Regent School of Law

by Rosey Mellion

The legal profession is both a vocation to practice law and a call to serve. Calling and service are tenets integral to the mission and culture of Regent University School of Law. The School of Law recently approved a standard that all law students are expected to give fifty hours of community service during their time in the program. The fifty service hours can be a combination of a minimum of thirty hours pro bono legal service and up to twenty hours of other community service.

The pro bono program will partner with Regent Law’s Civil Litigation Clinic and Law Career Services. Associate Professor Kathleen McKee, who has directed the Civil Litigation Clinic for seventeen years, has overseen our Legal Aid internships and opportunities for students to use their Virginia Third Year Practice Certificate. Working with Professor McKee, our Career and Alumni Services office will coordinate pro bono opportunities for our students, including cases they can handle in their third year.

This public service outreach is also a reflection of the commitment Dean Michael Hernandez has demonstrated to supporting pro bono services across the commonwealth. Hernandez is on the Virginia Bar Association’s Pro Bono Council, and he has worked with Norfolk Firms in Service and on our bi-annual community service projects. He also appointed me to develop and coordinate our public service and pro bono initiatives. I was recently selected to serve on the inaugural Virginia Access to Justice Commission Pro Bono Coordinating Consortium.

Regent Law’s Pro Bono Community Legal Service Program will provide students experiential learning and networking opportunities while providing invaluable legal assistance that will impact Hampton Roads and beyond. We are excited to be able to launch this important initiative.

Pro Bono at University of Richmond School of Law

by Tara L. Casey

“Pro bono” is often the first legal Latin that a law student learns, before other courses come in with their res ipsa loquitur and in flagrante delicto. The reason for this primacy is the greater emphasis law schools have placed upon pro bono programming in the past ten to fifteen years. Indeed, the American Bar Association’s Standards and Rules for Approval of Law Schools require schools to provide opportunities for students to participate in pro bono activities.

The challenge in taking advantage of these opportunities is that the very nature of pro bono requires that it be done without any intent of remuneration, either in financial or academic credit. Often, committed law students find themselves juggling classes, journals, and jobs in their pursuit of service. True, many of them will receive invaluable experience and skills development, as well as networking, through their service. However, many of them are simply open to the idea of service in and of itself — and making it work.

For some it will not just be about making it work, but making it thrive. Beginning in 2009, the Carrico Center for Pro Bono & Public Service at the University of Richmond School of Law has awarded a Pro Bono Certificate to graduating 3Ls who have performed at least 120 hours of pro bono service during their law school careers. This past May, nearly 20 percent of our graduating class received the Pro Bono Certificate, with approximately 5,400 hours of service total. In many ways, these law students are already our profession’s best teachers when it comes to pro bono service.

Every fall, I get to speak to the new class of first-year law students about the tremendous pro bono and public service opportunities that await them. I describe a set of keys they will receive in the next three years that few in our society get to hold, keys that are meant to unlock barriers to justice. The question for them is whether they will only use those keys for their own benefit. In many ways, that question will stay with them through law school and into practice. However, through the incorporation of pro bono programming into our legal education, it is a question they will be better prepared to answer.

Rosey Mellion is associate director for Career Services & Alumni Relations at the Regent University School of Law.

Tara Casey is the director of the Carrico Center for Pro Bono & Public Service at the University of Richmond School of Law.
JusticeServer 2.0
by Alexandra S. Fannon

JusticeServer® is a customized case management system with a volunteer portal currently serving central Virginia. Thanks to the generous support of the Virginia Law Foundation, Capital One, Dominion Resources, the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation and Firms In Service — Richmond, this pilot program has enabled Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS), Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) and the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation (GRBF) to manage over 22,000 cases and help over 50,000 low income Virginians since 2012.

With a growing volunteer pool of more than 1,000 lawyers, law students and paralegals, 6,800 of these needy clients have had pro bono volunteer assistance (helping more than 17,000 individuals). From the beginning, the hope was to expand JusticeServer to a statewide system, available to any legal service nonprofit who utilizes pro bono volunteers. With proof of lessons learned and our pilot successes, JusticeServer caught the attention of two national funders, Legal Services Corporation and the Salesforce Foundation, both of whom awarded the project large grants to help fund an improved version available to all in Virginia and the United States.

