



# HAP's

## *Sweet New Home*

Kathleen Guthrie Woods



**W**elcome to 125 Hyde Street, the new home of the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP), a program of the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) of The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF).

As you enter through the glass doors, you immediately sense the calm. The waiting room is warmed by sunlight, the floors are worn smooth from nearly a hundred years of visitors. The freshly painted white walls, neatly arranged bookcases, and an array of thriving green plants provide a sense of order. Even the front door's buzzer, a soft "beeng-bong," has a gentleness to it.

A cheerful, friendly greeting from a staff member invites you to check in at the front desk, and worn but sturdy chairs offer a comfortable place to sit while you wait for your name to be called. The tone is kind, courteous, respectful. It says, "We're here for you"—and for a clientele that is hurting, that sentiment might be what they most need to hear.

HAP's staff barely missed a beat when it moved into its new offices in late January of this year. It was only HAP's third home since the project began in the 1990s, but what makes this building exciting is its prime location, its colorful history, and its new building owners: the Justice & Diversity Center.

The services HAP provides are vital to a historically underserved population: people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. So when the project's previous headquarters was in jeopardy due to the volatile commercial real estate market, JDC leadership researched their options and took a leap of faith to purchase the bar association's first property. "It didn't make sense to put our services at risk," says Yolanda Jackson, executive director and general counsel of BASF and executive director of JDC. "It quickly became evident that the benefits of purchasing far outweigh the risks."



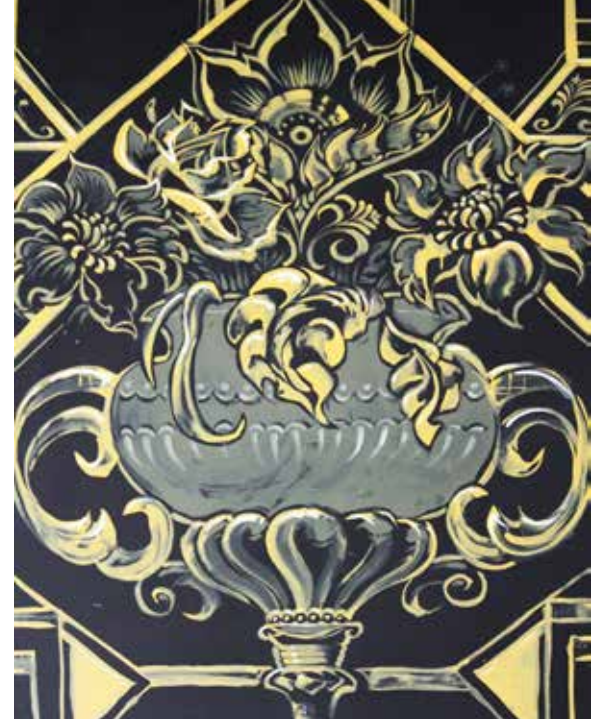
*The building at 125 Hyde offers plenty of space for HAP staff to work and meet with clients.*



*The waiting room and intake area at 125 Hyde*



*HAP's new location offers over 7,000 square feet of space*



*Detail of mural in the boardroom*

## *A History of Holistic Services*

HAP's own home needs to support and facilitate its services: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) advocacy, eviction defense, and immigration documentation. "We focus on these three because they are the services that can make the most difference," says Teresa Friend, HAP's director and managing attorney. HAP specializes in serving a clientele that includes people who suffer from mental illnesses, have histories of drug or alcohol abuse, and who have low or no incomes. Legal and social services are offered together as "holistic" services. "We do what we can," says Carlos Martinez, the data analyst and program assistant. "Sometimes we can help, sometimes we're late, but we can mitigate." HAP staffers handle close to 2,000 cases a year and had 13,700 client contacts over the past two years.

In addition to being open for appointments during the week, HAP holds a drop-in legal clinic on Tuesday afternoons, and fifty to eighty people may show up in need of help. After gathering general demographic information on an intake form, staff members meet with clients individually to assess their needs and make recommendations.

Identifying a client's income stream is crucial, and SSI advocates have their work cut out for them in light of

escalating housing costs. In San Francisco, SSI currently maxes out at \$900 per month, and residential hotels charge \$250 a week.

Eviction defense services have evolved over time, as the needs of the clientele have changed. Many non-eviction settlements include behavioral stipulations, and whether or not new incidents occur, staff attorneys continue to monitor their clients to keep them stable as long as possible.

Immigration issues have always been part of HAP's services. Most of the clients who come through HAP's doors are documented but not stable enough to acquire the documents they need—such as certification of citizenship, naturalization, and green cards—to get the benefits they are entitled to.

Some cases can be handled quickly, some can be referred to other agencies, others are more complicated. "We try to triage," says Friend. "That's the priority of the day." To that end, schedules are flexible depending on clients' needs. Staff members participate in evening legal clinics and visit health centers to help people get access to their benefits. Erin Katayama, a staff attorney, figures she spends 50 percent of her time outside of the office, going to the Civic

Center courthouse for eviction matters, or making home visits to check on clients who aren't able to travel to the office or who need extra assistance.

