trauma-informed, holistic, wraparound approach that combines support, case management, counseling, safety planning, housing and advocacy services along with its legal services. UHLP meets clients “where they are,” offering victims a full spectrum of civil legal services at no cost, provided by highly qualified staff, emphasizing victim safety, client choice and empowerment. UHLP provides representation and consultation on legal matters including, but not limited to, protection orders, child custody and support, spousal support, name and social security changes, divorce, landlord-tenant and employment problems, child protective proceedings, and small claims matters related to a client’s domestic or dating violence. Unlike legal services provided elsewhere, UHLP’s services are designed to meet the unique safety and legal needs specific to victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. In addition to providing representation and consultation to victims, the UHLP authored, published and disseminates Finding Your Way in New York State Courts: A Guide for Survivors of Domestic Violence.

UHLP Eligibility Process

Unity House identifies clients for its Law Project through a variety of sources, though the majority come to the UHDVS program seeking safety, and self-identify the need for legal services at intake. The most common referral sources to UHDVS in 2016 were local social service agencies (20.6%), various agencies within the criminal justice system (18.4%) and family members and friends (16.5%).

When a prospective client calls UHLP seeking services, staff will first obtain caller’s name and conduct a conflict of interests check using both the computer tracking and card box systems. If there is no conflict, staff will screen prospective client for eligibility, i.e. client’s background information, including legal needs, as well as a detailed history of their domestic and/or dating violence experience and financial circumstance. Clients are eligible to receive representation from the UHLP Staff Attorney if their income does not exceed 200% of the poverty level. In evaluating the client’s income, consideration is given to extraordinary expenses that the client may incur as the result of a disability, maintaining employment, caring for a disabled child or any other extraordinary circumstance. When a client’s income exceeds 200% of the poverty level for that year, the client shall be referred to other local legal resources to obtain a referral to a reduced fee attorney. Referrals may also be made to other attorneys in the local area who are sensitive to and experienced in matters related to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Regardless of whether a client is eligible for UHLP services, he/she will be referred to a UHDVS caseworker, who will complete written and personalized safety and service plans according to each client’s unique risks and situation. If an individual meets eligibility requirements, a Paralegal completes a full intake sheet and schedules an appointment for the client to consult with a Staff Attorney. If client is only seeking accompaniment in a civil matter, staff will make an appointment with the court advocate to meet the client prior to the accompaniment. Those whose needs are most acute will receive priority (e.g., establishing Orders of Protection and/or temporary orders of child custody and support).
After the initial consultation, the Staff Attorney makes a determination whether to accept the prospective client for representation. This decision is based on the capacity of the UHLP to accept new cases, complexity of the case compared to available resources, urgency of client need based on safety, homelessness and other such factors. The Staff Attorney either informs the client of the decision at time of intake or within two (2) business days. At the time of consultation, the client also receives information regarding any pending deadlines or statutes of limitation about to expire. The Attorney and Paralegal work closely with clients to formulate plans they believe will best address their current legal needs. They take time to explain legal options in detail, truly helping the client understand what the legal system can do and, sometimes more importantly, what it cannot do. All possible legal options are thoroughly explained and evaluated for possible safety risks to the client. After discussing all options, the Attorney commences legal action and/or prepares legal paperwork that the client has requested.

When a referral to UHLP needs to be turned away, staff makes every attempt to point them in the right direction, usually connecting them with local not-for-profit organizations that provide free or sliding-scale legal assistance.

**Client Confidentiality**

Client confidentiality is of the utmost importance. At intake, clients are advised about the attorney-client privilege and their right to grant permission for information to be disclosed. The UHLP Attorney and client work closely to determine what information will best facilitate the prosecution of the client’s case, paying close attention to safeguarding details the client wishes not to disclose. If after a thorough discussion and analysis it is considered in the best interest of the client’s case to obtain/share information with a third party, clients are asked to sign releases for the third party contact. Releases are required for all third party communication, including between the UHLP and UHDVS providers.

The UHDVS and UHLP collaboration shares a strong history of disclosing case details according to legal, ethical, and safe protocols only when in the best interests of the client’s legal case. All staff are fully aware that time-limited informed consent must be obtained from the victim prior to sharing any information. UHDVS is bound by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program (FVPSA) confidentiality provisions; as such, UHDVS, under federal law, may not release identifying information about a client of UHDVS unless written, time-limited, informed consent has been established with limited exceptions.

2. Describe the most **innovative** aspects of the **program** you are nominating for consideration.

**UHLP: A Holistic Client-Drive Legal Service**

The most innovative aspect of UHLP is that it is not a stand-alone or service- or problem-driven legal service for domestic violence victims. Additionally, it is more than just a program or service of Unity House’s domestic violence services. UHLP is part of a large coordinated system of services and supports that is strengths-based, client-driven, trauma-focused, recovery-oriented; and an integral component of Unity House and the community. UHLP wraps services around its clients. In this sense, UHLP operates through a structured, creative and individualized team planning process designed to meet the identified
needs of its clients and the family. UHLP staff strive to ensure clients become empowered, have access to food, clothing, housing; acquire problem-solving, coping, and self-efficacy skills; and are linked to medical, mental health and substance abuse treatment. UHLP, by definition, is a holistic legal service, providing ethical, competent legal services, with an approach that helps heal, empower, balance, and transform clients. At its core, holistic legal representation calls on attorneys to look beyond the single legal crisis of the moment and search for its underlying causes, and multidisciplinary teams of lawyers and community agencies to resolve the core issues that keep clients in poverty and at risk of future victimization.

If UHLP referrals are not already connected to UHDVS services (e.g., safe shelter, housing, counseling, therapy, etc.), they will be referred at intake, regardless of eligibility for UHLP. UHDVS and UHLP will work together to facilitate client transition from an abusive household to safe, independent living—an essentials of life priority. UHLP provides victims of domestic violence assistance in managing complicated, sometimes multiple legal issues which must be addressed together to achieve best results. The UHLP Attorney works closely with each client to identify the full scope of their civil legal needs, and will provide comprehensive representation and advice on all issues. The Attorney and Paralegal provide support to the client throughout the process, providing a detailed explanation of their legal case and what options are available, their risks and benefits. Only when the client fully understands the legal parameters of their case can they make the best decision about how to proceed. While litigation is not always the best choice, it is always an option that must be considered and made available to clients in order for them to access their rights to utilize the legal system.

**UHLP's Qualified/Compassionate Staff**

The second innovative aspect of UHLP is that it, along with Unity House as a whole, has a long history of attracting qualified staff that represent the language and culture of the communities we serve, which is accomplished through careful recruitment, training and ongoing quality assurance (QA) efforts. Our QA approach ensures continuous quality improvement efforts for all Unity House programs, and incorporates involvement by clients and all levels of program staff. Staff participates in ongoing training and staff development opportunities to stay abreast of the latest issues concerning poverty and domestic violence. Leadership works to continually improve services and enhance programs by identifying and responding to gaps, trends, and evidenced-based best practices.

**Rural Service Delivery**

Thirdly, though many of UHLP’s clients are disadvantaged individuals from the cities of Troy and Albany, UHLP also makes every effort to serve clients from the rural areas of Rensselaer County. Rural victims are often isolated by geography and actions of their abuser. Isolated, unaware of available services and options, and fearful of engaging in the legal system, rural victims often remain trapped in abusive relationships. In order to reach these victims, the Paralegal will continue to identify rural service providers (e.g., churches, community centers, social service agencies) willing to host legal workshops for victims in their community. Unity House already collaborates with numerous agencies with established networks in rural areas. After brief informational sessions, participants will have the opportunity for a confidential consultation with the Staff Attorney. Having the opportunity to obtain
information in a non-threatening environment allows the victim to become familiar and more trusting of the legal process.

**Client Safety Policies**

Lastly, UHLP has established policies prohibiting any activity that might endanger a victim of domestic violence, such as required mediation, alternative dispute resolution, or insisting on actions not approved by the client. All UHLP staff are instructed on these policies when they are hired. These policies are also reiterated during staff meetings and in-service trainings throughout the year. In addition, each UHLP staff person is required to sign a Unity House Law Project Confidentiality Policy, which details the policies governing the disclosure of information and need for strict adherence and protection of confidential information.

