

## **Call for Justice, LLC—United Way 2-1-1 Training Paper**

### **Session 10: Drilling DEEP: The Volunteer Lawyers Network**

**March 21 and 22, 2013: Martha Delaney, Deputy Director, Volunteer Lawyers Network, Minneapolis**

#### **Featured Speaker's Topic**

This month, Martha Delaney, an attorney and Deputy Director of the Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN), will help us to better understand VLN's programming.

**Intake and contact information for VLN: 612-752-6677; intake hours M, T, W and F 10-1; no intake on Thursdays. [www.volunteerlawyersnetwork.org](http://www.volunteerlawyersnetwork.org)**

#### **What is the Volunteer Lawyers Network?**

VLN was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1966. VLN connects volunteer private practice attorneys with low income people who have legal needs in core areas, such as housing, employment, key family relationships, and personal safety. In 2012, VLN attorneys provided more than 11,500 legal services to more than 8000 clients at no charge utilizing a roster of 1000 attorneys (whom remain on the VLN roster by taking at least one legal matter per year). All of VLN's work is free to the clients it serves.

With a budget of approximately \$1.1 million and a staff of 17, VLN provides these key services:

- Screening and preparation of prospective clients
- Connecting clients to attorney services in one form or another
- Educating and providing resources to volunteer attorneys on poverty law issues
- Educating attorneys about potential challenges to and strategies for working most effectively with people in poverty
- Providing mentor attorneys to assist newer volunteer attorneys

#### **How is VLN Different from Legal Aid?**

In Training Session No. 1, we learned about Legal Aid, which has full-time staff attorneys who provide full representation services to clients. (Legal Aid also utilizes some volunteer private practice attorneys to provide full representation to clients.) Legal Aid receives funding from both the federal/state governments and the private Bar.

In contrast, VLN's four resource attorneys provide very few direct legal services; rather, their legal expertise is used to support volunteers and create effective programs that best leverage volunteer attorney time. The vast majority of VLN's work is through volunteer (pro bono) attorneys who take no pay for their services. This requires great coordination between clients and attorneys—something which VLN does exceedingly well. Additionally, VLN has historically served only Hennepin County;

however, VLN is currently expanding most of its services to assist clients metro-wide and state-wide (depending on the service).

VLN's largest sources of funding are the state (33%), private law firms (15%), Hennepin County-specific funders (13%) and fundraising events (10%).

### **Legal Matters that VLN Doesn't Handle**

Let's get out of the way the types of legal matters that VLN doesn't handle:

- Criminal cases (except if the client hasn't yet been charged)
- Cases where an attorney could take or collect a fee (like a personal injury case or where the court can order attorney fees)
- Employment Discrimination (but it will handle other employment matters like wage claims)
- Government Benefits
- Wills and Probate
- Business Litigation (businesses fighting between themselves)

**RED FLAG:** Hopefully, we've done enough training for you to determine what most of these categories encompass. The key words for cases where attorneys can take a fee are "car accident," "worker's comp./hurt at work," "discriminated against by my employer/harassed at work," and "breach of contract." The primary referral for these matters should be to the Lawyer Referral and Information Service (in Hennepin) and the Attorney Referral Service (in Ramsey). You can also send the callers to the "Alternative 2-1-1 Referrals" button on the Call for Justice website.

### **Spanish-Speaking Clients**

Let's also make clear there's an easy referral for Spanish-speaking callers. VLN operates a Spanish Services Program, which coordinates representation of Spanish-speaking individuals by Spanish-speaking attorneys. **Thus, as a primary referral, tell these callers to call La Red Abogados Voluntarios (La Red) at 651-379-4223 (Tues. 11-2, Wed. 2-5).** La Red provides Legal Advice and Brief Services (these services are defined below).

### **Financial Eligibility**

The beginning point for understanding VLN is how its services are categorized:

Full Representation (where the attorney handles the legal matter from start to finish) is available at 125% FPG or less, **except in bankruptcy cases**, which is at 200% or less.

Legal Advice or Brief Service (these are two different things, but generally they mean the attorney will limit his/her involvement only to a certain aspect [such as writing a letter on a

client's behalf] of a client's overall legal needs). Legal Advice or Brief Service is available for people at 200-300% of FPG. Also, recall that we've referred to this more limited legal work as "unbundled services."

In other words, generally the more that a person earns/has in terms of assets, the less comprehensive are VLN's services. However, because there are way more people in need than available attorneys, the number of Legal Advice and Brief Service outlets is significant.

### Types of Services

VLN offers the following types of services:

1. **Full Representation:** the traditional work by a lawyer of representing someone on a particular matter from start to finish.
2. **Scheduled Clinics:** where the person **must call VLN** to get scheduled to attend a "clinic" (a fixed location where lawyers will volunteer their time). This is a Legal Advice/Brief Services service.
3. **Walk-in Clinics:** where the person simply obtains services on a **first come, first served basis** at a fixed location. This is a Legal Advice/Brief Services service.
4. **Brief Services Workshops:** where the person **must call VLN** to get scheduled to attend a "workshop." Law students and/or paralegals help clients complete court forms under the supervision of an attorney. This is a Legal Advice/Brief Services service.
5. **Paneled Brief Services:** where the person **must call VLN** to get scheduled to talk one-on-one with an attorney (as compared to a law student or paralegal). This is a Legal Advice/Brief Services service.
6. **Telephone Advice:** where the person **must call VLN** to get scheduled to talk to an attorney by telephone. They will set a time for the attorney to call the client. This is a Legal Advice/Brief Services service.