Being near the courts and being convenient for the clients are big plusses for the new location. "When we get a critical call," says Katayama, "we can run down there." But again, it isn't just about being there for legal purposes, it's the holistic approach that makes HAP so successful. "The lawyer is able to be present, to prevent catastrophes, to calm the client down," she says. Clients regard HAP staff members as "someone they trust," perhaps the only person they trust.

The dedicated staff includes two attorneys working exclusively on eviction defense, two supervising attorneys, a director/managing attorney, and one SSI advocate attorney who also supervises the clinic. Volunteers, law school interns, social work interns, and summer associates from big law firms may also supplement the staff. "It's like a family, a good family," says Friend, and the mutual support of staff and volunteers is crucial as they continue to seek satisfactory outcomes in work that is often heart wrenching.

## *A Blessing in Disguise?*

Anticipating a significant raise in rental rates at the end of HAP's lease in December 2014 didn't help anyone's stress level. In line with the market, the costs for HAP's previous location on Mission Street were expected to increase from \$23 per square foot to \$36 per square foot. It could have gotten worse—commercial space in San Francisco currently rents for about \$70 per square foot. The JDC board explored the option of purchasing a building and the search for properties began.

Escrow on the two-story building closed in July 2014, and construction began in August. Jackson, who was then the interim executive director, oversaw the process—getting board approval, securing a loan, and monitoring the buildout. Major kudos go to the subcontractors (see page 31) who donated or discounted materials and labor, and who completed the work in record time, as well as to in-



*The vault doors, remnants of the building's past as a film exchange*



*Detail of the mural in the boardroom, evidence of the building's past as a speakeasy performance space*

dividuals and organizations who contributed furnishings. “When we are able to help an organization like the Justice & Diversity Center increase the services they are able to provide or simply to serve more people, we jump at the opportunity to get involved,” said Earl Martin, project executive at Cupertino Electric, one of San Francisco’s largest electrical contractors. “We are committed to doing what we can to make a positive impact in the community.”

The benefits of the purchase and the move were immediate. The renovated 7,200 square feet provides offices, cubicles, and conference rooms. “There’s enough space for people to be private, to have choices of where they sit,” says Ramona Holguín, a supervising attorney.

In the heart of the Tenderloin, the new building removes many of the old barriers that prevented clients from keeping their appointments. “The space is a lot more accessible, not just in a literal sense,” says Senior Supervising Attorney Katie Danielson. “Imagine you’re a person who is homeless with a mental impairment; just trying to get into the courthouse can be intimidating.” Physical access from the street, the inviting waiting room, and the open space are all assets.

As a bonus, the difference between leasing and owning will save JDC a whopping \$93,500 a year.

## *The Hollywood Connection*

You might expect HAP’s new home to be a standard office building. Instead, it comes with a touch of glamour. At first glance, some of the architectural elements appear to have been left behind by the previous resident, a theater company. A chandelier hangs outside the upstairs offices, a gorgeous Art Deco façade hints at an old playhouse marquee. But the building’s history is much more Technicolor-ful.

Built in 1931, HAP’s new home was part of Old Hollywood along with nearby movie houses, theaters, and studios’ film distribution centers. Designed with rein-

forced concrete, the Motion Picture Studio and Laboratory at 125 Hyde Street served as a fireproof film exchange. Films were purchased in bulk, stored in the building’s vaults (still in place behind thick, brightly painted orange doors, and now used for files and storage), and rented out to movie houses.

You can catch glimpses of the neighborhood’s former glory in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lions at 259 Hyde, the comedy-tragedy masks at the old 20th Century–Fox film exchange at 245 Hyde, and HAP’s soaring façade.

## *Looking Ahead*

With the staff settled into HAP’s fabulous new space, there’s no lack of work as they continue to fulfill JDC’s mission to provide legal services to low-income people. Looking ahead, growth, in terms of getting bigger, isn’t necessarily a goal. Instead, the intent is to stay relevant and accessible, to make certain the services HAP provides truly address the changing needs of clients over time.

As the specific services evolve, the core purpose remains. “We try to help people who are hard to help,” says Martinez. “It’s a challenge, but we do it with patience and dignity.”

And now that HAP has a permanent home, its good work can continue without interruption.

*Kathleen Guthrie Woods, a San Francisco–based freelance writer, was privileged to meet many of the HAP staffers in person, to observe them in action. She has tremendous respect for them and the crucial work they are doing.*

# Thank you!

The JDC Board of Directors would like to extend its most sincere thanks to all who contributed to the success of the tenant improvement project that allowed HAP to move into a new space designed specifically for the program. Given the explosive growth in commercial construction, the contractors involved in the work made huge sacrifices in their busy schedules, and many opened their hearts and checkbooks to provide labor and materials at either reduced rates or, in some cases, completely free of charge. Other firms and supporters donated furniture to HAP. Had these generous firms not stepped up, the project costs would have easily been doubled.



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