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**Managing Service Quality & Maintaining Funding Levels
While Positioning The Program For Greater Community Impact**

Legal services is exciting because getting results for people is exciting.

I have been in legal services since 1974. I started as a paralegal in San Jose for the Legal Aid Society of Santa Clara County, California. I went to night school and became a lawyer. I worked there for 8 years as a paralegal and another 7 years as an attorney. Then I went to Micronesia and worked for the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation as a managing attorney of 2 regional offices and as a litigation director, for a total of 9 years. In 1999 I interviewed for this job and was hired. I have been here for 3.5 years.

I was drawn to legal services from the beginning. In school I was a recreation and leisure studies major. I had long hair in the 70s and I was a basketball referee. I wanted to referee high school but they said to do that I had to cut my hair. I didn't think that was fair. So I went to the ACLU and got it overturned. Through this I met Bob Baines who was a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Santa Clara County. I was fascinated by the work done at legal aid.

I got a job at legal aid through the federal CETA employment and training program. The job was to represent clients in front of administrative law judges in public benefits cases. This was exciting work. What kept me excited and working was the success in getting results for clients. In 75 to 80% of the cases the client was successful! It was a great feeling to know that I was able to play a role in obtaining critically-needed benefits to which the client was entitled.

Moving from litigating to spotting trends and being the public face of the program.

I am a litigator by background. As director I have a small caseload. I have not been able to do as much litigation as I would like. My ideal role is to be an executive director who also has a law practice. I saw the executive director in San Mateo County, California, taking cases, being co-counsel and then handling administration the rest of the time. I thought that this was a great approach.

My role is to spot trends and transmit them to the staff for action. I need to discuss the trends that are exciting to folks. My role is to keep staff excited, involved, interested and on mission. There are not many opportunities to move up in a program. I have to give staff the message that there are opportunities. I want to resist turnover so I have to motivate.

How I spend my time is roughly:

- 5-10% on assuring quality of service and that includes dealing with client complaints.
- 30-40% on what I call “keeping the revenue flowing”, or marketing, and that includes time spent on fundraising applications and reporting.
- 5% on the public face, the soft development work of relationship building.
- 40-50% on some case work but mostly administrative, including personnel.

I feel I should be spending much more time on the public face role. My responsibility is to be out there. Instead of 5% it should be 20%. We have recently hired a deputy director to provide assistance in a number of areas. I hope this will free me up for more of a public role.

We are a local service program with major community funding.

We are a traditional staff program with significant private bar involvement. We have seven offices with 27 attorneys, and 12 paralegals. We have a total staff of 61 employees. Some 280 private attorneys participate in our pro bono program. We handle 5,500 cases per year.

Legal Services of Northern Virginia has a budget of \$3M per year. We went from \$2.6M in 1999 to \$3.0M in 2002. Our major revenue sources are:

- \$1.37M total from the counties of Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun and Prince William and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park.
- \$0.6M from Legal Service Corporation of Virginia. That includes IOLTA, a state appropriation and a state filing fee.
- \$0.08M from United Way.
- \$0.15M from the Department of Justice, VAWA funding.

The remaining funding is from other grants from both governmental and non-governmental sources and our fundraising campaign. For example, we get \$75K from a community foundation to work with day laborers.

Local support allowed us to spin off the federal LSC money and help restructure the local delivery system.

We wanted to set up a hotline unit to respond immediately to people. I couldn't figure out how to do it within our structure. The LSC reconfiguration exercise was a good opportunity to deal with these issues.

The LSC money was \$517K. The other \$2.5M came from State and local sources. Faced with an LSC-driven forced merger with an adjoining program, our need to establish a hotline, and our desire to open our doors to all immigrants in our service area, we made a decision to voluntarily relinquish our LSC funding beginning in 2002. We supported the formation of a new 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Potomac Legal Aid Society. Potomac, a hotline program, became the LSC grantee for our former service area as well as the service area of Rappahannock Legal Services, the

program to our South. By spinning off our LSC funds we were free to expand to serve all immigrants. We could stop saying “no” and could more properly respond to the needs of our local low-income community. We simply could not continue to ignore a major segment of our community.

We wanted to avoid merging to form a big region in order to preserve our local identity and support. We work closely with localities: Fairfax, Alexandria, Arlington, Loudoun, and Prince William. Historically, we have received major funding from local governments.

