

ABA/ NLADA 2005 Equal Justice Conference

Creating Pro Bono Partnerships to Serve Homeless and Runaway Youth

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Brief Description:

Homeless and at-risk youth struggle with many legal issues and need assistance on a variety of civil and criminal matters. Learn about the special legal problems faced by homeless youth and how pro bono attorneys can provide assistance. Panelists will provide participants concrete guidance on how to set up and administer a new pro bono partnership/project.

Topical Outline:

- I. Homeless and Unaccompanied Youth
 - a. Homeless youth defined:
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 USC §11434(a)
Means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Includes youth sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement. Youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. Youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.
 - b. Unaccompanied youth: A youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
 - c. How to identify homeless and unaccompanied youth and the causes of their situation.
 - Abuse and neglect
 - Mental health issues
 - Substance abuse issues
 - Fetal alcohol syndrome

- II. Common Legal Issues for Homeless and Unaccompanied Youth
 - a. Shoplifting, minor in consumption of alcohol, driving without insurance, assault, drug possession, violation of probation
 - b. Landlord-Tenant issues
 - c. Family law issues; child custody, child visitation, child support
 - d. Employment issues
 - e. Need documents notarized
 - f. Access to education
 - g. Police harassment
 - h. Access to Public Aid

- III. Creating a Pro Bono Project to Assist Homeless and Unaccompanied Youth
 - a. Legal Street: A Legal Clinic for Homeless, Runaway and At-Risk Youth
 - Who needs help?
 - What are their issues?
 - What laws benefit them?
 - Is more protection needed? How?

 - b. Chicago Coalition for the Homeless Youth Futures: A Mobile Legal Aid Clinic for Homeless Youth
 - Planning.
 - Determine what Partners are needed. Who works with homeless youth or youth in state custody or foster care that has a legal background?
 - Public Defenders Office
 - Shelter or Street Outreach Programs
 - Disability Law Center or another other nonprofits
 - Existing Pro Bono Programs
 - Juvenile Justice
 - Legal advocacy programs for minority
 - Child Support Enforcement Staff
 - Family Law Center Staff

 - Developing a Mobile Clinic.
 - Determine where homeless youth can be found in your area (i.e., the library, homeless youth shelters, drop-in shelters, schools.)
 - Partner with homeless youth service providers and other organizations to bring legal services to homeless youth.
 - Understand the special needs of the homeless youth population (i.e., mobility, short attention span, distrust of adults and work to address those needs.)

- Outreach.
 - Advertise clinic: Flyers, posters (find volunteer or graphic artist to assist; ask a printer to donate services)
 - Create an e-mail list.
 - Ask shelter staff and agencies that serve youth to publicize the program.

- Providing Legal Assistance.
 - Explain to youth that you are providing legal information and not legal advice unless you are covered by malpractice insurance.
 - Give youth phone numbers and information in written form.
 - Get contact information for youth or give them your business card – they are transient.
 - Be ready to help them on the spot and to research information on-line or make calls for them.
 - Most youth need assistance handling situations, Examples Landlord has not returned their deposit; an employer has not forwarded their last pay check.

- c. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
 - 33 legal work practice areas
 - Multi-portal intake
 - Telephone Access to Justice
 - Walk-in
 - Outreach to shelters
 - Disposition Review
 - Long-distance collaboration
 - Technology for a “virtual office”
 - Wide Area Network: Citrix
 - Case Management System: TRLA Client Tracking System
 - Web Site
 - Email
 - Scanners
 - Practice Area Teams
 - Children’s Rights: Juvenile Justice, Emancipation, Sexual harassment in the workplace.
 - Homeless: Police harassment, “camping” ordinance enforcement.
 - Family/Domestic Violence: Custody, visitation, child support.
 - Bi-National Project on Domestic Violence: International child abduction, Hague Convention enforcement.
 - Employment and Farm Labor: Child labor.
 - Education: School admission, truancy, disciplinary issues and due process.
 - Immigration: U-visas and T-visas.

Web site Links:

1. ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty: <http://www.abanet.org/homeless>
2. ABA Center on Children and the Law: <http://www.abanet.org/child/home.html>
3. Chicago Coalition for the Homeless: <http://www.chicagohomeless.org>
4. Covenant House Alaska: <http://www.covenanthouseak.org>
5. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty: <http://www.nlchp.org>
6. Texas RioGrande Legal Aid: <http://www.trla.org>