



LAW SCHOOL CONSORTIUM PROJECT

2005 Recipient of the ABA Brown Award for Legal Access

The Law School Consortium Project is a national nonprofit organization working with law schools to create and sustain networks of solo and small firm practitioners who are dedicated to providing affordable legal services to low and moderate income communities. By supporting a unique partnership between law schools, practitioners, students and communities, the Law School Consortium Project (LSCP) is helping to increase access to justice for individuals and families who could not otherwise afford legal services.

The Law School Consortium Project was founded by four law schools in 1997 with the support of the Open Society Institute to address issues of inadequate access to justice for low and moderate income populations. The founding law schools developed models to demonstrate that the Law School Consortium Project could make a difference in access to justice, in the viability of solo and small firm practices, and in law school curriculum. The law schools, providing both school resources and commitment, recruited graduates, provided them with technical assistance and substantive/ law office management training, and brought them into a network of other practitioners committed to social justice.

Some of the LSCP Law School Members also incorporated practical courses into their curriculum that trained students to become solo and small firm community based lawyers. Courses included Law Office Management, with a focus on how to run a small business, while others focused on substantive areas such as Predatory Lending, Immigration Practice, Special Education, Domestic Violence, and Spanish for Lawyers. LSCP law schools have also established externships for law students at LSCP Practitioner Members' law practices.

Today, the LSCP has sixteen Law School Members nationally, with LSCP Practitioner Members engaging in private forms of public interest law, often giving their low and moderate income clients discounted rates (we call this *low bono*). According to a 2005 survey of LSCP Practitioner Members, 43% of legal services provided by LSCP practitioners were *low bono* cases. The survey also revealed that 63% of LSCP Practitioner Members reported that their participation in a LSCP network allowed them to provide services to more low and moderate income clients, and 92% reported that their participation allowed them to promote social justice in their practices. According to the survey, over 40% of LSCP Practitioner Members are of color, and over 60% are female.*

The Law School Consortium Project and its Law School Members are proud to support a new vision of the lawyer: a community practitioner who can do well while doing good.

**Additional survey results can be found in the next section of the LSCP Information Packet.*



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Practitioner Testimonials

An important objective of the Law School Consortium Project is to build community among typically isolated solo and small firm practitioners, connecting them with each other, and connecting them to resources and services. This enables the attorneys to have viable practices, providing legal services to individuals and communities who otherwise would not have access to justice. LSCP practitioner members, many of whom are attorneys of color and female attorneys, use their law degrees to make a difference:

A young practitioner who was once an illegal immigrant from Colombia and is now a lawyer operating a legal information community center for Hispanic immigrants: "Without the network I might have had to defer my dream for five to 10 years while I got experience somewhere else. I would not have been able to go out on my own or to help this community right away."

A gentleman dedicated to social justice causes: "It is great dealing with people who have a sense of social justice. You have more commonality in this network than you would in a general bar association. . . My practice is profitable. Of course, I could make a lot more money if I wanted to, but I don't . . . I have a deep commitment in me to social justice issues."

A network participant who represents low-income women who were abused: "Without [the network], I could not continue my dream of representing low-income battered women and also take pro bono cases from agencies who represent indigent battered women."

A practitioner member who is able to offer higher quality services through his participation in the Law School Consortium Project: "Saving time allows me to take on more clients for smaller fees. [The network] helps me save time with legal issues and practical issues. . . I can spend more time being an effective advocate and less on office details."

A young practitioner who no longer feels the isolation solo practice can often create: "As a solo, I felt isolated and had no group or individual to turn to for help with procedural matters, legal issues, approaches to individual cases and research. . . . I do not believe that I would still be in practice without the [network]."

LSCP Practitioner Members report that their membership provides them with:

- "a sense of community. . . the ability to help and be helped."
- "the security of knowing that there are experienced attorneys who can guide me when I face a new situation."
- an "incredible sense of social justice purpose among like minded practitioners, leading to valuable insights into specific legal case issues and problems."



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Client Testimonials

The mission of the Law School Consortium Project is to make legal services affordable and accessible to low and middle income communities. The difference that the LSCP solo and small firm practitioners are making in serving these populations is evident from the many comments of clients being directly served by LSCP Practitioner Members:

The son of a fifty-eight year old Asian woman who needed help with a wrongful termination case: "While the other lawyer cut his losses and got out after thinking that he could not bring a long, drawn out case, [the LSCP Practitioner Member] took on the case so she could help my mom and not solely for the money. My mom felt completely comfortable and relaxed to have the case taken care of by [her]. It is very rare to get the type of person who really cares about what they are doing and really wants to help people."

