



NEWS RELEASE

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Innovative Local Nonprofit Wins National Award For Giving People Tools to Fight Legal Emergencies

Minneapolis, Minn. – A committee of the American Bar Association (ABA), the leading legal professional organization in the country with 400,000 members, has awarded its Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access to Call for Justice, LLC, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit that works to help low and moderate-income people access justice by connecting them with lawyers and legal resources.

The Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access is awarded annually to honor programs that match the unmet legal needs of the middle class and those of moderate incomes with lawyers. The Award, presented by the ABA Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services, is intended to recognize programs that have made “creative contributions to the delivery of legal services in ways that are exemplary and replicable.”

Call for Justice, LLC (C4J) is a two-person Minneapolis nonprofit that opened in December 2011 with a mission to help people with legal emergencies, particularly persons with lower incomes or from marginalized communities, navigate the system in search of lawyers. Initial funding for C4J originated within the Twin Cities legal community, including 29 law firms, the foundation arms of the Hennepin and Ramsey County Bar Associations, and with seed money from the Saint Paul and Bigelow Foundations.

C4J executive director Ellen (Ellie) Krug, responded to news of the ABA Award by stating, “We’re proud to be recognized for the contributions we’ve made in helping low and moderate-income people connect with lawyers to fight legal emergencies in the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota. We believe we’ve created a model that can be replicated across the United States.”

Access to justice in the United States, sometimes called the “Justice Gap” because low and moderate-income people can’t easily obtain lawyers, has been described as a “dramatically understated crisis.” In civil cases, 80% of the legal needs of the poor are unmet; the ratio of private attorneys to the general population (based on attorney per capita estimates) is 1:525, while the availability of Legal Aid attorneys (funded by all sources) to the U.S. poverty population is 1:6,861, a more than ten-fold disparity. An added problem is that many moderate-income people (which includes the “working poor”) earn too much to qualify for pro bono (no fee) attorneys, yet they don’t earn enough to afford market rate lawyers.

“Lawyers make a difference,” explained Ellie Krug. “They can mean the difference between an eviction by an unscrupulous landlord and keeping a family in their apartment.” The inability to speak with a lawyer can be devastating for those with a legal emergency and often it means they’ll suffer an injustice.

C4J’s programs include a “Legal Liaison Program,” that helps nearly 60 different organizations to break through silos to share information about free or low fee lawyers. In doing so, C4J helped two Minneapolis law firms “adopt” the Jeremiah Program (which helps woman and children escape intergenerational poverty).

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For more information, contact: Ellen (Ellie) Krug, executive director, Call for Justice, LLC (612-333-4000), ellen.krug@callforjustice.org; visit the C4J website at www.callforjustice.org

Other C4J programs include training United Way 211 information and referral specialists on Twin Cities legal resources, something which has annually helped 30,000 to 40,000 callers obtain better legal referrals and direction to more legal resources. C4J posts the 211 trainings on its website, generating nearly 30,000 YouTube views a year. “We think the YouTube views—which cover topics like landlord-tenant law, immigration law, and most recently civil commitments—help the public better understand Twin Cities legal resources and connects them to lawyers more easily,” Krug reported.

Yet another C4J initiative involves identifying gaps in the system and filling them. C4J is helping create a community law firm that will train new attorneys who will serve the working poor. That law firm is slated to open in Saint Paul later this year and is sponsored by Hamline and William Mitchell law schools.

“We imagined what it would take to help lawyers connect with people caught in the Justice Gap,” Krug explained. “With the assistance of many community partners and stakeholders, C4J will help make a community law firm a reality.”

In closing, Krug said, “For a two person nonprofit that opened for business little more than three years ago, I think we’ve accomplished much. We are honored to receive the Louis M. Brown Award for Legal Access from the ABA.”

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