3. Was there a catalyst for the creation of the nominated program? If so, please describe. What barriers did your organization have to overcome to implement the program? How did you marshal the necessary resources for implementation?

As state previously, attorney Milinda Reed started UHLP. Though it was a risky venture and there was no funding specifically for it, the UHDVS managers at the time definitely saw the benefits and hired her. Her motivation in wanting to create such a program was the fact that victims of domestic violence struggled at that time (and even today, although less so) to find an attorney who understood the dynamics of domestic violence. Having been through the domestic violence shelter system herself, she knew firsthand that an attorney housed within a domestic violence program would be a fabulous resource for victims as they would be able to access legal information early in their case and make better and more informed decisions for themselves and their children. “Victims who are suffering from trauma, fear, and anxiety often struggle in the court system. My colleagues and I knew that having an attorney available to victims from the onset would create better long-term outcomes. It was unique at that time to take on such a project but turned out to have been a risk that definitely paid off,” Milinda said.

Barriers included lack of funding, ensuring client confidentiality among Unity House’s programs, instilling a non-traditional approach to serving clients, and community buy-in. Financial barriers were overcome through fundraising and grant writing. Initially funded by private donations, UHLP has subsequently received both State and Federal funding for its work, and has recently been able to add a second paralegal and attorney to its staff. Unity House’s Development Department is constantly on the look-out for potential funding streams to support UHLP. Other barriers were resolved by establishing confidentiality policies and release forms, forming authentic collaborative relationships with community partners; and educating and training staff and the community on handling legal matters for domestic violence victims in a holistic, client-driven way.

Milinda Reed’s work and her founding of the UHLP has not gone unnoticed. She has been the recipient of:
- The Women’s Fund of the Capital Region Trailblazer’s Award (2014)
- The Women of Excellence Award for Excellence in the Professions from the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce (2012)
• Citation for Special Achievement in Public Service from the NYS Women’s Bar Association Committee on Attorneys in Public Service (2011)
• Merit Award, City of Troy Police Department (2011); and
• Empire State Counsel honoree for pro bono work, New York State Bar Association (2008)

4. How do you know the nominated program is successful? Please site two examples. Although anecdotal examples are helpful, at least one example must include quantitative data.

**Quantitative Information**

UHDVS and UHLP evaluations are conducted on a regular basis and include feedback from clients in the form of exit interviews and confidential client satisfaction surveys. UHLP holds a demonstrated record of successfully securing positive outcomes for the majority of clients (95%) in all represented matters. Between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, 96% of the 118 victims represented by UHLP on 167 cases experienced favorable findings. Of those 118 clients, 35 resolved multiple legal issues. Only 4% of rulings in 122 cases closed during that timeframe did not fully support UHLP clients. The Attorney also provided 284 clients with legal consult on 422 cases. During the same timeframe, an estimated $135,000 in annual benefits was obtained for clients through UHLP efforts.

Both research and experience of UHDVS and the UHLP demonstrate that victims of domestic violence often struggle with disproportionate levels of poverty as compared to the local community. In 2015, 89% of all victims served by UHDVS and 90% of shelter-specific clients reported incomes below federal poverty level, as compared to 26% of Troy residents and 11% of Rensselaer County residents. The average annual income of UHDVS clients was less than $8,500 and only 4% earned more than $30,000 a year. Of the 332 victims of domestic violence served by the UHLP between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, 77% lived below federal poverty level, with 14% living in rural areas, 7% in subsidized Unity House housing and another 7% in the UHDVS shelter. The average annual income of UHLP clients was $15,970, primarily from social services. Excessive income is rarely an issue.

**Anecdotal Story**

There are countless stories of UHLP domestic violence survivors who permanently and safely separate from their abusers, acquire financial and personal independence, and recover from the trauma they endured. Many survivors choose to remain engaged with Unity House, giving back and offering hope to those in crisis. Some volunteer, others serve as advocates and a few become Unity House employees. This is a very important part of the Unity House continuum of care as UHLP clients learn they are not “alone on an island,” there is hope and a safe future is achievable. Meeting victims who have successfully overcome the trauma of abuse enables them to see firsthand what could be possible for their future. UHLP victims become empowered survivors who serve as hope for the next UHLP client.

One particular UHLP client stands out as a great example of why our work is so important. “Jane” and her husband “Steve” were not married long when Steve’s sister, “Liz”, addicted to heroin, gave birth to a baby girl. The child was born addicted, and, due to her own addiction, Liz could not care for the infant. Jane and Steve took this special-needs child into their home. Jane learned how to administer methadone by injection into the infant’s tiny body to stop the horrendous effects of the heroin in her system, and Jane would cry with each injection. They raised this child as their own. However, as the years passed, Jane’s husband became controlling and abusive toward her. Jane struggled to leave Steve as she feared
losing the non-biological child she raised as her own. With the help of UHLP and UHDVS, Jane separated from Steve. UHLP represented Jane in the custody battle against Steve and his sister, the child’s biological mother who feigned sobriety. Getting a judge to grant Jane even partial legal custody of the child would be difficult since Jane was not biologically related, had no legal rights and Steve fought hard for full legal custody. After many months of court appearances and detective-style discovery of facts leading up to the day of trial, Steve finally agreed to share a 50/50 custody arrangement with Jane. The child spends one week with “mom” Jane, and the next week with “dad” Steve. Although Jane wanted full custody, she was pleased with the outcome, allowing her to remain in the child’s life indefinitely. In addition, Jane received services and support through UHDVS and considers herself a “survivor”.

5. **If funding were not an issue, what (if any) changes or additions would you make to the nominated program in the future? What are the long term goals for your program? (We are interested in hearing both your practical goals in addition to any lofty dreams you have for the future.)**

If our program “won the lottery” and funding was not an issue, UHLP would (in order from practical to lofty):

- Hire more staff, upgrade current office space and establish offices in surrounding Capital Region counties (Albany, Saratoga, Schenectady counties) so that no domestic violence victim is turned away due to full caseloads or geographic barriers. Upgrading and adding office space (which could be a new office/new location or co-location of UHLP within another domestic violence organization) would better facilitate private consultation and recordkeeping; and ensure victims requiring UHLP and UHDVS services are never turned away. In addition, more attorneys, paralegals, advocates and office space would enable UHLP to serve victims holistically regardless of zip code and in their communities, where they are most comfortable and can easily access services.
- Upgrade website to offer more legal resources online.
- Offer monthly legal clinics in rural areas (we now offer them every 4 months).
- Increase outreach and services at local college campuses. We currently hold quarterly legal workshops and consulting hours at Russell Sage College and would like to do the same on a monthly basis to College of Saint Rose, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), the University at Albany (State University), Union College, Siena College, Skidmore College, Hudson Valley and Schenectady Community Colleges.
- Collaborate with other programs around the country to expand network of services and promulgate best practices for serving legal needs of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.
- Replicate the UHLP model and philosophy nationwide by creating manuals, webinars, on-site trainings (ex. Legal and DV conferences, bar association meetings), and on-going free technical assistance.

6. **Who are your key community partners? What are their roles?**

Unity House boasts a long history of collaborative spirit in the community. Community partners include, but are not limited to:
• The Rensselaer County Sexual Assault and Crime Victims Assistance Program (SACVAP)—UHLP partners to provide services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. SACVAP provides counseling and advocacy services for victims of sexual assault.

• The Rensselaer County District Attorney’s Office, the Rensselaer County Probation Department, and the Troy Police Department—each partner contributes its expertise in identifying and managing cases where there is a high risk of lethality. All, including UHLP, are currently partnering on a Domestic Violence Risk Reduction pilot program.

• Russell Sage College—to provide education and services to campus victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Russell Sage operates a Sexual Assault Response Team and offers information, counseling and support.

• The Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley (ILCHV)—UHLP is partnering with ILCHV to increase access to domestic violence services for people living with disabilities. ILCHV provides services to individuals with disabilities/Deaf individuals.

• Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO)—We provide reciprocal referrals to ensure every client need is met in the areas of family and education support, early childhood education, employment and financial education, “healthy homes”, and various health and wellness services designed to be stepping stones to long-term client success and break the cycle of poverty.

• Albany Law School Family Violence Litigation Clinic—Under direct faculty supervision, law students interview and counsel clients, conduct fact investigation and discovery, draft pleadings, correspondence, motions, stipulations and orders, perform legal research and analysis, work with translators, appear with clients in court, and negotiate cases with opposing counsel as well as the attorney for the children involved. UHLP regularly collaborates with the clinic to help assist its clients.

