

Legal Hotlines: What's in a Name?

How to provide seamless and high quality legal services, to clients in a multi-service area, through the use of a centrally managed web-based intake system that utilizes intake personnel working from different geographical locations. In other words, how to use cyberspace to get more bang for your buck without sacrificing quality.

I. Overview of Legal Aid Line

- A. Joint project of two legal aid programs and pro bono programs
 - 1. Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE)
 - a. No LSC funds
 - b. Impact litigation
 - c. LSC ineligible clients
 - d. Class actions
 - e. Undocumented aliens
 - 2. Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO)
 - a. Individual service cases
 - b. LSC funded
 - 3. Toledo Bar Association Pro Bono
 - 4. Greater Dayton Volunteer Lawyers Project
- B. Provides independent legal advice and referrals
- C. Provides centralized intake and referral for above-listed programs

II. Service Area, Personnel and Office Locations of Legal Aid Line

- A. Office/Service Areas
 - 1. Legal Aid Line in Toledo covers 32 counties in Ohio
 - 2. ABLE in Toledo and Dayton operates statewide
 - 3. LAWO offices in 8 Ohio cities cover 32 counties
 - a. Dayton, Toledo, and Mansfield
 - b. Sandusky, Fremont, and Lima
 - c. Defiance and Springfield
- B. Personnel Locations
 - 1. Screeners (intake specialists)
 - a. Seven (7) screeners working in the Toledo office
 - b. Three (3) screeners working in the Dayton office
 - c. One (1) screener working in the Lima office
 - d. One (1) screener working in the Fremont office

2. ABLE Attorneys

- a. Managing Attorney in the Toledo office
- b. Supervising Attorney located in Iowa
- c. Full-time remote attorney in Geneseo, New York
- d. Full-time remote attorney in Yellow Springs, Ohio
- e. Part-time remote attorney in Bowling Green, Ohio
- f. Part-time remote attorney in Springfield, Ohio
- g. Part-time attorney in Toledo

3. LAWO Attorneys

- a. One (1) part-time contract attorney in Michigan
- b. Five (5) part-time contract attorneys in Toledo

III. Intake Process for Legal Aid Line

A. Caller seeks assistance by telephone

- 1. Incoming calls come into a digital phone switch in Toledo
- 2. Call is placed in an ACD queue which looks for the next available screener

B. Screener takes application

- 1. Takes basic eligibility information
 - a. Income requirements
 - b. Check for conflicts
 - c. Record basic facts of the case into PIKA case management system
- 2. Assigns to attorneys as scheduled or unscheduled

C. Screener checks for emergencies

- 1. Served with court papers
- 2. Scheduled for court hearing dates
- 3. Served with any other type of official notice from a government agency, a landlord, or any other person
- 4. Harmed or threatened within the past 30 days
- 5. Case assigned emergency response attorney

D. Applicant seeks assistance via the internet

- 1. Applies through Legal Aid Line or ABLE websites
- 2. Legal Aid Line receives 25-35 web applications per day
- 3. Designated screener monitors the web applications
- 4. Screener checks for emergencies and immediate call backs
- 5. Screener makes calls back non emergencies and takes application the next day

E. Screeners use protocols (on-line directions) to schedule “call back” cases and assigns “no call back” cases

- 1. Online case screening protocols:
 - a. Are programmed in the software
 - b. Provide questions for screeners

- c. Are specific to case type
 - d. Dictate protocol to follow
- 2. Online scheduler used for “call backs”
 - a. Next available appointment given for “call backs”
 - b. Daily roster determines assignments of “no call back” cases

IV. Legal Aid Line Case Flow/Process Maps

Initial Screening Process

Interviewing and Counseling Process

A. Attorney Assignments, Work Stations and Case Types

1. Managing and Supervising Attorney

- a. Located in Toledo
- b. Responds to emergency calls and complex matter
- c. Handles various client cases including “no call backs”
- d. Answers screener/attorney questions
- e. Monitors quality control

Application

Intake

Advice from attorneys

- f. Monitors flow of calls and assignments

Can reverse call backs / no call backs,

Adjust according to volume and staffing.