A seventy-year old man living on social security who faced the prospect of losing his home: "Even though I did not have any up-front money, she was willing to take me on my word. That meant a great deal to me. A great deal!"

An immigrant woman from El Salvador who needed a lawyer to obtain a divorce and child support: "Other lawyers I have gone to, they don't care about the people. They just care about the money. . . [The LSCP Practitioner Member] will do work for the community no matter how much money they have. He has a lot of compassion for the people."

A recent immigrant to the United States: "Where other attorneys were charging me double for changing my name after I became a naturalized U.S. citizen, [the LSCP Member Practitioner] was able to charge me a lot less."

A Hispanic woman who needed to escape an abusive husband: "I was thankful that she took my case and that I was able to afford her.... I was a mess. [The LSCP Member Practitioner] was like a counselor to me. She gave advice even outside of the divorce, like that I had to file a report for every abusive incident with the police and about my order of protection.... But most importantly, [she] never made me feel like she judged me in any way. "

An immigrant who needed immigration representation: "[The LSCP Practitioner Member] is my angel. . . If I didn't find him I would have went against the INS without a lawyer. I just couldn't afford it. . . He was so considerate. He did not push me. He just said, 'send me what ever you can.'"



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Law School Member Project Descriptions

CUNY School of Law (Flushing, NY)

The CUNY program, the Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN), includes approximately 180 graduates from solo and small firm practices. CLRN members can participate in one or more Practice Groups which each has a particular focus. Current Practice Groups include: Criminal Defense Practice, General Practice (including family law, domestic violence, elder law, personal injury, real estate, and labor and employment law), Immigration Practice, and Micro-enterprise Practice. These group members receive intense CLE training in their fields, meet on a monthly basis and work together on a public service project. All CLRN members are linked virtually by a listserv that allows them to receive peer mentorship and support, access substantive information, and share case referrals. CLRN is the recipient of a 2003 Equal Justice Fellow.

Program Director: **Fred Rooney** (rooney@mail.law.cuny.edu)

University of Maryland Law School (Baltimore, MD)

The University of Maryland Law School supports Civil Justice, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation which acts as a Demonstration Law Office in conjunction with a network of approximately 60 practitioners who are also linked by a listserv. Civil Justice funds itself, in part, by litigating cases on behalf of low and middle income clients, occasionally acting as co-counsel with its practitioner members, and through contracts with nonprofit housing advocacy agencies. Civil Justice practitioners are expected to pledge to a mission statement that calls for a commitment to increasing access to justice to low and moderate-income individuals. The specialty areas in which network members practice include: consumer, wills and estate planning, family, real estate, personal injury, lemon law and auto fraud, products liability, worker's compensation, administrative law, elder, and alternative dispute resolution. Civil Justice practitioner members also act as supervising lawyers for students in the General Practice Clinic of the Law School.

Program Director: **Denis Murphy** (dmurphy@law.umaryland.edu)

University of Michigan School of Law (Ann Arbor, MI)

The University of Michigan School of Law has developed the Pediatric Advocacy Initiative, an innovative medical-legal collaborative which unites attorneys and clinical students with pediatricians, social workers and medical staff at pediatric health centers to help address the overlap between pediatric patients' legal and medical concerns, including housing, education, and public benefits issues. Previously, the University of Michigan created a collaboration with the Student Advocacy Center, a local community-based organization, to increase legal advocacy for children in the area of "zero tolerance" cases.

Program Director: **Anne Schroth** (schroth@umich.edu)



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University of New Mexico School of Law (Albuquerque, NM)

The University of New Mexico School of Law has created a network of approximately 150 attorneys called the Access to Justice Network. These attorneys are supported through reduced cost continuing education programs, the possibility of externs, bi-monthly luncheons and participation on a listserv. The lawyers take referrals from the law school clinic to provide services for reduced fees in a variety of areas, many of which involve the delivery of legal services to rural areas in New Mexico.

Program Director: **Antoinette Sedillo Lopez** (lopez@law.unm.edu)

New York Law School (New York, NY)

New York Law School's project will support alumni practicing immigration law by providing an effective network via lowbono.org* and enabling them to find information and referrals not always readily available to solo and small-firm practitioners. Once this group is established, NYLS will reach out to alumni in other public-interest related practice areas, including elder law, criminal law, and mental health law.