• Red Cross Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC)—Should a local natural disaster occur, UHLP is invited to distribute information about its services and meet with clients if appropriate.

7. Could/should your program be replicated in other areas of the country? Why?
Yes, UHLP should be replicated. UHLP is clearly innovative and has the quantitative and qualitative data to prove its efficacy. UHLP’s seventeen-year history, its experience in serving both rural and urban victims, its partnership with SACVAP to address the needs of sexual assault victims both on and off campus, and its understanding of the challenges faced by people living with disabilities, all give it wide-ranging expertise in meeting the civil legal needs of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. UHLP’s holistic wraparound approach empowers clients and doesn’t just result in positive court outcomes, but positive lifelong client outcomes. This not only benefits the client, their children and extended family, but also the community. We would hope to collaborate with other highly regarded legal programs (including several previous winners of Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions awards) to expand the civil legal resources available to victims and survivors of domestic violence.

8. Does your agency have a workplace policy that addresses domestic violence? If so, please include a copy. Yes.

9. Has the agency and/or nominated program received VAWA funding? (“Yes” or “No” is sufficient) Yes.
The Roth Award

The fifth Celebrating Solutions Award, the Roth Award, has been created specifically for programs which address the needs of underserved or vulnerable populations. These programs provide services to those who are identified as such based on characteristics that include age, race, ethnicity, gender, faith, disabilities, low socio-economic status, non-English speaking, sexual preference, and surprisingly, victims from economically-comfortable suburban areas who traditionally do not know how to avail themselves of services or who are too ashamed to find them. In general, there is a lack of resources for these specific populations, or the individuals have difficulty accessing available resources.

One Roth Award will be presented annually, in addition to the other four Celebrating Solutions Awards. Eligible programs may be nominated for both the Celebrating Solutions and the Roth Awards, but would only receive one $10,000 grant.

If you would like your program to also be considered for the Roth Award, please answer the following questions, in addition to the previous 9. Two additional pages may be used to provide the answers to these questions.

1. How do you determine that the population you serve qualifies as “underserved”?

The UHLP and UHDVS serves domestic violence victims regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, sexual identification and preference, faith, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability. UHLP primarily serves low-income clients as they cannot afford legal representation.

The geographic area UHLP serves is home to a high-poverty population with a significant percentage of minority residents. According to the U.S. Census, Troy, N.Y. has a population of 49,933 people with a poverty rate of 26.1%; and is composed of 66.5% White, 14.9% Black, and 8.78% Hispanic residents. Albany, N.Y. has a population of 98,468 people with a poverty rate of 26.8%; and is composed of 51.2% White, 28.3% Black, 9.6% Hispanic residents, and 7% Asian residents. Both cities’ poverty rates and percentage of Black residents are well above the national average of 13.5% and 13.3% respectively.

Victims and survivors receiving services from Unity House overwhelmingly live below the poverty line (90%) – in significant disproportion to the Troy community as a whole. It is well-established that people living in poverty experience domestic violence at a higher rate than those living above the poverty line, and face a number of barriers to finding safety, including limited resources to leave the abusive relationship, a shortage of safe and affordable housing, inability to afford legal resources, and a lack of means to obtain financial independence. That being said, if a referral is not eligible for UHLP legal services, he/she is referred to a low cost attorney knowledgeable about domestic violence. In addition, regardless of socio-economic status, UHDVS offers domestic violence services to anyone seeking assistance, support and advocacy.

Additionally, UHLP and UHDVS staff are experienced in serving clients with a disability. In 2017, of the 1,507 adult victims who received services at UHDVS, 286 self-reported having one or more disabilities. Of those who reported, 22 had developmental disabilities, 211 had mental disabilities, and
115 had physical disabilities, including chronic health conditions such as HIV. Most of the clients served came from the urban and suburban population centers of the County with only 6% of clients with disabilities coming from rural areas.

2. Why do your clients need resources that are structured specifically for them?

Clients with limited income generally cannot afford legal representation, have greater difficulty establishing financial freedom from their abuser, and fear homelessness. Through UHLP’s legal representation and UHDVS, clients have access to compassionate/holistic domestic violence legal representation, housing/shelter, assistance applying for social services, referrals to free or affordable physical and mental health services, interpreters, food, clothing and advocacy. Most importantly, UHLP staff are non-judgmental, supportive, and willing to go the extra mile to ensure its diverse clientele are not only afforded superior legal counsel, but also provided the resources to overcome trauma/abuse and financial insecurity.
Personal & Confidential
Attn.: Board President

Your report may be made verbally or in writing and should be as detailed as possible, including the names of the individuals involved, the names of any witnesses, direct quotations when language is relevant, and any documentary evidence (notes, pictures, cartoons, etc.) All reports will be promptly reviewed and investigated when necessary. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigation to the greatest extent possible, practical and appropriate under the circumstances. A determination regarding the reported harassment will be made and discussed with the employee who filed the complaint and where appropriate to the accused harasser(s).

Unity House will not knowingly permit any retaliation against any employee who complains of harassment or who participates in an investigation.

4. Liability for Harassment

If a complaint of prohibited harassment is substantiated, appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination, will be taken.

Any employee who engages in harassment, including any manager or supervisor, who knew about the harassment but took no action to stop it, may be held personally liable. Any manager or supervisor who knew about harassment and took no action to stop it or failed to report harassment to a supervisor or manager, Director of Human Resources, Compliance Officer or the Chief Executive Officer may also be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

E. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It is Unity House’s policy to provide education and support to employees who are the victims of domestic violence. Any such employee who wishes to utilize the resources outlined in this policy should contact their supervisor, the Human Resources Department or the Unity House Domestic Violence Program. It is expected that leave requests made pursuant to this policy will be handled as described in this employee Handbook. Terms used in this policy are defined as follows:

- Domestic Violence: A pattern of coercive tactics carried out by an abuser against a family or household member (the victim) with the goal of establishing and maintaining power and control over the victim. These tactics can be physical, psychological, sexual, economic, emotional, verbal, medical or financial.
- Abuser: A person who carries out a pattern of coercive tactics against a family or household member (the victim).
• Victim: The person against whom an abuser directs their coercive and violent acts.
• Domestic Violence Service Provider: Agency or a staff member of an agency that helps victims of domestic violence. Services include residential programs (shelters) and nonresidential services. Shelters are licensed by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services.

1. Education and Support for Employees Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence

Unity House will make available a list of resources, including information on Domestic Violence Service Providers, for employees who are the victims of domestic violence.

Unity House will make reasonable efforts to provide a safe work environment for employees who are the victims of domestic violence.

Unity House will not discriminate against an employee who is a victim of domestic violence in hiring, staffing, or other terms, conditions, or privileges of employment.

2. Leave Options for Employees Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence

Unity House will make reasonable efforts to accommodate requests for time-off or work schedule adjustments for purposes of obtaining medical treatment (including mental health counseling) or legal assistance; making court appearances; securing alternative housing; or making other safety arrangements. It is expected that an employee will notify Unity House of the need for such accommodations as far in advance as is reasonably possible.

3. Employee Payroll and Benefit Change Request

Unity House will make reasonable efforts to promptly enroll an employee who is the victim of domestic violence in Unity House employee-benefit programs where such employee has chosen to discontinue receipt of similar benefits through the benefits plan of an abusive spouse (or covered domestic partner).

Unity House will also make reasonable efforts to promptly process such employee's requested changes to their electronic payroll transfers.

4. Performance Issues Related to Being a Victim of Domestic Violence

Unity House is aware that an employee who is the victim of domestic violence may experience performance problems resulting from the victimization, such as chronic absenteeism or trouble concentrating.

In such circumstances, Unity House will make reasonable efforts to consider all
• Threats to harm self or others;
• Warrants, subpoenas, court orders; and
• Unified Service Mental Health agencies have joint service provisions affecting mental health consumers. Participating agencies (Unity House, Samaritan Hospital, Intensive Case Management, Rensselaer County Mental Health, etc.) that have a legitimate reason for knowing information about a mental health consumer may request and be given consumer information.

NOTE: Whenever in doubt as to what is confidential, consult your supervisor, any manager or director, the Director of Human Resources or the Compliance Officer.

D. WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

1. Types of Harassment

Unity House is committed to making sure that the workplace is free of harassment and discrimination. Any form of harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, other gender based sexual conduct, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, family medical history or veteran status or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law is strictly prohibited. Harassment can consist of conduct that is not criminal or that constitutes a violation of federal, state or local law. This policy applies to harassment committed in person, by phone or through use of the company’s electronic communication systems. Some examples of harassment include:

• Verbal conduct such as, threats, derogatory comments, unwelcome jokes, teasing, slurs, epithets and other similar conduct;
• Visual conduct such as derogatory posters, photographs, cartoons, drawings or gestures;
• Physical conduct such as assault, unwanted touching or blocking normal movement; and
• Retaliation for reporting harassment or threatening to report harassment.

2. Sexual Harassment Defined

Sexual harassment includes any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other visual, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual or otherwise offensive nature, especially where:

• Submission to conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; or
• Submission to, or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for decisions affecting an individual’s employment; or
• Such conduct has the purpose or effect of interfering unreasonably with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

This definition includes many forms of offensive behavior, including but not limited to the following:

• Unwanted sexual advances;
• Offering employment benefits in exchange for sexual favors;
• Making or threatening reprisals after a negative response to sexual advances;
• Visual conduct such as leering, making sexual gestures or displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, cartoons or posters;
• Verbal conduct such as making or using sexually explicit jokes, or comments about any employee’s body or dress;
• Verbal sexual advances or propositions;
• Verbal abuse of a sexual nature, graphic verbal commentary about an individual’s body, sexually degrading words to describe an individual or suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations; and
• Retaliation for reporting harassment or threatening to report harassment.

*It is unlawful for any person to sexually harass another person regardless of gender or any other factor. Sexual harassment on the job is unlawful whether it involves coworker harassment, harassment by a supervisor, or harassment by persons doing business with or for Unity House.*

3. Report Procedure

Unity House’s report procedure provides for an immediate, thorough and objective review of any claim of unlawful or prohibited harassment and investigation when necessary, appropriate disciplinary action against one found to have engaged in prohibited harassment, and appropriate remedies for any victim of harassment.

Any employee who feels that they are the victim of harassment should promptly report the incident to their supervisor, any supervisor or manager, Director of Human Resources, Compliance Officer or the Chief Executive Officer as soon as possible. *If the incident directly involves the Chief Executive Officer,* please send your complaint in writing to:

*Unity House of Troy Board of Directors*
*2431 Sixth Avenue*
*Troy, NY 12180*

*Updated June 2017*
Unity House of Troy

Unity House Law Project

Semi-finalist Information
October 25, 2018

Ms. Marcia Roth
Executive Director
The Mary Byron Project
9901 Linn Station Road, Suite 500
Louisville, KY 40223

Dear Ms. Roth:

I am writing on behalf of the critical work done by the Unity House Law Project (UHLP) in support of their 2018 Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions nomination. I can attest to the life-saving work that is done at the project and the manner in which they meaningfully contribute to a coordinated community response that promotes innovation and survivor safety.

The Unity House Law Project is impressive because of its holistic nature and how it supports victims and survivors. While many community members access legal services through a stand-alone legal provider, victims and survivors need only contact the local domestic violence program, Unity House, to receive speedy consultation and representation from an attorney skilled in representing victims of domestic violence. Located within a larger domestic violence services program, victims and survivors have access to wraparound support including shelter, temporary and permanent housing options, advocacy, and counseling. These supportive services help victims and survivors sustain the difficult decision to leave an abusive partner and engage in legal proceedings to protect their rights. Victims and survivors seeking domestic violence services have immediate access to an attorney who can answer their legal questions and provide advice regarding possible courses of action. This information is invaluable and helps victims and survivors make the best and safest possible choices from the onset for their future and the future of their children.

This additional support often provides victims and survivors with the feelings of safety that they need to participate in criminal justice processes that support batterer accountability. One of the particular strengths of UHLP is their ability to provide trauma informed, victim centered civil legal services on a broad spectrum of legal issues. Victims and survivors may present in need of an order of protection, custody, child support as well as facing eviction proceedings or needing to appeal a decision on public benefits. The UHLP attorney will represent victims in all facets of civil legal proceedings which significantly contributes to victim and survivor stability and safety. Victims and survivors face so many barriers as they leave abusive situations and establish new lives. For so many victims and survivors, the inability to obtain civil legal services
coupled with lack of understanding of how the legal system can help often leaves victims and survivors trapped in dangerous situations.

Since 2008, the Rensselaer County Probation Department and Unity House have been part of a larger coordinated community response to domestic violence consisting of many community agencies including the Troy Police Department and the Rensselaer County District Attorney’s Office. For over 15 years the Rensselaer County Probation Department and Unity House have worked collaboratively exchanging referrals and working together to resolve victim challenges in cases where an abuser is on probation. The legal services provided by UHLP have been a vital piece of this collaboration.

Most recently in 2016, Rensselaer County Probation and UHLP partnered on the formation and implementation of a high-risk team within the City of Troy. Focusing on victims and survivors of domestic violence who are at high-risk for homicide at the hands of an intimate partner, our collaboration leverages our individual agency strengths in partnership. While Probation focuses on batterer accountability mechanisms, such as enhanced GPS monitoring and unannounced home visits for probationers, the UHLP affords civil-legal protections and remedies to participants of the program through the provision of highly competent and compassionate civil legal services. The beauty of this partnership is our ability to build rapport around our cases and our victims, and to fortify reliable communication to prevent lethality. We are proud to report that there haven’t been any fatalities of high-risk team participants in 2017 or 2018, and that this project was one of only two projects to be funded in 2019 by the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (NYS OPDV) for expansion across the entirety of Rensselaer County.

We look forward to our continued collaboration with the UHLP, and are supportive of the creative programming that they develop in support of victims and survivors.

Respectfully,

Laura Bauer
Director
Rensselaer County Probation Department
October 26, 2018

Ms. Marcia Roth
Executive Director
The Mary Byron Project
9901 Linn Station Road, Suite 500
Louisville, KY 40223

Dear Ms. Roth,

It is my pleasure to support the Unity House Law Project for the Mary Byron Project’s Celebrating Solutions and Roth Awards.

The Unity House Law Project has been a valuable member of our vibrant network of non-profits serving the City of Troy since its inception in 2000. The Unity House Law Project provides victims and survivors of domestic violence with zealous civil-legal consultation and representation on a wide array of legal matters that they may face as a result of their victimization.

During the last few years, Unity House Law Project expanded its scope of services to include some of the periphery legal problems that victims and survivors may face, including housing, immigration, and estate planning. The Project’s ability to comprehensively assist victims and survivors with most if not all of their legal problems, within the context of a larger service model that includes shelter, counseling, and advocacy services, truly makes this project unique.

I am particularly impressed with how the Unity House Law Project fits within Troy’s coordinated community response to domestic violence. As recipients of FY16 funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women Improving Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Grant Program, the City of Troy is committed to a strong systems-level response to the epidemic of domestic violence. Through our coordinated community response, victims and survivors can access a wide breadth of services and resources that promote victim safety and batterer accountability, and the Unity House Law Project fits squarely within this strong response through the provision of compassionate consultation and representation on civil-legal matters involving domestic violence. It takes a village to combat domestic violence, and the innovation of the Unity House Law Project enhances the vitality of our overall response to this problem in our community.
I am excited that the Unity House Law Project is being considered for this prestigious national award. The Unity House Law Project truly enhances the quality of life for victims and survivors of domestic violence living in the City of Troy and the larger Rensselaer County area, and serves as a best practice that meaningfully contributes to a sophisticated array of non-profit organizations that help to make the City of Troy a great place to live.

Sincerely,

Patrick Madden
Mayor, City of Troy
October 22, 2018

Marcia Roth, Executive Director
Mary Byron Project, Inc.
Fostering Innovations and Strategies to End Domestic Violence
9901 Linn Station Road
Louisville, KY 40223

Dear Ms. Roth,

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV) is in full support of the Unity House Law Project as a deserving recipient of a Celebrating Solutions Award. The project’s innovative approach to meeting the diverse legal needs of survivors of domestic violence is truly commendable, and has had a far reaching impact for countless survivors.

