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The Southern Arizona People's Law Center

by Paul Gattone

The Southern Arizona People's Law Center, a non-profit law office, began operating in the beginning of January of this year. The founders of the People's Law Center established this project to pursue impact litigation and to do community organizing in the areas of low-income housing and economic rights. We hope that through these efforts we will have an impact on the conditions that perpetuate poverty and cause homelessness.

The People's Law Center currently has one full time staff attorney, whose position is funded by a grant from the Wallace Foundation. Tax exempt status allows us to solicit contributions for other necessary expenses. This arrangement allows the staff attorney to pursue impact work without having to do traditional forms of income generating cases.

In January the People's Law Center filed a case to stop the state from using money from the state Housing Trust Fund to operate National Guard armories as temporary homeless shelters. This case exemplifies in two ways the type of work that this project will do. First, this case can have a wide-ranging impact because the Housing Trust Fund, if properly used, can be another source of funds to produce desperately

needed low-cost housing. Second, this issue came directly from homeless persons and homeless advocates who realized that despite the necessity of winter shelter, permanent low-cost housing is the answer to homelessness.

The People's Law Center has also been actively working to organize low-income tenants. Presently these efforts involve tenants in both public housing and in a large HUD-subsidized complex. Both groups of tenants are organizing to gain some measure of control over their housing situations and their lives.

There is a common theme that runs through both the impact litigation and the organizing work that the People's Law Center is involved in, and that is to empower the people we work with so that they can begin to act on their own behalf. The letterhead of the Southern Arizona People's Law Center contains the saying "Aiding the People in Their Struggle for Economic Justice", and this is the guiding principle of all the work we pursue.

If you want more information about the Southern Arizona People's Law Center, or would like to make a tax deductible contribution, contact Paul Gattone at 314 E. Congress, #236, or call 623-7306.