On all of these services, the prospective client must provide VLN with copies of relevant documents. The failure to get VLN the paperwork may mean that the person in need either doesn't get legal assistance or is relegated only to a walk-in legal advice clinic.

**RED FLAG:** In all instances but Walk-in Clinics, the person in need must actually call VLN. Thus, make sure to know what subject matters are covered in the two types of Clinics (see below). If at all possible, direct the caller to a Walk-in Clinic as an initial first step (since this will ease congestion).

### Legal Matters Covered by Scheduled Clinics or Workshops (Where a Person Must Call VLN for an Appointment)

Here is the list of legal matters that VLN will provide some form of assistance on. Note: some of these legal matters are also covered in walk-in clinics. If the person in need doesn't want to try a walk-in

clinic, he/she must first call VLN. (612-752-6677; intake hours M, T, W and F 10-1; no intake on Thursdays).

- **Administrative Law** (hearing must take place in Minneapolis or St. Paul)
  - day care and foster care licensing
  - licenses for nurses or nurse assistants
  - special education issues
  - crime victim reparations issues
  - appeals from a determination that the caller committed maltreatment of a child or vulnerable adult
- **Bankruptcy** (there is also a walk-in clinic for this—see below)
- **Consumer Protection** (there is also a walk-in clinic for this—see below)
- **Criminal Expungements**
- **Debtor/creditor (includes debt collection issues)**
  - includes the new VLN lawsuit answering service for lawsuits seeking to collect debts
- **Employment** (except discrimination cases)
- **Family law**
- **General Civil Legal**
  - car title issues
  - uninsured car accident
  - other issues
- **Judgment Creditor Collections** (where someone is trying to collect a debt of \$3000 or less)
- **Real Estate Issues**

### **Legal Matters Covered by Drop-in Assistance (Where the Person in Need Can Simply Walk-in)**

There are other legal matters for which the person in need can get help **without having to call VLN**; he/she can simply show up at the clinics. The legal matters covered by these clinics are:

- **Bankruptcy**
- **Conciliation Court (small claims)**
- **General Civil**
- **Family Law**
- **Immigration**
- **Landlord-Tenant Law**
- **Youth Law**

The walk-in clinics are either at **courthouses** or **community centers**. When referring to one of these clinics, tell the caller:

- *You can receive free LEGAL ADVICE from an attorney between the hours of X.*

- *They won't represent you, but they can give you a free brief consultation - about 15 minutes.*
- *These attorneys are volunteers. Sometimes they have to cancel at the last minute*
- *It's a walk in clinic and people are served on a first come, first served basis. Space is limited to approximately 5-6 people; if the list is full you will have to return another time.*

## Courthouse Clinics—Walk-in

**Bankruptcy** Clinic Times: Thurs 11 – 1pm (walk-in)

Locations:

**Mpls** (1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Thurs.): 7<sup>th</sup> floor, U.S. Federal Courthouse, 300 S. 4<sup>th</sup> St.

**St. Paul** (2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Thurs.): 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, U.S. Federal Courthouse, 316 N. Robert St., 55101

**Conciliation Court** Clinic Times: Tues & Thurs: 9 – 11 am & 1 – 3 pm (walk-in)

Location: 350 S. Fifth St, Mpls (Room 312)

**Family Law** Clinic Times: Mon & Thurs: 10 – noon; Tues & Fri: 1 – 3 pm (walk-in)

Location: 110 S. Fourth St., Mpls (Family Justice Center, Self Help Center)

**General Civil Legal Matters--Legal Access Point (LAP)** (walk-in)

Location: 300 S. Sixth St. Henn. Co. Govt Center, Mpls near the Self Help Center – skyway level

VLN Staffed: Mon – Fri 11 – 1; Tues. and Thurs. 1 – 3pm

- no family or criminal issues
- typically we don't know the expertise of the VLN attorneys

LRIS (Lawyer Referral & Information Services) Staffed: Mon – Fri 9-11; Mon 1-3pm

- **no income restrictions –note this: one of the few clinics where anyone can talk to an attorney without income being a consideration**
- can often refer to an LRIS attorney with expertise in the caller's issue

**RED FLAG:** For Hennepin County residents who want to talk to an attorney without taking into account the person's income level, the LAP Clinic staffed by LRIS attorneys is one way of doing that. Yes, the person will have to get there early, and they will have to wait, but in the end, they will get free legal advice.