Local government has a tradition here of supporting legal services in a big way.

If you look at the statewide resources for legal services contributed by local government we get 80% of Virginia’s local dollars. The seed was planted a long time ago. We are paid to represent local residents in court.

Fairfax County gives us \$617K to represent folks who need legal services. This funding is a long historical tradition. It started way before I arrived. Fairfax County has supported us for many years, including providing us free office space. They gave us space right next to the courthouse. Arlington grants us \$322K and Alexandria \$193K.

Local governments are buying social services and constituent services. They see themselves buying legal assistance for low income residents. They know the money available from other sources is inadequate. For example, they think it’s important for residents to be found eligible for Social Security benefits and we are a way to make sure it happens. Legal services is seen as one part of a continuum of social services that residents should be receiving.

County supervisors, I believe, see us at the level of constituent services. They refer their constituents to us. We are seen by many as a resource in the community, a place to refer people. We were having a meeting in the library and they had a no food policy. I asked could we bring in lunch. The librarian asked who we were. When I said we were LSNV she said, “Oh yes, we refer people to you all the time. Of course you can bring food in.”

The money comes from the local governments in several ways.

In Arlington County we are part of a group of non-profits that get funded. In other counties we are a line item in the budget. We are in the city manager’s budget in several localities.

Fairfax and Alexandria wanted to avoid organizations’ lobbying the board of supervisors so they created an anonymous advisory committee that oversees a consolidated community funding pool. The committee decides how much will go to each community organization for services and then the board of supervisors votes. In the end we deal with the administrative people from the county. Fairfax County officials visit us on a quarterly basis as part of their contract monitoring duties.

Local funding means being known and being responsive.

In Fairfax County we have to be responsive to the board of supervisors. There are two other groups we have to keep happy. Local government contracts people and judges. The importance of responding to judges has been brought home to me in Fairfax. About five years ago some of the judges were frustrated because in their opinion there was an inadequate number of attorneys from the program in court. They went to the bar to complain. This created a serious problem for the previous director.

Today the judges who were critics are supporters of the program. When a supporter offers criticism you have to listen very carefully. We didn't always do that in the past.

It's important for the judges to know the director and for the staff to see that. My goal is to be seen, known, and appear before every judge. There are 80 judges in our jurisdiction. I have a small caseload and, so far, have only appeared before 7 local judges. I have met a number of other judges in bar events and social gatherings. I have a long way to go to have a personal connection with all 80 judges.

One judge complained to me, "we are not seeing you [our program] enough." So a couple of times a year I have lunch with him. I get feedback that I can respond to. I encourage judges to communicate with me so problems do not grow.

I did a survey of the 80 judges. One said, "I don't know what you do." I went to lunch with the Judge. She reported that residents appearing *pro se* were saying that they went to legal services and legal services sent them to the court. She wanted us to finish the entire matter when we assist a client.

We are sending our annual report out to the judges. This report is in an "our story" format, containing outcomes, case statistics and client stories. I have tried to do it in a communicative way since I don't practice enough to engage them all. I go to bar events. I get involved in legal education events.

Arlington County had an issue with us. They are paying more per poor person than other counties. Arlington officials want to make sure they get their fair share of service for their low-income residents. They threatened to cut funding for our program and to put money in escrow. I saw this as an opportunity to respond. We provide information on cases. We started a weekly clinic at the Department of Human Services. We opened a new Arlington Office. We increased our staffing. We increased our income levels for clients from 187.5% to 225% for Arlington residents only. We increased our visibility in Arlington by having a booth at the County fair, appearing at other community events and hosting a forum on the housing needs of low-income residents.

Securing local funding is building relationships.

How do we get support from local government? We have been increasing funding in two localities: Loudoun County and Prince William County. Both have growing poverty populations.

In Loudoun we had a local office that was struggling because it was understaffed. We meet with individual supervisors to make the case for more funding. We went to the board of supervisors and got the local bar involved. We got the bar president to lobby and speak in support. As a result of increased funding following lobbying efforts, we were able to open an office in downtown Leesburg (Loudoun County) and add an additional attorney in our Prince William office.

