

## The Jeremiah Collaboration—A Snapshot

### Origins of the Jeremiah Collaboration

The Jeremiah Collaboration was formed in late summer of 2012, when the Lindquist & Venum and Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi law firms agreed to provide pro bono attorneys to the Jeremiah Program, which seeks to eliminate inter-generational poverty affecting women and children. Jeremiah operates two residential/programming facilities—one in Minneapolis, another in St. Paul.

The collaboration was envisioned, and then facilitated, by Call for Justice, LLC (“C4J”) after it learned in late 2011 that Jeremiah lacked an on-going legal provider relationship. One of C4J’s roles is to promote collaborations that increase civil legal access for low-income people. Via C4J’s “Legal Liaison Program,” the Pro Bono director for Lindquist & Venum (Cynthia Anderson) became familiar with Jeremiah client advocates/coaches and met with the Program Director to discuss needs. Subsequently, C4J asked Autumn Nelson, Diversity & Pro Bono Manager for Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, to visit Jeremiah’s Minneapolis campus and consider collaborating with Lindquist.

Thereafter, the collaboration quickly came together. Logistical support was requested of the Volunteer Lawyers Network (“VLN”), a legal services nonprofit whose mission is to protect the basic human needs of those in poverty by engaging the power of legal volunteers. VLN offered technical assistance including: a streamlined online process for scheduling and sending client information and paperwork to law firm attorneys; providing legal form templates; collecting and compiling service data; providing templates for outcome measurement; and offering malpractice insurance.

### How the Collaboration Works

Each law firm adopted a campus (Lindquist—St. Paul; Robins, Kaplan—Minneapolis). Each campus has a Jeremiah Life Skills Coach who facilitates communication with Anderson, Nelson, and their firms’ attorneys.

The Jeremiah Life Skills Coaches (Hawi Baisa and Rebecca Putzer) identify Jeremiah participants with legal needs. The Life Skills Coach requests legal assistance through VLN’s electronic intake (including any paperwork the client may have), which in turn is forwarded to the Pro Bono Director/Manager, in order to complete conflict checks and set up the legal consultations.

The collaborative law firms provide pro bono services at regular intervals. Lindquist offers family law advice primarily via conference calls, so as to be most efficient with attorney time. Additional legal services have occurred in person in St. Paul as needed. Robins, Kaplan attorneys visit Jeremiah’s Minneapolis campus every other month for several hours. Legal services have included creating wills, health care directives, and power of attorney documents.

Additionally legal services have been provided for child support, parenting time, orders for protection, criminal expungements, criminal defense, and debt collection matters.

### Benefits of the Collaboration

In raw numbers, through September 30, 2013, the law firms provided 25 legal services to Jeremiah Program participants. In fifteen of those services, the attorney evaluated the client’s situation and gave her specific legal advice and education related to her concern. In ten, the attorney provided advice as well as additional work, such as making a phone call for a client, drafting a letter, or drafting a court form.

These numbers, while representing solid legal services to women who otherwise would not have been able to afford them, do not accurately convey the full benefits of this collaboration, which include:

- **Greater access to legal services:** Having a legal clinic onsite and integrated with other program services enables the nearly 80 women who live at the Jeremiah Program to obtain legal help as often as they need it. It eliminates the need for the women, each of whom is juggling motherhood, college studies, and a myriad of other demands, to search for legal assistance on their own in a legal system that is both confusing and intimidating. In addition, there is more flexibility in appointment scheduling (to fit around client needs rather than a fixed clinic schedule).
- **Higher impact resulting from support of the Life Skills Coaches:** Clients may have their Jeremiah Program Life Skills Coach present during their time with the attorney and, so far, all have chosen to do so. Not only does the Life Skills Coach help the client think through and prepare her questions for the attorney, but she also helps the client understand and take the next steps the attorney recommends. As a result, the clients receive a much higher benefit than at the traditional legal clinic model, where an attorney and client do not have this support.
- **More effective use of the attorney's time:** The clients' relationships with the Life Skills Coaches reduce the time/need for attorneys to establish trust with the clients; the Life Skills Coach can cue the attorney as to the level of the client's understanding; and attorneys may provide the service remotely.
- **Increased knowledge of the Life Skills Coaches:** By sitting in on attorney-client sessions and working with the law firm pro bono coordinators, the Life Skills Coaches have increased knowledge about the law in areas that commonly impact their clients. They can be better advocates for all program participants, including providing legal information and written resources (such as Legal Aid Fact Sheets and looking up court records on MNCIS). Knowing more, they can also better prepare prospective clients for attorney sessions.
- **Help for other systemic Jeremiah Program needs:** The Jeremiah Program staff have an additional resource to help program participants overall. For example, a participant voiced concern for her children if she should die. Realizing this was a common concern, the law firms quickly set up a clinic to assist with wills, power of attorneys and health care directives for all interested Jeremiah participants (not represented in the above numbers). The law firms are also able to provide targeted legal education classes to program participants as needed. Additionally, program participants may get internships at the law firms. These types of preventive and investment measures help prevent future legal crises.
- **High volunteer attorney retention rates:** Because the volunteer attorneys providing the services can sense the greater impact they are having as the result of the Life Skills Coaches' involvement, they report a high level of satisfaction with their involvement.
- **Increased efficiency in behind the scenes support:** Calling upon the expertise and infrastructure of facilitators like Call for Justice and local pro bono organizations both makes success more likely and greatly reduces the time of creating and running the clinic.
- **Pending Outcome Reports:** The collaboration is about to launch an outcome study using standard VLN evaluation instruments. Because program participants have stable housing (either through the Jeremiah Program or after), we expect a much higher than typical response rate. For the above reasons, we also expect that the services will have moved the clients up the scale from crisis to thriving in any number of areas, including family relationships, ability to get good housing, ability to get good jobs, and peace of mind.