**Housing Court Project** Clinic Times: Mon through Fri 8:30 – noon (walk-in)

Location: 300 S. Sixth St., Mpls (Henn Co. Govt Center, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, courts side)

## **Clinics at Community Centers—Walk-in**

### **Housing:** Simpson House Clinic (walk-in)

Clinic Times: some Mon, 6:30-8pm

Location: 2740 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. S Minneapolis 55408

Whom to refer: Simpson housing clients

### **Immigration and Employment:** Park Ave Methodist Church (walk-in)

Clinic Times: Thurs 3-5pm

Location: 3400 Park Ave. S 55407 Minneapolis (with Peace & Hope International)

Whom to refer: immigrants and those with employment issues

### **Native American Women:** MIWRC (walk-in)

Clinic Times: Wed 1-3pm

Location: 2300 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. S 55404 Minneapolis (with Faegre Baker Daniels)

**Issues: Family, criminal, housing, and juvenile protection**

Whom to refer: Native American Women

### **Youth Law Clinic** (walk-in)

Clinic Times: Mon 3:30 – 6pm

Location: 41 North 12<sup>th</sup> St. 55403 Minneapolis (with Faegre Baker Daniels)

**Issues affecting youth (family, employment, public benefits, criminal, housing, etc.)**

Whom to refer: youth, especially those already receiving services at Project Offstreets.

## **Clinics at Community Centers—Must Call the Clinic in Advance**

**“All Issues”** (scheduled by site staff)(952-697-1333)

CAPSH

Clinic Times once a month on Tuesdays, 4-6:00 p.m.

Location: varies

Whom to refer: persons in need in suburban Hennepin County

**“All Issues”** (scheduled by site staff) (612-435-1315)

Dignity Center

Clinic Times: Mon, Wed, Fri 9-11:30 a.m.

Location: Hennepin Ave Methodist Church (511 Groveland Avenue, Minneapolis 55403)

Whom to refer: anyone for whom the site is geographically convenient

**Debtor/Creditor, Consumer, Housing, General Civil, Family** (scheduled by staff)(612-338-5282)

Brian Coyle Center

Clinic Times: Alternating Tues, 4:30 pm

Location: 420 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. S. 55454 Minneapolis (with US Bank and Dorsey & Whitney)

**Issues: Debtor/creditor, consumer, housing, general civil, family**

**Note: Can assist Somali Speakers.**

**Sexual Violence Center** (scheduled by site staff) (612-871-5111)

Clinic Times: one Thurs/month, 6-8pm

Location: 3757 Freemont Ave N Minneapolis 55412

**Issues: Sexual violence**

Whom to refer: sexual violence survivors

## **VLN's Work in Outstate Minnesota**

VLN is expanding its services to outstate Minnesota, and thus provides some form of Legal Advice/Brief Services **via telephone** on the following topics:

- Employment law, wage claims and the caller's rights as an employee
- Bankruptcy issues (Chapters 7 or 13, reaffirmation agreements, real estate issues, student loans) **(Note: in many counties in MN, VLN will actually provide full representation services)**
- Answering a collections lawsuit in district court **(however, this service does not apply to Hennepin residents)**

## **VLN's New Online Intake Form**

VLN recently launched a new online intake form which can help potential clients determine their eligibility for services (and as well, give them an idea of how much time it might take before they will be connected with a volunteer attorney). This is a great resource for referring callers, especially at night or after VLN's intake line is closed for the day.

Send callers to: <https://www.formstack.com/forms/vln-intake>

## VLN's New Clinics Wiki

VLN has also created a new Clinics Wiki, which is an extraordinary resource, especially for those who want some legal advice now—as in near immediately. The Wiki lists clinics on almost every topic on which you receive calls. We recommend that you provide the Wiki URL to callers as a fallback referral in most instances (along with LawHelpMN.org—which provides on-line chat, something which VLN does not presently offer).

Send callers to: <http://vlncommunityclinics.wikispaces.com>

## Summary

Hopefully, you now have a better idea of VLN's programming and breadth of services. Here are your key takeaways:

1. **Intake no: 612-752-6677; intake hours M, T, W and F 10-1; no phone intake on Thursdays. Online intake: [www.volunteerlawyersnetwork.org/online](http://www.volunteerlawyersnetwork.org/online) (now only bankruptcy, family, housing and criminal expungement) (Offers information, too).**
2. Spanish callers can call above or also during La Red's phone hours (Tuesdays 11 – 2 and Wednesdays 2-5): 651-379-4223.
3. This will be a **primary referral** for people who make too much for Legal Aid (e.g. who are at more than 125% FPG) but not enough for traditional legal services.
4. First check the geographic eligibility cheat sheet to see if VLN handles the caller's issue given his/her income and geography. If yes, then see above for more detailed information regarding services.
5. Make sure that you advise callers about the difference between clinics which require a scheduling call to VLN and those that are drop-in clinics. The drop-in clinics may, of course, be more immediate for most people.
6. Remember the LAP Clinic shifts staffed by LRIS attorneys on M-F 9-11 and M 1-3 where callers can get free legal advice without regard to income.
7. VLN is doing more and more work in outstate Minnesota, so make sure to keep your eyes open to advisories about expanded program (Call for Justice will endeavor to stay on top of those expansions).
8. Remember the "All Issues" clinics (caller needs to schedule) where any legal issue is addressed.
9. Finally, some really cool developments are occurring on-line (the on-line intake and the Clinics Wiki), which are easy referrals for your callers.