With these grants in hand, and a second grant from Virginia Law Foundation, JusticeServer 2.0 is currently in development and targeted to open next year. JusticeServer 2.0 will have an improved Pro Bono Portal where volunteers can do one-stop shopping of pro bono service opportunities throughout the commonwealth, find necessary resources and training, and connect securely to all case information. Once JusticeServer 2.0 is launched, the private bar will have an amazing opportunity to provide pro bono service and to help legal aids move the needle on the civil justice gap.

Please stay tuned for more information and details in the months to come. For those in the central Virginia area, please visit www.justiceserver.org to register today.

Access to Legal Justice 2.0
by Jennifer Grace Dean

The use of technology in the 21st century has challenged traditional ideas of relationships and community. Conversations that once occurred across dinner tables and in meeting spaces now reach into online networks, adding new layers of engagement. The ease at which headlines, ad campaigns, and Internet memes are shared among friends and strangers has given rise to a “viral” environment that is as stimulating as it is nuanced. To become absorbed in a secluded corner of the World Wide Web has never been easier.

The Virginia State Bar Access to Legal Services Committee aims to occupy such a niche corner, having launched the bar’s second-sanctioned Facebook page, titled the “Virginia State Bar Access to Legal Services.” Through Facebook, the committee is connecting with audiences in new ways — providing notice of pro bono training and service opportunities, recognizing those who devote themselves to closing the justice gap, and raising awareness of access to legal justice issues.

The response to the committee’s social media presence is encouraging. With a current tally of over 250 “likes” and engagement reaching into the thousands, the page is off to a strong start. But the cause of promoting equality under our legal system is one that all members of the bar can rally around. For those who have not yet connected with the committee’s Facebook page, I encourage your visit and your “like” the next time you log on.

Jennifer Grace Dean is the founding partner of the Virginia Immigration Law Center, a private law firm in Roanoke dedicated to the practice of immigration and nationality law. She represents individuals in removal proceedings before the immigration courts and assists clients in obtaining work authorization, permanent residence, and US citizenship. She serves on the Virginia State Bar Access to Legal Services Committee and the Special Committee on Technology and the Practice of Law.
Distance Lawyering: Richmond to Southwest Virginia

by Alexandra S. Fannon

In rural areas, the civil justice gap is often compounded by the high density of individuals living in poverty, geographic distances to legal aid offices, and hard economic times for many of the practicing local attorneys. The resulting gap is sometimes referred to as a “legal services desert” (e.g., see OneJustice’s Rural Initiative). One such desert exists in the southwest corner of our commonwealth.

With seventeen counties and four small cities, the three offices of the local legal aid, Southwestern Virginia Legal Aid Society (SVLAS) (www.swvalegalaid.org), has its hands full with critical needs in all civil areas. However, the most requested service is for no fault divorce assistance, and for SVLAS, even with restricting access to lower income levels (100 percent of federal poverty, which for one person is gross income of $12,000/year or below) and mandating a one-year separation, it could easily have 600 eligible divorce clients each year.

Since 2015, the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation (GRBF) has partnered with SVLAS to connect urban lawyers in the greater Richmond area with low-income divorce clients. Thanks to lawyers in the Firms In Service - Richmond group, 103 clients have the pro bono legal help they need. Thanks to the amazing leadership team at SVLAS (Mary Parsons, deputy director; Anita Robinson, managing attorney; and Cassandra Turner, pro bono coordinator), the volunteers get all the intake information and assistance they need to handle these cases pro bono.

These divorce cases are perfect for distance lawyering and pro bono service, and allow volunteers an opportunity to put their knowledge and skills to use for those who cannot afford an attorney. For more information on how you can get involved and help these individuals, please e-mail Ali Fannon at afannon@grbf.org for details. Training and resources are available.

