

VLF Grant Fuels JusticeServer Expansion

by Alexandra S. Fannon

Times are challenging, and changing. Recent studies indicate that 80 percent of civil legal needs go unmet in Virginia. Given that one million Virginians live in poverty, and 48 percent of those will encounter a legal problem each year on average, legal aid organizations have 480,000 potential clients in the commonwealth, just in 2013. With budget cuts, legal aid staff is dwindling, and so is its ability to serve underprivileged Virginians. In the current conditions, legal aids can only handle about 35,000 cases a year, for the benefit of nearly 87,000 people. That means almost 400,000 Virginians each year do not have access to the services of a lawyer on civil matters.

The good news is pro bono lawyer volunteerism is on the rise. More attorneys than ever appreciate the need and obligation to give back, and they are looking for paths of service.

The Solution: JusticeServer

The best ways to attack the legal aid crisis are to provide more volunteer pro bono lawyers, improve efficiency to stretch legal aid lawyers' capability, and develop a centralized organization for the delivery of services around Virginia. JusticeServer provides all of these and more.

At the Supreme Court of Virginia's 2010 Pro Bono Summit, leaders at Capital One pledged to build for legal aid a state-of-the-art information management and case referral system. Capital One began leading a collaborative project team composed of members of the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation (GRBF), the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS), the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) and the Virginia Bar Association Pro Bono Task Force. This core team deconstructed the current processes of civil case intake, case management, and case placement with pri-



The Virginia Law Foundation in July presented a check for \$100,000 to the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation to help fund the JusticeServer program. Presenting the check were (from left) Leslie A.T. Haley, president of the GRBF; James V. Meath, VLF president elect; Alexandra S. Fannon, GRBF executive director; and John D. Epps, VLF vice president. JusticeServer, which was featured in a June/July 2012 *Virginia Lawyer* article, is an online case management and referral system developed in collaboration between the GRBF, the Legal Aid Justice Center, and Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. The system allows volunteer attorneys, paralegals, and law students to work on pro bono cases online.

ivate bar volunteers. The result was the creation of JusticeServer, an online case management and pro bono opportunity matching system.

With an internet connection, legal aid staff can now screen client eligibility, provide legal service, and collect required case information on the JusticeServer system — tripling functionality for less cost. From JusticeServer, staff can track case activity, attach documents or pleadings, or even e-mail the client. Supervisors can track individual and team productivity, and monitor the status of cases. Any data entered into JusticeServer can be tracked, tallied, and analyzed through a robust reporting feature.

Besides being a legal aid nerve center, JusticeServer is also a lawyer recruitment tool, a case referral system, a website, and a virtual law library. Through its Pro Bono Portal, www.justiceserver.org, JusticeServer provides a centralized location for any interested attorney, law student, or paralegal to register and create a profile of pro bono interest (practice area and location). The profile is used to filter the available cases

of interest and to trigger e-mail notifications about case availability.

JusticeServer allows participating legal aid and nonprofit organizations to send cases to the Pro Bono Portal in one easy step. The portal provides levels of secure information for the volunteers to browse opportunities, perform the conflicts check, evaluate the case, and accept the pro bono engagement. The Pro Bono Portal allows legal aid to exchange all client information and relevant documents with the volunteer online, and vice versa.

Current status:

Only Virginia has this technology. A JusticeServer pilot is underway in central Virginia. Thanks to the generosity of the Virginia Law Foundation with a \$100,000 grant to the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation, the core team collaborative partnership can continue to enhance the pilot version and expand to other pilot regions, with full deployment throughout Virginia by 2015.

With technology advances, the commonwealth can operate as one region. As

the world shrinks, organizations such as the Virginia Bar Association and the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation can rally and deploy lawyers statewide. With the expansion of JusticeServer, we can make initiatives like distance lawyering, virtual pro bono law firms (Firms In Service), and centralized deployment of specialized law projects realities in the commonwealth.

We thank the Virginia Law Foundation for being justice servers, and partnering in this groundbreaking solution to improve access to justice for hundreds of thousands of Virginians.

Endnote:

- 1 The active members of the Core Team are: Alexandra S. Fannon (executive director, GRBF), Alex R. Gulotta (executive director, LAJC), Kathleen D. Caldwell (senior attorney, LAJC), Phillip T. Storey (attorney, LAJC), Dan Epstein (finance, LAJC), Stephen E. Dickinson (executive director, CVLAS), Martin D. Wegbreit (senior attorney, CVLAS), Bill Burnet (senior business analyst, Capital One), and Michele Deane (senior project manager).



Alexandra S. Fannon is executive director of the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation. She previously was an assistant city attorney for City of Richmond, representing various city departments in all levels of courts and administrative hearings and providing legal counsel on issues ranging from constitutional to public relations. She has been on the board of directors of the Metropolitan Richmond Women's Bar Association, the board of directors of local nonprofit CARITAS, and the Local Government Attorneys' Standing Pro Bono Committee.



1. Pete Johnson of Hunton & Williams and Scott Oostdyk of McGuireWoods were co-chairs of the Virginia Bar Association's Pro Bono Committee when the JusticeServer project began.
2. John G. Finneran Jr., general counsel and corporate secretary of Capital One Financial Corporation, brought a team of experts to the project.
3. The Capital One team (l-r): IT Director Andy Schwarz, Michelle Deane for supply chain management, Brent Timberlake from the legal department, Elizabeth Wood in communications, and Bill Burnet from operations.
4. Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli presents JusticeServer T-shirts to Alex Gulotta (left) and Steve Dickinson, at a luncheon following an April 2012 Pro Bono Summit. The shirt portrays Gulotta's comparison of the old Legal Aid case management system to a plastic picnic knife — not effective for getting the work done.