## Replicating the Collaboration

See the accompanying checklist/suggestions on how to replicate the Jeremiah Collaboration with other Twin Cities social service providers.

## Potential Areas for Collaborations

There are many social service programs in the Twin Cities that could benefit from one or more legal providers “adopting” the program and providing dedicated pro bono services. Call for Justice, LLC and/or the Volunteer Lawyers Network would be happy to discuss facilitating collaborations with programs doing work in the following areas:

- **Sexual Violence Survivors:** Collaborative work could focus on helping survivors obtain restitution or other relief from perpetrators.
- **At-Risk Youth:** Collaborative work could focus on legal issues involving emancipation, housing, credit, school discipline, minor criminal issues, bullying, and expungement.
- **Domestic Violence:** Collaborative work could focus on orders for protection, housing and employment issues, family law, and post-decree custody or support issues.
- **Homelessness:** Collaborative work could focus on obtaining/restoring governmental benefits, access to mental health care, expungement, and housing issues.
- **Immigration:** Collaborative work could focus on naturalization, asylum, Dream Act applications, crime victim related visas, discrimination, employment and housing issues for immigrants.
- **Affinity Groups** [e.g. Native Americans, Asian women, West African immigrants, LGBT, fathers, Muslim communities]: Collaborative work creating opportunities for attorneys to assist related affinity groups with a wide variety of issues.

**For assistance with envisioning and facilitating a collaborative opportunity, contact:**

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# Connecting with Diverse Clients through Collaborative Pro Bono Work with Community Organizations



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Providing legal services coordinated with social services can dramatically improve the benefits to the clients as well as leverage valuable attorney time. Adopting a community organization can also give a law firm a more cohesive approach to pro bono that boosts attorney participation and interest. Here's a step by step guide on how to set up collaborative pro bono work with community organizations.

## 1. Find a community organization with whom you'd like to partner.

- a. Consider what organizations have a mission that strongly appeals to your attorneys or firm.
- b. Consider in what areas of law you can provide assistance. Consider partnering with other firms to complement your areas.
- c. Contact a program director at the community organization to express your interest or go through a facilitator such as Call for Justice or Volunteer Lawyers Network (a facilitator can also ensure you would not be duplicating specialized services already available in the community).
- d. If the program director is interested in talking, set up a meeting to discuss whether their specific needs match your volunteers' interests.

## 2. Discuss the extent to which the community partner can provide appropriate support, including:

- An onsite person who will serve as the point of contact (and be a champion of the clinic within the community organization)
- Private area to allow confidential consultations
- Access to a telephone (so attorneys may make calls on behalf of clients or to obtain further information)
- Access to the Internet for online legal research
- Onsite advocate support (if wished) to sit in on the sessions to help clients frame their questions and/or follow the attorney's advice
- Physical security for attorneys and for clients
- Handicapped accessibility
- A minimum number of clients (depending on your situation)
- Interpreters (if applicable)

**3. Determine the support you will provide your attorneys, including:**

- Attorney recruitment
- Trainings in appropriate issues
- Trainings regarding the client population, including any poverty, mental issues, or disabilities with which attorneys may not otherwise be familiar or comfortable
- Advance notice of clients' legal issues
- Legal resources related to the most common legal issues
- Malpractice insurance
- Attorney recognition

**4. Create procedures for appointments to run smoothly (consider going through an existing pro bono program such as Volunteer Lawyers Network to avoid re-creating the wheel)**

- Will there be any screening (e.g., poverty) procedures or will anyone served by the community organization be eligible? Will referrals from other agencies be accepted?
- Create procedures by which advocates can schedule appointments for clients in advance, including gathering sufficient information for attorneys to a) conduct conflicts checks and b) prepare for the appointments
- Procedures to provide attorneys with relevant paperwork in advance, when possible
- Procedures to schedule attorneys and back-up attorneys (in the event of last-minute conflicts)
- Attorney orientation to the clinic procedures
- Create applicable limited scope and/or full representation agreements.
- Procedure for clients to hear, understand and agree to the extent of the legal service (e.g., limited scope representation or full representation)

**5. Create procedures to track services provided and, if possible, outcomes**

- Forms to track client names, demographic information, legal issues, service provided, etc.
- Procedures to enter and compile data
- Follow-up contact with clients to determine outcomes

**6. Discuss any other ways the firm might support the community organization**

- In-kind donations
- Board members
- Mentoring to community organization's program participants
- Financial support
- Follow up support to clients even after they've left the program

**7. Discuss what success will look like and how you will measure it**

- Specific outcomes for clients and the community
- Specific instruments with outcome measures
- Review of results to assess the extent to which services can be improved