It's getting the board of supervisors interested. There are different kinds of supervisors. There are those who already know us and are supportive. They refer people to the program. They like human services. They believe that their constituency needs this kind of service. These people we give information to, like case figures and outcome data. Then there are those who know a little about us but it's very fuzzy. Here we start from scratch and build a relationship with them. We inform and educate. Then there are those who don't support legal services or at least don't support any public funding for legal services. We still try to lobby these individuals and make an effort to share program information and hit common themes that they might otherwise support.

We have data base information that is useful in assuring service quality and in describing to local funders what they purchased.

We have a lot of case information. It's data base information. It comes off our own case management system. We have a Microsoft Access-based program on a wide area network, real time. It can be accessed remotely from home or other locations.

The biggest use of data is internally. I can generate reports and use it for internal analysis. I have data on number of cases per attorney. I can look at the data by supervisor. We have outcome data. Ken Smith has worked with Legal Service Corporation of Virginia in developing over 100 outcomes for clients. His outcome system is mandated by our state IOLTA program. Outcome information is particularly helpful in lobbying for money.

We also have client satisfaction data. We send out a client satisfaction survey when a file is closed. The survey comes to me. I read several every week. Sometimes I see complaints and patterns. At performance reviews I meet with lawyers. One attorney had received complaints that he hadn't listened. I talked to the attorney. He was scheduling client appointments every half hour. He was quick at spotting issues and then he would cut to the chase. He wasn't spending time connecting with the client and allowing the client to fully explain the problem. We met and discussed this. He changed his approach, went to a 45 minute meeting, and the complaints have stopped.

Client satisfaction data alone is never enough for quality assurance. We had a paralegal with extremely high satisfaction scores, but he was also inappropriately handling cases. It was inadequate work. That did not show up in the client satisfaction surveys. The clients didn't know.

I track productivity. We look at case numbers and annual levels. There are no case number standards on productivity. We are better off with case quality reviews. Take an hour and look at case files.

We are looking at new census data by area vs. where our clients live. We see communities with many low-income residents but where we either have no office or few clients, or both. With 7 offices we have a community presence. My goal is to expand to 10 offices in the near future. An expansion does not always involve additional expenses. We were able to open a new office in Arlington last year by subleasing a portion of our main office to a community group with which we work closely. Another sublease will fund the expansion of our Arlington office later this year.

We have systems in place to assure quality and we will make them stronger.

For case quality we have supervisory standards to review the work of attorneys and paralegals. Each attorney and paralegal has a quality review of cases by a peer. Sometimes it's done every six months or annually, depending on the experience level of the case handler. Peer review is important. In the case of one paralegal, clients complained to the managing attorney. I reviewed a random sample of 13 cases. I found serious practice problems in two. He was with us six years. We should have caught this sooner. We do have bi-weekly meetings on cases but missed it. We are going to implement new state standards to do quality review on a more systematic basis. State planning came up with standards calling for quarterly review of files and review of court appearances. It is necessary to look at the case files. We also need to implement a formal system of capturing peer case review data. We do have yearly employee performance evaluations that sometimes contain discussions of case review issues.

We have six managing attorneys and five practice group managing attorneys, with some overlap. All of them have peer review responsibilities. All our managing attorneys are full time practitioners. The time they spend on quality assurance varies, from 5% to 20%.

If asked I would say we have quality service today. The reason we have quality is because the staff cares about quality. I would also say we can do better by improving our system of review.

If asked to demonstrate quality I would do it by showing the systems we have in place to assure it. I would show the supervisory standards, the structure, bi-weekly practice group meetings, the supervisor model, etc.

We will continue to grow our resources.

Today we are at \$3M. We need to be at \$6-9M to meet the need in this area. I see money coming from a number of sources.

I expect to raise \$0.5M from private bar and corporation contributions. It averaged \$5,000 - \$17,000 per year when I came in 1999. We brought in Dennis Dorgan, a fundraising consultant. We raised \$125,000 our first year. We can double that.

The state may be a source of new money. LSCV (the state IOLTA program) is seeking voluntary state bar dues contributions. We will go after foundation grants. We write a lot of proposals. I need a deputy director for fundraising.

Also we need to continue cutting expenses and improving our efficiency. We pay \$15,000/month rent for our main office. We can do better. If we can significantly reduce our space costs, we can hire additional staff.

The next step is to play a bigger role in the community.