Program Director: **Carol Buckler** (cbuckler@nyls.edu)

Northeastern University School of Law (Boston, MA)

The Northeastern Economic Development and Domestic Violence models were structured so as to examine how solo and small-firm lawyers can sustain economically viable practices which promote community economic development and prevent family violence by working with non-legal community organizations and other institutions. The Domestic Violence model directly involved Northeastern students who participated in a law school seminar and worked on domestic violence cases with professors and practitioner members.

Program Director: **Jim Rowan** (j.rowan@neu.edu)

**<http://www.lowbono.org> is the LSCP's web portal for practitioner members, featuring relevant news, a calendar of events, including CLE trainings, and an online library complete with substantive information, law office management advice, and technology tips.*



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Northern California Collaborative

The Northern California Collaborative (NCC) is a cooperative effort between five Northern California law schools to create and support a network of solo and small firm practitioners who are dedicated to providing accessible and affordable legal services to low and moderate income Northern California communities. The NCC law schools are:

- **University of California Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall)** (Berkeley, CA)
Program Director: **Mary Louise Frampton** (mlframpton@law.berkeley.edu)
- **Golden Gate University School of Law** (San Francisco, CA)
Program Director: **Susanne Aronowitz** (saronowitz@ggu.edu)
- **University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law** (Sacramento, CA)
Program Director: **Julie Davies** (jdavies@pacific.edu)
- **University of San Francisco School of Law** (San Francisco, CA)
Program Director: **Jackie Ortega** (ortegaj@usfca.edu)
- **Santa Clara University School of Law** (Santa Clara, CA)
Program Director: **Julia Yaffee** (jyaffee@scu.edu)

The NCC will work with local bar associations, community-based organizations, legal services organizations, lawyer referral services, foundations, and local corporations to provide affordable and accessible legal services in currently underserved areas. The NCC will also offer courses, such as a Law Office Management course, for its practitioner members and law students.

Rutgers University School of Law (Newark, NJ)

Rutgers University School of Law is creating a network of juvenile justice attorneys in New Jersey that will work with juvenile public defenders and other local organizations to advocate for children. Additionally, Rutgers is considering offering a Law Office Management course for students and solo and small firm practitioner alumni.

Program Director: **Laura Cohen** (lcohen@kinoy.rutgers.edu)

Syracuse University School of Law (Syracuse, NY)

Syracuse University College of Law is creating the Syracuse Equal Justice Project, a new effort to support solo and small-firm lawyers in developing economically viable and professionally satisfying practices that increase access to justice for traditionally underserved populations with legal needs.

Program Director: **Deborah Kenn** (dkenn@law.syr.edu)



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University of Tennessee College of Law (Knoxville, TN)

The University of Tennessee College of Law has established a Children's Advocacy Network (CAN). CAN will be the umbrella for a number of child advocacy efforts already underway at the College, including legal representation of children in the Legal Clinic, a Community Legal Education course that places students in one of the area inner city high schools, and close faculty ties to youth-oriented projects in the community and region. CAN's foundational project will be the Lawyers Education Advocacy Resource Network (LEARN), which will be developed and coordinated with the aid of a 2004 Equal Justice Fellow.

Program Director: **Dean Rivkin** (rivkin@libra.law.utk.edu)

Thomas Cooley School of Law (Lansing, MI)

The Thomas Cooley program focuses on support of solo and small-firm practitioners through a project designed to educate students about the opportunities and pitfalls of solo and small firm practice and by offering courses which enhance that career path. The Career Services Office at Thomas M. Cooley houses a Solo Support Center with materials and services designed to support students before and after graduation with information regarding the operation of the law firm as a business with Law Office Management as a core course in its curriculum. In addition, updated materials are available for alumni regarding current law management trends and opportunities. Alumni practitioners are also invited to mentor new practitioners through a formal matching program.

Program Director: **Gary Bauer** (bauerg@cooley.edu)

Touro Law Center (Huntington, NY)

Touro's program will be an alumni network that is focused on the provision of *pro bono* and *low bono* legal services. The Law Center will accomplish this by working with local bar associations and legal services programs to recruit appropriate alumni, provide mentoring and support services, offer special CLE training, and provide opportunities for student involvement.

Program Director: **Thomas Maligno** (thomasm@tourolaw.edu)

For more information on individual LSCP Law School Member programs, please visit our website at:

<http://www.lawschoolconsortium.net>