The Unity House Law Project provides a solution to the unique challenges faced by domestic violence survivors in accessing civil legal assistance by situating the program within Unity House Domestic Violence Services. Further, the Unity House Law Project is designed as a holistic program offering civil legal support on a broad range of matters, such as small claims matters, judgement enforcement, custody, securing original or modification orders for child/spousal support, matrimonial actions including divorces and separation agreements, appeals for reconsideration of denial of Social Security and New York State’s Supplemental Income, appeal of child neglect indication, immigration matters, orders of protection, name changes, landlord/tenant matters including eviction and lease termination on the grounds of domestic violence, and property rights. Back in 2000 the program was staffed by one attorney. Today, the program has expanded to three attorneys and three paralegals.

The mission of NYSCADV is to create and support the social change necessary to prevent and confront all forms of domestic violence through activism, training, prevention, technical assistance, legislative advocacy, and leadership development. As a statewide membership organization, NYSCADV is proud to have Unity House Domestic Violence Services as a member organization and longtime partner in our shared goals of preventing and eliminating domestic violence.

I write with enthusiastic support for the Unity House Law Project, and hope you will honor this incredible initiative with a Celebrating Solutions Award.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Connie Neal
Executive Director
In reply refer to: 0248452924
Jan. 10, 2008 LTR 4168C E0
23-2378930 000000 00 00Q
00000263
BODC: TE

UNITY HOUSE OF TROY INCORPORATED
33 2ND ST STE 3
TROY NY 12180-3904039

Employer Identification Number: 23-2378930
Person to Contact: Maggie Webster
Toll Free Telephone Number: 1-877-829-5500

Dear Taxpayer:

This is in response to your request of Jan. 03, 2008, regarding your tax-exempt status.

Our records indicate that a determination letter was issued in September 1982, that recognized you as exempt from Federal income tax, and discloses that you are currently exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Our records also indicate you are not a private foundation within the meaning of section 509(a) of the Code because you are described in section 509(a)(2).

Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to you or for your use are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of sections 2055, 2106, and 2522 of the Code.

If you have any questions, please call us at the telephone number shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely yours,

Michele M. Sullivan
Michele M. Sullivan, Oper. Mgr.
Accounts Management Operations I
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OVW LAV SACVAP PASS THRU  
28,843.05

**TOTAL PASS THROUGH EXPENSES**  
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**TOTAL EXPENSES**  
354,621.11

**EXCESS (DEFICIT)**  
(65,842.20)
4.

a.) What is the approximate number of individuals served annually by UHLP?

The services offered through UHLP benefited over 750 individuals between January 1, 2017 and March 30, 2018.

b.) How many paid staff and volunteers are used to administer UHLP?

UHLP consists of two full time attorneys and two full time paralegals who provide direct legal services to clients in civil legal matters and advice to victims of crime. UHLP is overseen by the General Counsel .15 FTE who directly supervises the attorneys and consults on case strategy, document preparation and how to handle complex legal issues.

When available, volunteers are used to provide translation services for clients who have limited English proficiency. While a language translation service can also be utilized, we find that clients feel more comfortable with a live translator present in the room. Through our collaboration with Albany Law School, we also host law students who are required to engage in community service. This is a great opportunity to teach new lawyers about domestic violence and the services that we provide in the hopes that more attorneys will enter public service and/or have a better understanding of challenges that victims of intimate partner violence face in accessing the legal system. In using any volunteers, we pay strict attention to the need for confidentiality and make sure that all volunteers are screened and undergo background checks.

c.) Are there past awards, accolades, and grants conferred upon the applicant or nominee that would further exemplify its success in combating intimate partner violence?

In support of combating intimate partner violence, the Unity House Law Project has received a number of prestigious grants to support its work. UHLP is an FY12 and an FY16 recipient of U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women (OVW) Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) Grant Program funds. Further, UHLP is a recipient of funds from The New York State Interest on Lawyer Account Fund (IOLA). These grants have supported the growth of UHLP from two to six staff, including three staff attorneys, and have expanded the scope of matters that the attorneys can provide consultation and representation upon to further a holistic service provision.

d.) In what ways is the composition of your staff and Board of Directors reflective of your client population?

The Unity House Board of Directors and Unity House Management Team is reflective of our client population as members of these groups identify as survivors of domestic violence and as being formerly homeless. These lived experiences often contribute to strong, meaningful, and thoughtful policy decisions being made by these groups, in support of the Unity House Law Project and the agency in its entirety.
1.) The application states that staff will conduct a "conflicts of interest check" when a potential client first contacts the agency. What constitutes a conflict of interest? Where are individuals referred for services when a conflict is found?

A conflict of interest occurs if an interested party to the case has received consultation or representation from UHLP in another related matter such that a conflict is created between the client seeking services now and a former client. For example, a father comes in seeking representation in a custody modification proceeding wherein UHLP provided representation to the mother in the initial custody proceeding. A conflict also exists in a case where the client comes in seeking services from UHLP but the opposing party is receiving services from the domestic violence program. For example, the mother comes in seeking representation on a family offense petition but the father is receiving domestic violence support services from the domestic violence program. When a conflict is found, clients are referred to other providers of free civil legal services in the region including Legal Aid and domestic violence providers in other counties (Unity House is the only provider in Rensselaer County) if applicable.

2.) Does UHLP maintain a waiting list for services?

We do not maintain a waiting list for services. In the past, we did maintain such a list but it became very impractical in light of the fact that most clients need assistance immediately. We did maintain a divorce waiting list for many years but clients ended up waiting for as much as two years, which wasn't a good practice.

3.) Have you noted any ways in which the UHLP services and representation has led to any system-wide improvements for victims of intimate partner violence in your community?

Having attorneys who advocate and educate about intimate partner violence has created widespread information in the community about this epidemic. Our agency partners, courts and other attorneys in the civil and criminal justice system have become increasingly aware of the holistic service model utilized by Unity House and as a result often refer clients to our program. Because our attorneys are in essence experts on domestic violence, they are able to assist courts in understanding the complicated dynamics that often accompany these cases including the many barriers victims face in leaving an abusive partner, reasons why victims recant and the interplay of mental health and other disabilities.

4.) How are the services of UHLP promoted or advertised? Is information regarding the services of UHLP provided to individuals filing for protection orders?

Information about UHLP is distributed throughout the community to our community partners and at tabling events that are done routinely. Both brochures and posters are distributed including at the local Family Court facility. UHLP is a member of the Rensselaer County Risk Reduction Team, which is a team that consists of the Rensselaer County District Attorney's Office, Rensselaer County Probation, Rensselaer County Sheriff, Troy Police Department, Rensselaer County Mental Health and Samaritan Hospital. The Team is designed to provide support in high-risk cases of domestic violence and UHLP provides legal consultation and representation to these victims. Being a part of this team connects UHLP to the many systems that have routine contact with victims of intimate partner violence. Additionally, Unity House has a domestic violence advocate located full time in the Rensselaer County Family Court who provides assistance to victims seeking
emergency orders including orders of protection. The Family Court Advocate connects victims directly to UHLP for follow up legal services and representation in these matters.

5.) At any point in the eligibility review process is a danger or lethality assessment conducted with the potential client? How is the safety of the client assessed while legal services are being provided?

Safety planning is conducted with all clients who enter the Law Project at the initial consultation and on an on-going basis throughout their case. This is a critical part of the services provided at UHLP. Particularly in cases where there are children, it is important to really delve into all the possible safety risks that exist when you have children going back and forth between parents. UHLP understands these risks and helps clients think through the best steps to take to protect themselves and their children from intimate partner violence.

A lethality assessment is also conducted with all clients to determine elevated safety risks and whether or not the client could benefit from participation in the Risk Reduction Enhanced Response Team. Participation in this team is voluntary but can offer enhanced support where high risk of lethality is present. Additionally, conducting the assessment often helps clients identify and really become aware that they are being abused. Many victims have become accustomed to certain kinds of abusive treatment and going through the factors in a formal way often creates greater understanding of what has happened and what the risks truly are for them should they choose to return to an abusive partner.

6.) Has UHLP ever engaged in appellate work on civil domestic violence cases?