When I look three years out I see things to accomplish and three approaches come to mind: (1) increase our connection with many other organizations, community groups and agencies; (2) increase our visibility as a major player; and (3) becoming very well known in our community. *One is increasing our connection so that the big “no” is over.* Now we frequently have to say “no” to people seeking service. I want it to be in a place where we don’t have to say “no.” We can respond to all. We serve 187% of poverty now. I want to go to 250%. This means adequate staffing. It means being more connected with other organizations and services.

We are evolving into a delivery model that is better connected with social service organizations. It is inclusive of other locations with other organizations such as Arlington County Human Services Department and the courthouse. There will be more partnerships with community organizations where we are getting referrals and giving referrals. I want a community-based intake system. Our domestic violence program illustrates the relationships we want. We have cooperative agreements with over 50 organizations. It involves the courts, sheriffs, shelters, domestic violence programs, sexual abuse programs, and social services projects. I want to move away from the client always having to call us or drop by one of our offices. It will be more referral, more outreach. I want there to be more of a connection.

Two is visibility as a major player and activist. I want LSNV visible as a major spokesperson for people in poverty. When there is an issue I want the Washington Post to come here to find out what is going on. I want the TV news people to come here. I want to be the visible organization for the poor in Northern Virginia. The more visibility we have the better the results we can achieve for our clients.

I would like to achieve the acceptance here that I saw legal services earn in Micronesia. There the status of legal services was very high. For example, in one state I was invited to the governor’s inaugural and participated up close. Judges were very aware of the program. There was an acceptance of legal services as a major player in the justice system and in the community at large. There was visibility not only as an effective legal advocate, but also as an active player.

Third, is that we are known by agencies, client groups and organizations. They know who we are and that we are effective. They know the issues to bring to us. We are a major player, an activist. We are doing things to make ourselves known. An example is our decision to give up LSC money. That freed us from immigrant service restrictions. Now we are much better known in the immigrant community. We have received great feedback from immigrant organizations. Our data base is showing the effect. The percent of immigrant cases of our total caseload increased from 14.5% to 20% during the first 6 months after we opened our doors to all immigrants.

Bottom line stories and compelling themes get the sympathetic listening we need.

I have had to learn how to say what we do so that it generates sympathetic listening. It's not "we stopped an eviction" or "did a divorce." It's "we kept a family sheltered" and "we unified a family in a stable environment."

Our work on domestic violence was favorably considered by a female legislator who backed a state filing fee bill. She responded. We have real connections with the police and courts and attorney general in the domestic violence area. We are on the right side and we use it.

I like to hit common themes when we meet with elected officials. Themes like child support, unifying the family. I can show over time that we helped women get money for their children. We can make arguments like a one dollar increase in the state filing fee will help so many people. You can be against legal aid and still believe that people need help with Social Security. You can be against legal aid and believe that mothers need help in collecting child support. These are the common themes that resonate with all.

Fairfax County has a \$50K contract with us to represent disabled welfare recipients. The objective is to get them off the county welfare rolls and on to the federal program. Shift the cost from local to federal SSI and Social Security. We build a base of information and show it generates dollar benefits for the county. We are partners with local government in providing services to residents. We show we are bringing dollars into the community. If we show results on the bottom line we will get support. For example, our HIV/AIDS Law Program saved health clinics money by shifting people to Medicaid. Clinics have given us cost data showing a cost of \$1,000-\$3,000 a month to treat persons suffering from HIV/AIDS. We are bringing more health care dollars into the community.

We are increasing child support collections. More dollars to residents and into the community. Local government will say, yes, this is a good investment.

The key is to tie the story to a compelling set of themes. A theme is: collecting \$600K/year in child support. Have bottom line stories. We can put them out now. For example: child support, SSI, savings to consumers in certain transactions.

There is an involvement strategy we are pursuing using community forums.

We co-sponsored a community forum on the housing needs of low-income residents in Arlington. Several of our staff attorneys gave talks on low-income affordable housing issues. All members of the Arlington board of supervisors showed up. They liked it. I would like to replicate this.

We did a hearing on living wages. It was about child care providers for women on welfare. It was put together with tenant workers organization. People testified. Politicians were there. It got news coverage. I would take a lot of issues like these and create community forums. See who shows up. Work with those individuals, groups, and agencies to jointly address problems adversely affecting low-income residents.