Virginia Judicial System Self-Help Website

by Gail Warren

In June 2016, the Supreme Court of Virginia announced the availability of a new website for self-represented litigants in the commonwealth. The Virginia Judicial System Court Self-Help Website, http://selfhelp.vacourts.gov/, as a public service, provides neutral legal information in topical areas commonly sought by self-represented litigants, such as traffic tickets, divorce, and landlord and tenant issues. The site features glossaries of legal terms used in the district and circuit courts, instructions for routine processes, and informational videos, with the goal of making Virginia’s courts more accessible for all citizens. In August, the site was updated to include a link to Virginia.freelegalanswers.org.

The website was created by the Committee on Access for Self-Represented Litigants of the Virginia Access to Justice Commission. It utilizes a platform based on Drupal for Legal Aid Websites (DLAW), an open source website management system developed and maintained by Urban Insight Inc. Selfhelp.vacourts.gov features web responsive design that works on computers, smartphones, and other mobile devices. Content was drafted to meet guidelines for lower literacy and reading levels; additional content and resources are planned for future updates. The Access for Self-Represented Litigants Committee is chaired by the Honorable Deborah V. Bryan, Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, and its members include judges, representatives from the legal services community and the National Center for State Courts, clerks of court, and law librarians.

Alexandra S. Fannon is executive director of the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation.

Gail Warren is the Virginia State Law Librarian.
On August 22, 2016, Virginia was one of twenty states to open a freelegalanswers site to the public on that date. Twenty more states will launch in October. More than ninety Virginia attorneys have registered to provide answers to civil legal questions posted by low income and modest means Virginians, and members of the public have begun to post questions to the website.

In the weeks leading up to the launch, the VSB heavily recruited lawyers to volunteer for the website and more than 200 submitted “Attorney Interest Forms” to volunteer for the site. VSB Executive Director Karen A. Gould and President Michael W. Robinson made written appeals to Virginia lawyers to sign up for the website, and Access to Legal Services Director Karl Doss and members of the Access to Legal Services Committee recruited lawyers at several CLE events and local bar programs across Virginia. VSB Access to Legal Services staff has been contacting these lawyers to request them to complete the registration process by:

1. visiting the website, https://virginia.freelegalanswers.org/, and
2. clicking on the words “Volunteer Attorney Registration” at the top of the page, and providing the requested information. Once the lawyer clicks “I agree,” she will be approved to provide pro bono assistance and may begin answering civil legal questions posted by low income Virginians.

Lawyers who did not submit the form may register directly on the website following the steps noted above.

Additionally, the VSB has begun its effort to market the service to the public. Information about Virginia.freelegalanswers.org has been posted on social media pages by legal aid offices and legal services organizations and the state court’s Self-Help Website. The VSB Communications Department has developed promotional materials that will be sent to court clerks, public libraries, legal aid offices, social services organizations, magistrate offices, and other outlets. Potential users of the website are told that they simply need to go to the “Get Started” page on the homepage, complete the user registration, and, if they meet the financial eligibility requirements, they may post up to three civil legal questions in a year.

Virginia.freelegalanswers.org includes Frequently Asked Question pages for users and attorneys, a Training and Resources page for attorneys that provides links to websites with training materials, publications and forms that may assist them to answer questions, and “Other Places to Find Legal Help” page which provides information about legal and non-legal resources that could assist clients and individuals determined to be ineligible to post a question with potential legal representation and services.

### Virginia Pro Bono Webinars

by Karl Doss

Since October 2013, the Virginia State Bar Special Committee on Access to Legal Services has been offering webinars, almost monthly, to recruit, train, and mobilize lawyers interested in providing pro bono legal services to low income Virginians. These webinars cover a variety of topics on substantive law and legal ethics on matters that especially impact pro bono and legal aid clients. Presentations include uncontested divorces, representing survivors of domestic violence, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, elder law, advance medical directives, Social Security Disability, landlord-tenant law, relief from creditors, the Justice Gap, and Rule 6.1 of the Virginia Rules of Professional Conduct. The VSB has collaborated with several legal aid offices, non-profit pro bono providers, law firms, and bar associations to offer the webinars including Legal Aid Justice Center, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Virginia Poverty Law Center, Legal Information Network for Cancer, Community Tax Law Project, Drive to Work, CAIR Coalition, the VSB Young Lawyers Conference, the Sands Anderson law firm, and the Old Dominion Bar Association.