UHLP has not engaged in appellate work at the Court of Appeals level but has provided consultation and representation related to appeals of administrative decisions such as social security and public benefits. Many clients are denied Social Security Disability benefits when they first apply despite the fact that they are unable to work. Clients are also denied public benefits, sometimes for reasons related to their victimization such as an inability to gather required documentation. Because financial stability is so important in assisting clients in the transition away from an abusive partner, the UHLP attorney will assist clients in gathering necessary documentation and witnesses that support their case and then represent the client throughout the appeal process.

7.) Please describe the working relationship that UHLP has with the Troy, Albany and respective counties’ Legal Aid offices.

Unity House has a good working relationship with our local Legal Aid provider and we provide cross referrals on relevant cases. In addition, Unity House collaborates with Legal Aid to provide homelessness prevention services through funding we receive from the New York State Office of Temporary Disability and Assistance.

8.) In addition to the relationship with the Albany Law School Family Violence Clinic, has the UHLP engaged in any efforts to recruit local law firm/attorneys to provide pro-bono representation for dv victims?
It has been our experience that UHLP clients benefit from an attorney who has been trained in trauma informed care and focuses exclusively on serving victims of domestic violence. Our approach to serving our clients has been focused on expanding our in house attorney program in order to provide these specialty services rather than on creating a pro bono network. UHLP attorneys take considerable time to get to know their clients, build trusting relationship and focus on providing holistic support services so that clients have an increased chance of success in their transition to safe and independent living situations.

While pro bono service is highly valuable and plays an important role in the overall delivery of legal services to low income individuals in the community, domestic violence victims have numerous and varied challenges from other types of clients. For this reason, we have made it a priority to develop and expand UHLP in order to provide these targeted services. This is one of the reasons that the Albany Law School clinic program is such a great partner; they are overseen by a practicing attorney who focuses solely on serving victims of domestic violence. UHLP has developed strong relationships with many members of the local bar and does engage in referrals to local attorneys for both civil and criminal legal services when warranted. Many of these attorneys do offer pro bono or reduced rates to our clients.

9.) Please provide information on the provision of services to clients with mental health or chemical dependency issues.

Many UHLP clients present with a variety of co-occurring challenges including mental health and other disabilities, chemical dependency issues, poverty, racial and ethnic barriers. UHLP engages in a client centered, trauma informed service delivery model designed to assist clients to overcome existing barriers to successful outcomes and connect them to the services they need and want both through Unity House programming and in the broader community.

Working with clients who have co-occurring mental health or chemical dependency issues demands a comprehensive approach to how these challenges will be managed particularly within the context of a family offense petition, custody and divorce. Abusers often use mental health and chemical dependency issues against the victim in an effort to keep them trapped in an abusive situation afraid that they will lose their children if they proceed with legal action, which is simply untrue in many cases. The key to success in these situations is to wrap the client in supportive services that will allow them to be safe and continue to parent their children while addressing these other challenges. It’s also important to connect the facts around mental health and chemical dependency, which is often tied to the abuse that the client has suffered. Victims often develop anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from experiencing intimate partner violence particularly if they are in these relationships for a long time. Many abusers affirmatively try to get their victims to use drugs or alcohol and often victims become addicted. Chemical dependency can also occur because the client is using substances to self-medicate through the abuse and through anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms. The UHLP attorney takes the time to understand the origins of mental health and chemical dependency in order to explain the circumstances to the court and wrap the client in needed services.

Many services can be provided through Unity House programming including a scattered site housing program for victims of domestic violence living with disabilities and/or chemical dependency issues, therapeutic counseling and advocacy in the community. Unity House also offers a Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS) program that is a comprehensive
recovery oriented program for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. The goal of the program is to integrate treatment, support, and rehabilitation in a manner that facilitates the individual's recovery. Unity House has many other community partners including Rensselaer County Mental Health, Samaritan Hospital, Conifer Park and Mohawk Hudson Recovery Center that also provide mental health and substance abuse treatment.

10.) Please feel free to briefly share any additional information about your program that may be helpful for our reviewers to know.

UHLP staff works hard to achieve their clients' goals and ensure the best possible outcome for each client. Over the years, we have seen many success stories, two of which we would like to share. One client, who had a successful outcome, sought legal representation in family court so that she could establish custody for her second child and obtain an order of support against her husband. This young individual endured years of domestic violence perpetrated against her by her husband for the duration of their relationship. The husband moved over 2,000 miles away after being removed from our client's house following an incident of domestic violence against our client, who was pregnant at the time. During the proceedings, the husband threatened the life of our client while simultaneously harassing our client to "save" their family. The husband also filed petitions for custody of the two children. We were successfully able to negotiate the withdrawal of the husband's petitions, establish an order of custody for the second child with our client as primary custodian and obtain an Order of Protection. After aggressive negotiations immediately preceding a trial for spousal and child support, we settled the matters successfully.

Another client with a successful outcome was an elderly woman who sought representation in a divorce. She had been married to her husband for nearly two decades, but hadn't lived with him in thirteen years. Due to acts of domestic violence the husband perpetrated against our client, she fled from their home in another state without any of her belongings and returned to New York. Our client had no contact with her husband for approximately thirteen years, but knew that her husband returned to the area over a decade ago because they still had mutual friends. Our client was fearful of having to see her husband in court; she was hesitant to provide any of her husband's contact information. We initiated matrimonial proceedings on behalf of our client, and engaged in strategic negotiations with the opposing party to entice him to consent to an uncontested divorce. Less than two months after filing for divorce, and without ever having to see her husband again, our client received a judgment of divorce.

11.) Please provide copies of any evaluation forms, screening tools or assessments used to determine client eligibility.

Included in this packet are copies of our intake interview, and client eligibility guidelines and case acceptance policy forms.

12.) Please include copies of any tools or forms used for safety planning with clients and determining danger and/or lethality.

Included in this packet are copies of our safety plan, safety plan for stalking and lethality screening forms.
UNITY HOUSE LAW PROJECT INTAKE INTERVIEW FORM

CLIENT NUMBER:

Date of Intake: ____________ College Student? ______ Name of College: ____________
Intake by (initials): ____________ Special Needs/Disabilities? _________________
Referred by: _______________ Race/Ethnicity: ________________

CONSULTATION DATE/TIME: ____________ Housing Client □ Shelter Client □

CLIENT INFORMATION:

Name: ______________________ SS#: ______________________
Address: _____________________ DOB: ____________ Age: ______
Safe Phone #: __________________ POE: __________________
Email: ________________________ Income: __________________

Brief Description of Legal Problem:

________________________________________________________________________

Martial Status: ________________ If yes, Date of Marriage: ____________ Reside together?: Yes □ No □

Is client currently represented by an attorney in any matter? If yes, specify:

________________________________________________________________________

OPPOSING PARTY INFORMATION:

Name: ______________________ SS#: ______________________
Address: _____________________ DOB: ____________
Phone #: ______________________ Citizen: Yes □ No □ Specify: ________________

Martial Status: ________________ If yes, Date of Marriage: ____________ Military: Yes □ No □

Is client currently represented by an attorney in any matter? If yes, specify:

________________________________________________________________________

OPPOSING PARTY ATTORNEY INFORMATION:

Name and Address: ________________

________________________________________________________________________

CHILDREN'S INFORMATION:

Children's Name(s) Date(s) of Birth SS#

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
UNITY HOUSE LAW PROJECT
CLIENT ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES AND CASE ACCEPTANCE POLICIES

The Unity House Law Project (UHLP) serves victims of domestic violence and low income residents of Rensselaer County needing civil legal services. Clients will be directed to the attorney who is able to serve the client based on both financial eligibility criteria and victim status.

Client Eligibility
UHLP clients must satisfy financial eligibility criteria in order to receive legal services. Financial eligibility shall be determined using the poverty guidelines established annually by the Federal government.

Victims of domestic violence with incomes at or below 220% of the federal poverty level, which is adjusted annually, are financially eligible to be served by Heather Dukes, Esq.

Victims of domestic violence and low income residents of Rensselaer County with incomes at or below 220% or 125% of the federal poverty level, which is adjusted annually, are financially eligible to be served by Paulene David, Esq.

In evaluating a client’s income, consideration shall be given to extraordinary expenses the client may incur as a result of a disability, maintaining employment, caring for a disabled child or any other extraordinary circumstance.

