

# **FLORIDA PRO BONO COORDINATORS ASSOCIATION**

Written by Cathy Tucker and Marcie Green  
Updated for EJC March 2009

## **History**

From 1960 through 1970, concerned lawyers and others made a push to provide civil legal services to each county in the state. Federal funds, first from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and then from President Richard Nixon's authorization of the Legal Services Corporation, encouraged expansion of legal aid and legal services programs throughout Florida. In 1973 full time staff attorneys worked in legal aid and legal services offices in 12 counties and volunteer lawyer programs served 12 additional counties. Forty-one counties remained without any legal assistance to the poor. By 1980 there was a civil legal aid and services staff program providing help to every county in Florida.

During the 80's funding for many social service programs was cut and the Legal Services Corporation was targeted for reductions. The American Bar Association, who opposed reduction or elimination of LSC, sought to coordinate support of local bar associations for continued funding. The ABA encouraged members to provide pro bono services and the LSC Board of Directors used this movement to place specific requirements on LSC grantees to use 12.5% of their grant for Private Attorney Involvement.

In response to this increased interest in the development of local pro bono efforts, a group of legal aid and legal services representatives met to form the FPBCA. An ad hoc committee was formed in 1985. Members of this committee included pro bono coordinators Gary Gilbert of Florida Rural Legal Services, Allison Graham of Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach, Michelle Ivy of the ACLU Public Interest Law Project, Henry George (Skip) White of Florida Legal Services, Alice Schofield of Withlacochee Area Legal Services' Volunteer Lawyer Project, and Doreen Cook of Central Florida Legal Services' Volunteer Lawyer Project. They met to create a structure for a statewide organization of people who directed or coordinated pro bono work in local programs. After a couple meetings and attempts to reach out through the local voluntary bar and the legal providers, the organization formalized with officers, by-laws and regular annual meetings structure.

The LSC cutbacks of the late 80's caused a decline in FPBCA membership. In 1992, the Florida Supreme Court made its initial decision on pro bono and later created the Standing Committee on Pro Bono Services and circuit committees. The Florida Bar Foundation encouraged support of the circuit committees and beginning in 1994, membership in FPBCA increased with numbers ranging from 15 to 35 members.

FPBCA's initial role of identification and development of statewide pro bono programs and resources has moved into staff program support and circuit program development with information sharing, monitoring, support and training.

At the close of the 90's there was a push by the Legal Services Corporation to require consolidation and 'reconfiguration' of individual programs throughout the country. In Florida this process was endorsed by The Florida Bar Foundation and became a statewide effort to re-invigorate the delivery of legal services by including a broader

group of providers, all IOTA recipients as well as LSC funded programs. Committees were developed statewide to make recommendations on various delivery issues such as intake, technical assistance, training, and pro bono services. A State Plan was prepared which identified seven regions in Florida and which LSC approved. In 2004 LSC funded the new entities.

FPBCA has remained as a statewide pro bono entity similar to a workgroup.

### **Structure**

The FPBCA is a voluntary association of coordinators of pro bono programs throughout Florida. Originally the officers were Chair, Chair-Elect, Secretary and Treasurer, later modified as President and President-Elect. The membership elects officers at the annual meeting in June and the prior year's President-Elect succeeds to the Presidency. Original standing committees included Training, Technical Assistance, and Publication. Added later were Public Relations, General Practice Section Pro Bono Award, and the Kay B. Meyers Award. The Technical Assistance Committee no longer exists. The original Executive Committee was composed of the officers, the standing committee chairs and a representative from Florida Legal Services. The Executive Committee expanded to include the immediate past president.

By-Laws are supplemented by the Procedural Guidelines, both amended several times. The original Procedural Guidelines included a detailed timetable and transition worksheet for each office and committee.

### **Funding for FPBCA**

Florida Legal Services, Inc., the statewide support organization, administers the FPBCA budget, since it is not incorporated. FLS received startup funding from The Florida Bar and Florida Bar Foundation. An initial budget of about \$20,000, including in-kind services from The Florida Bar and FLS, was reduced to \$15,000 and then to \$12,000 and then to \$6,000 over the next two decades. Funds are currently used to pay for meetings and travel costs such as reimbursement for coordinators travel and the room and food. In 2006, FPBCA requested help from the Young Lawyers Division of The Florida Bar and to encourage attendance at the ABA conference by paying some of the cost of travel. YLD has provided about \$7,000 plus payment of the 'pins' which are used by local programs for annual recognition of pro bono attorneys.

FPBCA has received a variety of small one time grants for a display to take to events, for printing costs and materials, and other items, from The Florida Bar and Foundation.

The Florida Bar, the Florida Bar Foundation, and Florida Legal Services have funded various pro bono activities and continue to do so. Both The Florida Bar and Florida Bar Foundation (IOTA) provide funds to FLS for the Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services.