This is a strategy to focus the community on an issue in order to generate partnerships. We are involved in several ways, as a sponsor, as a participant. There are payoffs. It increases our visibility. People see us as an active player. As a result we get referrals. We get asked to take on work by other organizations, to play a role. New grant possibilities is the by-product.

Evaluation today is geared to quality assurance and accountability to funders.

Legal Service Quality Assurance. It's routine peer review of cases, complemented with survey and case management data. We do it now and it can be better.

The evaluation involves (a) supervisory peer case review, (b) an annual performance appraisal, (c) signals of performance issues from case management and client satisfaction survey data, and (d) informal feedback from encounters with judges, social service agencies. This is a professional judgment system. It is assurance, more like a certification than measuring quality on a scale.

Informal Satisfaction Survey Of Community Institution. There are customers other than clients that I talk to for evaluative feedback. Those that see us in service to the client and who also work with the client – judges, social services agencies, libraries, elected officials, ... I intentionally schedule to talk to the judges. It is an informal evaluation survey even though I do not write it down. I have less frequent encounters with other such as elected officials and social service agencies like the welfare director. When I do meet I get comments such as, "attorney so and so is doing a great job," or, "I can't get through to the office in X."

I should meet with these people more routinely and more formally. Last year I went to Richmond to talk to our local legislators, in session, about the filing fee. That went well and they appreciated hearing from us. But most of the time they are here, back home. . I should be meeting with them here.

In the past LSNV would break down our data by legislative district. We could tell a legislator the number of people in need and the number we served in his or her district. This is a good idea and we should restart that approach.

Being Accountable For A Service "Contract": Evaluation provides counts of clients, outcomes, and benefits that show funders our contract with them has been fulfilled.

Funders purchase services and we report on what we deliver. Funders have their own forms we have to fill out. Services provided are measured by case management and survey data. We can make distinctions among quantity, quality, outcomes, value added. Funders make very specific demands.

Fairfax, for example, is very involved in checking on the services they purchase. They have on-line monthly reporting. There are a series of questions we have to answer including the demographics of people, the outcomes. United Way has its own forms. We try to steer them to

accept elements already in our data system. We use the state mandated system that has us report on outcomes and this has been very useful.

In the future I would like to have evaluation that helps me market projects and helps me position LSNV as a major player.

Proactive Marketing of Compelling Results to Funders: An evaluation system would support marketing by compiling case outcomes and client stories around major themes.

We are into developing case outcome data. We are being helped out by Ken Smith. We capture results, like documented monetary awards to clients (Social Security, back child support, etc.), and monthly savings. It is part of our outcome reporting. Case statistics and outcomes are effective in lobbying. We use “bottom line” stories and quotes organized around compelling themes.

Recent Fairfax County contract negotiations resulted in the kind of results based partnership I envision. We entered into a contract to take people from general relief to SSI and Social Security. We get more money for clients and we obtain more money for the county. Fairfax County gets financial relief.

It is not difficult to do this kind of work. On closing cases we get the data required. However, we have only an informal process to get client stories or quotes. The process is: I send out an e-mail to staff and they send back stories. We give it all to Ken Smith for a write up. It goes into our Annual Report, a marketing, informational and fundraising piece. If you asked to see our results-based evaluations, I would show you the Annual Report.

I would be interested in further development of our ability to capture the client stories and to develop innovative case presentations. I saw a publication by the Legal Aid Justice Center in Virginia for their building campaign and it was a wonderful piece with client quotes and stories and great graphics. I loved it. We are not there yet. That’s the direction that I would like to move towards. This could be used in many ways. By investing in this capability we would substantially increase fundraising, lawyer interest, funding applications, attention, etc. The payoff would be more revenue and greater visibility.

Campaign To Position LSNV As A Major Player In The Community: Evaluation can be used to track performance in achieving this vision. Track the achievement of LSNV becoming “more connected,” “more visible,” “more known.” We can measure it through: surveys of community residents and organizations, number of media stories, number and strength of referral connections, number of collaborative grant proposals each quarter, trend in grant dollars brought in, community forums held with participation and partnerships that follow.

Now I keep this in my head. I would love a system to track progress to manage and to get others to help. If we polled residents in northern Virginia today only 5% would know about us. That has to change. I want us to have such visibility and credibility that when you hear we are in a case everyone says there must be merit to it. This will directly translate to more favorable outcomes for our clients. I would be interested in developing a system to make this happen.