Eligible clients may receive consultation and representation from the UHLP Staff Attorney. When a client’s income exceeds the requisite poverty level for that year, the client shall be referred to the Legal Project to obtain a reduced fee attorney. Referrals may also be made to other attorneys in the local area.

Case Acceptance
When a prospective client contacts UHLP seeking services, staff will first obtain the individual’s name and conduct a conflict of interests check. If there is no conflict, staff will screen the prospective client for eligibility (victim status and financial). If client meets eligibility requirements, staff will complete a full intake sheet and schedule an appointment for client to have a consultation with the Staff Attorney.

Once the Staff Attorney meets with client for a consultation, a determination will be made as to whether the client will be accepted for representation if requested. The Staff Attorney will either inform the client of the decision at the time of intake or within two (2) business days. The client will also be apprised of any deadlines pending or statutes of limitation about to expire at the time of the consultation.
SAFETY PLAN

Client's Name

BEING READY FOR A CRISIS

☐ If there is an emergency, or I am unsafe I can call 911 to get emergency services.

☐ The domestic violence hotline number at Unity House is (518) 272-2370 and I can call this number if I need a safe place or if I have a question, or if I need support.

☐ I will leave money, extra keys and copies of important documents and an emergency bag with necessary items at ____________________________.

☐ If I decide to leave, I will: ____________________________

I will go to: ____________________________
If I need to I can call the hotline for safe shelter. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

PLANNING TO LEAVE

☐ I will keep important numbers and change for phone calls with me at all times. I will call Unity House and get help making my plans.

☐ I will make sure I have important items ready to take with me when I leave) see back).

☐ I will make sure I know the best way to get out of my house or apartment.

☐ I will sit down and review this safety plan periodically.

AFTER I LEAVE:

I can tell ____________________________, employers, teachers, family members, friends, etc. that I am no longer with my partner and ask them to call the police if they believe that I or my children are in danger.

I will keep my order of protection on me at all times. If I lose my order, I can get another copy from the court that issued it.

I can change the locks on my doors and windows. I can make sure my house or apartment is well lit.

I can teach my children how to call 911 if there is an emergency.

I can tell people who take care of my children, including their school personnel, which people have permission to pick up my children and also give them copies of orders of custody or protection.

I can change my patterns and try to avoid places where my partner might find me.
BASIC SAFETY AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

☐ I can call an advocate at Unity House (272-2370) if I have questions about Department of Social Services, the Police, Family Court, or any other community agencies. I can also call this number for counseling, referral and advocacy.

☐ I can attend support groups in order to build a support system, learn skills or get information.

☐ I can take care of my physical health by getting regular checkups at my doctor or clinic.

☐ I will look at how and when I use alcohol or use other drugs. If I am going to drink or use other drugs, I will do it in a place where people are committed to my safety.

☐ I will remind myself daily of my best qualities.

☐ Other things I can do to feel safe are: _______________________________________________________

ITEMS TO TAKE WHEN LEAVING

► Identification for myself
► Children’s birth certificates
► My birth certificate
► Social security cards
► School, vaccination records
► Money, checkbook, ATM card
► Medication
► Keys (house, car, office)
► Driver’s license
► Public Assistance/Medicaid ID
► Passports, green cards, work permit
► Divorce or separation papers
► Lease, rental agreement or deed
► Car/mortgage payment book
► Credit cards
► Children’s toys, security blankets
► Sentimental items
► Insurance papers

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Unity House Domestic Violence Program  (518) 272-2370  (Collect calls are accepted).

Local Police Department (non-emergency) ________________________________.

Local Family Court ________________________________.

Local Department Social Services ________________________________.

Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline  1 (800) 342-3720

NYS Domestic Violence Hotline  1 (800) 942-6906

Created on 12/31/2003 10:44 AM
The domestic violence program's hotline number is________________, I can seek shelter by calling this hotline.

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN FOR VICTIMS OF STALKING

The following steps represent my plan for increasing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility of stalking. Although I do not have control over my partner's stalking, I do have a choice about how to respond to him/her and how to best provide a safe environment for myself and my children.

Step 1: Developing a framework
It is important to remember that stalking is about power and control and the stalker will engage in any behavior that he/she believes will help him re-gain power and control over the victim.

A stalking victim is NEVER responsible for the acts of the stalker.

The stalker is the only person responsible for his/her behavior.

I need to think about any or all of the following:

A. I will not blame myself for the stalking behavior of my partner. I am not responsible for his/her behavior and I cannot make him/her stop.

B. I can take steps to protect myself, and my children from harm.

C. I can take steps to see that my stalker is held accountable for his behavior.

D. I can consider other options before I try to bargain with my stalker because this may put me in greater danger.

E. I can think carefully before I take steps to let my stalker "down easy" because he/she may interpret this as an invitation to continue his pursuit.

F. I can end my relationship for good and cease all contact with the stalker including phone calls, written communication, third party messages and all other contact.
G. If I must contact my stalker to discuss my children, I will only talk to him/her about my children and I will end the conversation immediately if he/she begins to discuss something else. If I must contact my stalker regarding other issues I can do it through a lawyer, priest, police officer, or other neutral third party.

H. I will treat all threats as serious and not minimize the danger that the stalker poses to myself, or my children.

I. I will use my judgment and intuition. If my stalker accosts me and I am unable to get away from him/her, I can talk to my stalker and try to calm him/her down. I have to do whatever I think is necessary to protect myself and my children until I/we are out of danger. I will try not to go to an isolated area with my stalker and may be able to avoid this by agreeing to talk on the phone or meet the stalker later in the day. I can say anything necessary to remove myself from the stalker, whether it is true or not.

J. If I need support I can contact my domestic violence program caseworker or attend a stalking or domestic violence support group.
Identifying Acts of Stalking
Stalking can be any type of act or behavior. The specific act or behavior does not have to be threatening or violent to be considered stalking. In fact, many acts of stalking are non-threatening and non-violent. Typically, stalking begins with acts designed to re-kindle the relationship with the victim. When this fails, the stalker may escalate into more harassing and violent behavior. Stalking is unpredictable and there is no way of knowing for certain how a particular stalker will respond. For this reason it is important for victims to focus on safety at all times even if the stalker is not openly threatening. (See list of examples of stalking.)

The following are steps I can take to identify acts of stalking:

A. I can review the list of examples of stalking behavior.

B. If I am unsure if a particular incident is stalking, I can contact my domestic violence program caseworker to discuss my situation.

C. If I am unsure that a particular incident is stalking, I can contact the police to ask if the act is a criminal offense.

Recording Acts of Stalking
Every act or potential act of stalking should be recorded at the time it occurs. (See telephone and Incident Logs attached.) This includes any act that is non-violent or non-threatening, any act that is a crime (i.e. assault) even if the victim chooses not to report it to the police, and any act that the victim thinks may be an act of stalking (i.e. tires on the car are flat without reason). Every act or potential act of stalking should be recorded at the time it occurs, without exception. While a victim may choose not to involve the criminal justice system initially, she/he may decide to at a later time. Information and details collected by the victim over a period of time can be extremely helpful if a criminal prosecution becomes necessary.

The following are steps I can take to record acts of stalking:

A. I can keep a telephone incident log by my phone and keep track of every phone call that I receive from my partner or from a third party calling on his/her behalf, even if the calls are not threatening.

B. I can keep a stalking incident log on my person and record every incident, direct or indirect contact, or suspicious happening that occurs.

C. I can save any notes, letters, e-mails, or other written materials and record when they were received.

D. I can make taped recordings of all phone calls from my partner or from a third party calling on his/her behalf.

Personalized Safety Plan for Victims of Stalking
Developed by Milinda J. Reed, Esq., for The Unity House Law Project
E. I can photograph anything of mine that has been damaged or destroyed.

F. I can collect all of my logs and other evidence in a safe place like ______ so that I have them to show the police or prosecutor.

G. I can call the police and ask them to make a report.

H. I can have my stalker arrested if the acts he has committed are a crime under the law. (Even though your partner is stalking you, which is in itself a crime, the police may not make an arrest if there is no evidence to support your claim.)
Safety In My Own Residence.
There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use include:

A. I can move to a new apartment/house and be careful to preserve my address confidentiality.

B. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible. (Even if you think the stalker returned the key, he/she may have made a copy.)

C. I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors and always keep them locked.

D. I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, and electronic system, etc.

E. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floors windows.

