

Partnering to Create a Successful Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project

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Brief Description:

Pro bono bankruptcy projects have sprung up across the country in recent years to help address a variety of concerns in bankruptcy courts, such as an increase in pro se litigants. In this workshop, the panelists will discuss their involvement in pro bono bankruptcy projects designed to address these problems by bringing together various segments of the legal community. Discussion will center on the panelists' efforts to provide training for all volunteers, serve as mentors to participants, and work with other legal entities to develop coordinated intake and referral procedures.

Topical Overview:

- I. Creating a Successful Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project
- II. The Benefits of Partnering
- III. Mechanics/Infrastructure of a Successful Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project
- IV. Maintaining a Successful Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project

Program Overview:

South Jersey Legal Services & Rutgers University Law School – Camden

- I. SJLS Involvement with Clients
 - a. Provides screening for income eligibility.
 - b. Assist applicants in filling out pro bono questionnaire.
 - c. SJLS attorneys and paralegals make presentations to local community groups.
 - d. Recruit new attorneys.
 - e. SJLS attorneys are a resource for volunteers.

II. Rutgers Law School

- a. Recruits and trains student volunteers.
- b. Student participants are assigned to assist attorneys during initial client interviews.
- c. In addition to being prepared to conduct the client interviews, students are responsible for follow up, which includes, calling creditors when necessary and completing petitions and schedules. Students are expected to attend Section 341 Hearings for the clients they assist whenever class schedules permit.
- d. Train attorney volunteers and recruit alumni to participate.
- e. Sets up client appointments and schedule student volunteers to assist Project attorneys.
- f. Clients meet with law students and attorney supervisors at the law school during evening hours.
- g. SJLS recruits Rutgers student as interns, externs, paid and volunteer clerks.

III. Bar Association Involvement

- a. At the start of the project provided seed money to get things in place.
- b. Training is provided by members of the Debtor/Creditor Section of the Camden County Bar Association and other attorneys involved.
- c. Pro Bono attorneys involved in the Rutgers Project serve as the Attorney of Record on case referrals and supervise the work of law student volunteers.
- d. Experienced attorneys mentor new recruits with limited bankruptcy experience.
- e. Attorneys are expected to provide close supervision and timely feedback to law students as they prepare the bankruptcy petitions, client correspondence, or other documents related to the cases in preparation for the bankruptcy filing.

IV. Bankruptcy Court Participation

- a. Program originated out of concern of Judge Judith H. Wizmur that many that a significant number of Southern New Jersey residents were

filing pro se petitions for bankruptcy relief, or were not filing because of a lack of pro bono legal representation.

- b. Judge Judith H. Wizmur and her staff also attends the training to provide further guidance and instruction.
- c. Judge Wizmur hosts an annual meeting with members of the Bar, Rutgers Law School and SJLS to make sure that project continues to run smoothly as well as an annual thank you reception for the pro bono volunteers.

V. Sample Forms

- a. Bankruptcy Questionnaire
- b. Money Wise Bankruptcy Info Pamphlet
- c. NJ Iolta Bankruptcy Pamphlet
- d. Training Manual

Consumer Education and Training Services (CENTS)

I. Overview

- a. Non-profit organization
- b. Formed in 1995 by bankruptcy, legal service and accounting professionals and members of the King County Bar Association
- c. Launched its website (www.centsprogram.com) in December 2003

II. Programs

- a. Weekly pro bono debt clinics
- b. Monthly money management classes
 - i. Curriculum
 - ii. Essential adult learning elements
- c. Statewide education outreach tour

III. Forming a Non-Profit Organization