- g. Assesses training needs
- h. Provides ongoing instruction as needed

2. Legal Aid Line Attorneys

a. Locations

Toledo office

Dayton office

Private offices

Their homes

b. Assignments

Area of specialty

Conflicts

Denials

Criminal and other LSC exclusions

Incomplete applications

Over income

Out of state

Third Party

Scheduled and Unscheduled family law
Scheduled and Unscheduled consumer or Bankruptcy
All other new cases which do not qualify for scheduling
Attorneys jointly handle 50-60 calls/day

V. Case types

A. "No call back" cases (unscheduled)

1. Examples:

Driver license suspended for driving without insurance
Non emergency bad conditions in tenant's home or
apartment
Expungement of criminal records

2. Represents 40% of the eligible callers

3. Advice letters or self-help materials sent to the client after legal assessment within 10 days.

Prepared by attorneys

Electronically signed and sent to printer in Toledo

Processed by the screeners in Toledo office

4. Over 100 self-help packets available for clients

B. "Call back" cases (scheduled)

1. Examples:

Domestic Violence within last 60 days

Evictions

Bankruptcy (if home at risk)/Garnishments

2. Represents 60% of the cases

3. Appointments scheduled within 48 hours

4. Most "call backs" same day/ next morning

5. Attorney offers telephone advice

6. Attorney makes referrals to:

LAWO/ABLE office

Private attorney

Court/public defender

Lawyer referral program

Pro bono program

Social service agency

7. Advice letters, self-help materials or referral letters sent to client after telephone interview.

8. Advice and referrals:

Based upon on-line case referral protocols

Guided by resources manuals/research

VI. PIKA Case Management System

- A. Web-based case management system designed to:
 - 1. Complete client intake applications
 - 2. Track ongoing cases
 - 3. Keeps electronic record of each client's case
- B. Uses PHP "open source" web-coding software to
 - 1. Make screens and data accessible to authorized staff
 - 2. Allow use from anywhere that there is an internet connection,
 - 3. Allows use from within Legal Aid Line office.
- C. Features
 - 1. Password protected log in
 - 2. Common task accessible on home screen
 - 3. New client intake link
 - 4. Checks for existing names
 - 5. Adds new cases
 - 6. Opens new case
 - 7. Checks for conflict
 - 8. Allows additional clients, opposing parties, household members
 - 9. Flags Conflicts
 - 10. Checks Financial Eligibility
 - Assets
 - Liabilities
 - 11. Allows case notes input
 - 12. Provides document assembly letters/integrates topic materials
 - 13. Allows case closing
 - 14. Has built-in time keeping
 - Daily time slips
 - Monthly reports
 - 15. Has searchable database
 - 16. Allows report creation

VII. Volume and Quality Control

- A. Teamwork
 - 1. Attorneys function as co-counsel, sharing expertise and knowledge
 - 2. Coordination of work flow
- B. Management of work flow
 - 1. Monitors
 - a. Case loads
 - b. Intake levels

- c. Assignments of duties
 - 2. Adjusts intake, assignments and caseloads
 - a. To serve clients timely
 - b. During staff shortages
- C. Staff development
 - 1. Work group participation
 - 2. Task force participation
 - 3. CLE
 - 4. Lexis Nexis account
 - 5. Internal training
- D. Effective Utilization of resources
 - 1. Resource manual on-line
 - 2. Website links
 - 3. Agency links
- E. Community partnerships and collaboration
 - 1. Discerning trends
 - 2. Run queries
 - 3. Case review
 - 4. External input
 - 5. Systemic advocacy
- F. Survey Results
 - 1. Independent Survey Results
 - a. Clients satisfied with services=75.3%
 - b. Clients who would return for services=77.7%
 - 2. Internal Survey
 - a. Random satisfaction surveys
 - b. Follow up telephone surveys

Bibliography & Website Links:

- 1. Legal Hotline Quarterly Winter 2004 <http://www.legalhotlines.org>
- 2. <http://www.pikasoftware.net>
- 3. <http://www.legalaidline.org>