F. I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.

G. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.

H. I can get a dog.

I. I can get a cell phone to keep with me in the house in case my stalker breaks in and he/she has disabled my home phone line.

J. I can teach my children not to let my stalker into the house.

K. I can tell __________________________ about the stalking and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.

L. I can inform __________________________ (neighbor), __________________________ (landlord), __________________________ (pastor), and
(friend), that I am being stalked. I can provide the above persons with a picture and description of the stalker and ask them to call the police if they see the stalker around my house.

***In some cases, a victim of stalking may be eligible for Crime Victims Compensation, which can help pay for certain expenses. Social services may also be able to help with certain moving expenses. Ask your domestic violence advocate for more information about Crime Victims Compensation and services available through Social Services.
Protecting Personal Information
A stalker will use every means possible to find out information about his/her victim. It is important that the victim focus on safeguarding all personal information.

Steps I can take to protect my personal information:

A. I can ask the utility and phone companies if they have password protection available on account information and make sure my accounts are password protected if possible.

B. I can obtain a private mailbox (not from the postal service) separate from my home address and always use my mailbox address as my mailing address even with close friends and family.

C. I can be careful about using my name and address together on documents that may be accessible to the public like police incident reports, court papers, voter registration, professional license registration, pet license registration, driver’s license and auto registration, credit applications that may report information to the credit bureau, and deeds to land.

D. I can ask my relatives, friends, employer not to reveal my personal information to anyone for any reason, even if there is an alleged emergency.
Telephone Safety
Stalkers frequently use the telephone as a means to harass their victims. Most stalkers have the victim’s phone number and it is an easy way to contact and connect with the victim. Victims should not feel obligated to speak with the stalker when he/she calls. Changing the phone number is one way to end harassing phone calls but if the victim wants to collect evidence to use against the stalker, she/he might consider other alternatives. There are a number of strategies that victims can consider.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

A. I can disconnect my phone number entirely and obtain a new, unlisted, unpublished phone number.

B. I can obtain a new unlisted, unpublished phone number for my own personal use and attach an answering machine to the phone number that the stalker uses. I can record the messages and use them as evidence of his stalking behavior.

C. If I keep my phone number I can find out about services offered by the phone company like caller ID, phone blocking and call trace.

D. If I keep my phone number, I can trace the calls I receive from the stalker and ask the phone company to do something about the calls.

E. I can explain my situation to the phone company and ask them to place special protections on my account information.

F. I can report the phone calls to the police.

G. I can use a corded phone rather than a cordless phone so that my calls cannot be monitored from outside my home.

H. If my stalker calls me on the phone and I answer, I can: __________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

Personalized Safety Plan for Victims of Stalking
Developed by Milinda J. Reed, Esq., for The Unity House Law Project
Safety In My Own Car
There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own car.

Safety measures I can use include:

A. I can always park in a public, well-lit and frequently traveled parking lot.

B. I can travel on well-traveled highways and stay off back roads even though this may be inconvenient.

C. I can always lock the car doors even when I am inside.

D. I can check the car for intruders before I get in.

E. I can be alert to cars that may be following me.

F. I can carry a cell phone with me at all times in case I need to call for help.

G. I can use a different route when I travel to and from work, school, etc.

H. I can locate police and fire stations in the areas where I travel so that I can drive to them if someone is following or harassing me.

I. I can install a locking gas cap and locking hood latch to protect my car.

J. When driving home if problems occur, I can ________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Personalized Safety Plan for Victims of Stalking
Developed by Millinda J. Reed, Esq., for The Unity House Law Project
Safety On The Job
Each stalking victim must decide if and when she/he will tell others that her/his partner is stalking, and that there may be a continued risk of violence. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect victims of stalking. Each victim should consider carefully which people to invite to help secure her/his safety.

I might do any or all of the following:

A. I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and ________________ that I am a victim of stalking.

B. I can ask ______________________________ to help screen my telephone calls at work.

C. When I leave work, I can ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________

D. If I use public transit, I can ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________

to ensure my safety while traveling.

E. I can use different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different than those when residing with my battering partner.

F. I can also ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Personalized Safety Plan for Victims of Stalking
Developed by Milinda J. Reed, Esq., for The Unity House Law Project
Safety with An Order of Protection
A stalker may obey an Order of Protection, but one can never be sure which stalker will obey and which will violate an Order of Protection. A victim may need to ask the police and the courts to enforce her/his Order of Protection.

The following are some steps that I can take to help with the enforcement of my Order of Protection:

A. I will keep my Order of Protection (location). (Always keep it on or near your person. If you change your purse, that's the first thing that should go in.)

B. I will give my Order of Protection to police or sheriff's departments in the community where I work, in those communities where I usually visit family or friends, and in the community where I live.

C. There should be a county registry of protection orders that all police or sheriff's departments can call to confirm the validity of an Order of Protection. I can check to make sure that my Order is in the registry. The telephone number for the county registry of protection orders is ____________________________.

D. For further safety, if I often visit other counties in my state, I might file my Order of Protection with the court in those counties. I will register my restraining or protection order in the following counties:

______________________________________

E. I can call the local domestic violence program if I am not sure about B, C, or D above or if I have some problem with my Order of Protection.

F. I will inform my employer, my minister, my closest friend and ____________, ____________ that I have an Order of Protection in effect, and provide them with a copy if necessary.

G. If my partner destroys my Order of Protection, I can get another copy from the courthouse located at ____________________________.

H. If my partner violates my Order of Protection, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my domestic violence advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.
I. If the police do not help, I can contact my advocate or attorney and can file a complaint with the chief of the police department.

J. I can also file a civil contempt complaint in Family Court or a criminal complaint with the police. I can charge my stalker with a violation of the Order of Protection and all the crimes that he commits in violating the order. I can call the domestic violence advocate to help me with this.
Additional Safety Measures I Can Take To Protect My Children

A. I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to ______________________ (friend/minister/other) in the event that my partner abducts the children.

B. I will tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:

________________________________________ (school)
________________________________________ (day care staff)
________________________________________ (babysitter)
________________________________________ (Sunday school teacher)
________________________________________ (teacher)

C. I can give anyone who cares for my children a copy of my Order of Custody and Order of Protection.

D. I will also teach my children to: __________________________

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
Personalized Safety Plan for Victims of Stalking
Developed by Milinda J. Reed, Esq., for The Unity House Law Project
# Domestic Violence Lethality Screen For First Responders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Case #:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Victim: | Offender: |

- [ ] Check here if victim did not answer any of the questions

> **A "Yes" response to any of Questions #1-3 automatically triggers a protocol referral**

1. Has he/she ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a weapon?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

2. Has he/she threatened to kill you or your children?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

3. Do you think he/she might try to kill you?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

> **Negative responses to Questions #1-3, but positive responses to at least four of Questions #4-11 trigger protocol referral**

4. Does he/she have a gun or can he/she get one easily?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

5. Has he/she ever tried to choke you?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

6. Is he/she violently or constantly jealous or does he/she control most of your daily activities?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

7. Have you left him/her or separated after living together or being married?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

8. Is he/she unemployed?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

9. Has he/she ever tried to kill himself/herself?  
   - [ ] Yes  
   - [ ] No  
   - [ ] Not Answered

10. Do you have a child that she/he knows is not his/hers?  
    - [ ] Yes  
    - [ ] No  
    - [ ] Not Answered

11. Does he/she follow or spy on you or leave threatening messages?  
    - [ ] Yes  
    - [ ] No  
    - [ ] Not Answered

> An officer may trigger the protocol referral, if not already triggered above, as a result of the victim's response to the below question, or whenever the officer believes the victim is in a potentially lethal situation

Is there anything else that worries you about your safety? If yes, what worries you?

---

Check One:  
- [ ] Victim screened in according to protocol  
- [ ] Victim screen in based on the belief of officer  
- [ ] Victim did not screen in - officer use only  

If victim screened in: After advising him/her of a high danger assessment, did the victim speak with the hotline counselor?  
- [ ] Yes  
- [ ] No
Do you have a legal issue?
We may be able to help.

Contact the Unity House Law Project to find out if you qualify:

(518) 687-1820

Small Claims
Child Support
Simple Will
Landlord/Tenant Issues or Eviction
SSI/SSDI
DSS Entitlements
Pre-School Special Education Hearings