Programs are typically approved for 1.0 to 2.0 hours of MCLE credit. There is no cost to attend the webinars; however, registrants are asked to certify that, in exchange for the CLE credit, they will either accept a referral of a pro bono case from the co-sponsoring legal services organization or their local legal aid office or make a financial contribution to the designated organization. The webinar presentations are recorded and posted on the Pro Bono/Access to Legal Services page (Resources for Attorneys subpage) on the VSB website. These

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A Survey by the VBA Pro Bono Council

by David Neumeyer

In January 2016, the VBA Pro Bono Council’s Committee on Unmet Needs asked executive directors and program leaders of thirty-seven nonprofit legal providers in Virginia to take part in a survey. The survey sought to identify Virginia’s top needs, by type of case, for pro bono assistance from the private bar.

Eight local direct-service legal aid programs and ten other nonprofit legal providers responded. They indicated that they had placed 5,202 cases in 2015, but could have placed 9,300 with more pro bono volunteers. This gap of 4,100 cases does not describe the total additional pro bono need in Virginia, just the number of additional cases that could have been placed by the current providers using current staff.

Some providers serve hundreds of clients with pro bono volunteers each year and would like to serve hundreds more, while some small providers serve dozens and would like to serve dozens more.

Top 10 Statewide Pro Bono Needs

These case types received the most provider votes for “strong need.”
1. Private landlord/tenant
2. Divorce/separation/annulment
3. Custody/visitation
4. Wills/estates
5. Advance directives/powers of attorney
6. Bankruptcy/debtor relief
7. Adult guardianship/conservator
8. Domestic abuse
9. Collections (including repossession/garnishment)
10. Support

Survey respondents rated the relative time needed to handle a matter and the complexity for each case type. Of the top ten needs, the time needed is low in all but these three categories: divorce and support were rated medium and custody was rated high. The complexity level was rated as low in all but one category. Bankruptcy was rated medium in complexity.

Private landlord tenant cases, for example, were the number one pro bono need, and they ranked medium in client demand but were desired by many providers; they were ranked low in time needed and in complexity. Divorce/separation/annulment cases were the number two pro bono need, and they ranked high in client demand, “varies” in complexity, and low in complexity. To view the complete list of statewide needs, for http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/Pro_Bono_Council/Statewide_needs_survey_2016.pdf

Program Needs

The committee also reported the strongest pro bono needs by providers that participated in the survey, including contact information and additional comments. Pro bono needs expressed by the eighteen individual programs responding varied. Some legal aid programs and independent providers like Rappahannock Legal Services and the Veterans Initiative listed many different types of cases in which they need pro bono help, while a few agencies like Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society and the Community Tax Law Project listed just a few subject areas for help.


David Neumeyer is the executive director of the Virginia Legal Aid Society.

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recordings may be viewed for informational purposes only and are not eligible for MCLE credit. Following the webinar, the registration information of the attendee is sent to the appropriate legal aid or pro bono provider organization to facilitate the case referral or collection of the attorney’s financial contribution.

The webinars are, in a small way, making a difference. For example, “Uncontested Divorces: A Webinar for Pro Bono Lawyers in Northern Virginia” in 2015 was attended by forty-one attorneys who agreed to accept two uncontested divorce referrals from their choice of the jurisdictions served by Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV). Attendees heard presentations by Jennifer Fulmer, LSNV’s Pro bono managing attorney, and Laura O’Brien an attorney with Kelly Byrnes & Danker. Attendees were provided with a training manual and sample pleadings. Following the webinar, attorneys received their case assignments and, as a result of their pro bono efforts, were able to almost eliminate LSNV’s sizeable backlog of uncontested divorce cases.

To date, the VSB has conducted twenty-seven pro bono programs that have been attended by 1,435 lawyers. Additionally, Access to Legal Services staff assisted the Virginia Lawyer Referral Service, Lawyers Helping Lawyers, the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission, the VSB Young Lawyers Conference, the Intellectual Property Section, and the VSB-VBA Joint ADR Committee to conduct CLE webinars.