Several versions of a statewide pro bono coordinator position have been created over the past decade under Florida Legal Services. A two year position in 1999 was developed with matching funds from The Florida Bar and three private law firms. With the development of the State Plan and the inclusion of pro bono in the state plan, a statewide pro bono position was part of a resource development team. In 2003, a one year effort to develop resources, including in pro bono, was made. The pro bono portion focused on CyPres Education and Development, The Florida Bar's Challenge For

Children, and the Law Firm/Corporate Pro Bono Challenge. In 2006, a pro bono staff member was added to FLS to support the Standing Committee and statewide projects.

### **Activities**

FPBCA has supported several activities over the past decade, including a newsletter, the booth at the Florida Bar Annual Meeting, trainings, brief information exchanges and networking opportunities, participation in The Florida Bar annual pro bono awards, attendance at ABA Pro Bono Conferences, General Practice Section Pro Bono Award, and Kay B. Meyers Pro Bono Coordinator Award. Short lived, unsuccessful projects included vouchers for pro bono attorneys through The Florida Bar and consultant directory.

The organization first held its annual meeting in conjunction with The Florida Bar Annual Meeting in June. FPBCA was an official meeting on the convention schedule, but Wednesday time slots provided by the bar made coordination with other activities expensive and difficult. The FPBCA first moved the meeting off site to a less expensive hotel and a different day but the cost of the group attending a meeting was prohibitive. The annual meeting and election of officers was changed to the fall meeting. FPBCA continues to use the booth at the annual meeting to display ongoing projects of coordinators and programs throughout the state.

The first meeting of the calendar year is during The Florida Bar annual pro bono awards in January. Coordinators attend the ceremony and have a meeting the following day. The second meeting of the year is during the ABA/EJ Conference. Dates and locations of the remaining one or two meetings vary depending on resources and other activities. The fall meeting in the early 90's seemed to follow or be followed by a late season hurricane as the FPBCA met with other FLS workgroups for their meetings at a common site. The FPBCA has also held the fall meeting during the statewide meetings sponsored by the Florida Bar Foundation.

### **The Florida Bar General Practice Section Pro Bono Award**

The General Practice Section of The Florida Bar decided to recognize each year a pro bono program in Florida that offers opportunities for bar members to participate in pro bono activities and provides outstanding services to their community. Originally named the Bill Jacobs Award for a long-time section member, the first award of \$2500 was presented in 1990 at a reception sponsored by the FPBCA at The Florida Bar Annual Convention. The award, now named for L. Michael Roffino, past GPS president, has developed into an award with the support and appreciation of the FPBCA. During the past 20 years, the Section has awarded over \$94,000 to pro bono projects. Currently three awards are presented: one for \$3000, and two additional awards of \$1000. The section presents the awards during their lunch at the annual convention in June and pays for the attendance of the top winner to the Florida Bar meeting.

### **Kay B. Meyers Pro Bono Coordinator Award**

Kay B. Meyers worked for Florida Rural Legal Services, Inc. from 1981 until her death on October 31, 1992. She began at FRLS as a legal secretary, advanced to an office manager and then to administrative assistant/part-time pro bono coordinator. This split role is a familiar challenge to many coordinators. Ultimately Kay became a full time pro

bono coordinator. FRLS serves 14 counties in central and south Florida. Based in the Polk County office of FRLS, Kay's responsibilities included several counties. Three formal agreements that Kay helped establish in Hardee, Highlands and Polk County, made her especially proud. In addition, she began advice clinics and recognition events in each county. As a charter member of FPBCA, Kay played a major part of the formation and growth of the organization. The driving force behind the series of deskbooks, she helped recruit authors and coordinated publication with The Florida Bar. She began the newsletter and helped write the By-Laws and Procedural Guidelines. Her dedication helped with the growth of FPBCA and the inclusion of more coordinators.

Kay had the qualities that make a great coordinator. She liked people and liked to talk and tell stories. A great salesperson, if she believed in something, she wanted you to know why and believe it too. She liked to know the rules (think by-laws and procedures). FPBCA benefited greatly from her leadership, her humor, and her ideas.

In the small world inhabited by coordinators, we do not get recognized or even acknowledge each other's good work. This is why the FPBCA created an annual award named for Kay Meyers to honor and recognize the contributions and dedication of a coordinator in their own project and to the Florida Pro Bono Coordinators Association.

**Kay B. Meyers Pro Bono Coordinators Award recipients:**

- 1994 Bonnie Silverstein, LAS of Palm Beach County
- 1995 Christine (Marini) Whalen, Broward Lawyers Care
- 1997 Marcia Lockhart, Three Rivers Legal Services
- 1998 Cathy Tucker, LAS of Orange County Bar Association
- 1999 Susan Christmas, Brevard County Legal Aid
- 2000 Rob Johnson, Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach
- 2001 Susan Christmas, Brevard County Legal Aid
- 2002 John Fenno, North Florida Legal Services
- 2003 Sheila Seig, Bay Area Legal Services
- 2004 Bruce Levine, Put Something Back
- 2005 Donna Graf, Florida Rural Legal Services
- 2007 Linda Harradine, Legal Aid of Manasota
- 2008 Kimberly Rommel Enright, Legal Aid Society of the Palm Beach County Bar
- 2009 Ethel Wells, Florida Rural Legal Services and Paige Palmer, Legal Aid Foundation of the Tallahassee Bar