

The LSBA's Access to Justice Program could not be able to accomplish its tasks without the ongoing partnership of Justice Community Organizations and the myriad of volunteers that recognize the importance of the work of Louisiana's non-profit legal aid providers. As one year ends, we look back at the strides we have made together and we look forward to the possibilities continued collaborations can have to benefit those seeking access to justice.

ATJ Policy Committee Issues

In its examination of policy issues, these ranked high on the 2013 list of the Committee's work:

- Inconsistent application of *in forma pauperis* laws was examined in a "[white paper](#)" written by Louisiana Appleseed volunteer, Ashely Gonzalez. Correct practices were outlined in educational materials create for the judiciary in the form of a [brochure](#). With the support of the ATJ Policy Committee mechanisms were developed to assist legal aid providers in challenging improper application of the law to provide increased access to the courts.
- Custody Policies affecting school admissions – The development of a "[white paper](#)" with Louisiana Appleseed revealed the school admission rules were being applied arbitrarily resulting in costly and cumbersome admission process for relatives (many grandparents) enrolling children in school. A was meeting with the DOE administration, Appleseed and Bar executives resulting in a plan for ATJ and Appleseed to develop educational material for school districts and identification of DOE staff who could facilitate issues between school districts and public interest attorneys. Continued work on this issue will exam the use of voluntary transfers of custody to ensure children aren't denied admission to schools.
- Debt collection practices and education – Recognized as an area of the law in which unwary debtors are easily taking advantage of, the ATJ Program coordinated a pilot pro bono project to educate and represent debtors to ensure that legitimate debts are recognized and debtors do not enter into agreements in which they unnecessarily incur greater debt. The ATJ Program worked with SLLS and its Northshore Pro Bono Program to provide a debt buyer training for pro bono volunteers at the 22nd JDC Courthouse. Prior to the training, a debt-buyer pleadings packet was developed to assist attorneys who volunteer for these cases. The pro bono program is promoting the availability of these services and cases are now being directed to Northshore Pro Bono volunteers. The project will be offered to organizations in other parts of the state which have identified this need.
- Availability of domestic law resources – In response to an overwhelming request for domestic law services, the LSBA and its Access to Justice Department have devoted significant time and funds to help individuals obtain relief in domestic cases through the development of self-help resources.

Access to Justice SRL Subcommittee

- The SRL Subcommittee assists courts in creation of “Self-Help Resource Centers” (SHRCs) where volunteers provide self-represented litigants with forms, information, and referrals; this is in addition to assisting courts in the development of those self-help forms, material and websites. ATJ staff has developed models for the creation of self-help resource centers (SHRC) and worked with local partners – courts, bar associations, pro bono programs, law schools, universities, legal aid organizations and others – to make SHRC’s available in several cities.
- *Alexandria*- the SHRC operates as a partnership between the 9th JDC, Alexandria Bar Association, Central Louisiana Pro Bono Program, and LSU Alexandria
- *Baton Rouge* – the SHRC is administered by the Baton Rouge Bar Association and is a partnership between the 19th JDC, Baton Rouge Bar Association, Southern University Law Center, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and LSU Law Center.
- *New Orleans* - the SHRC launched under the leadership of Judge Tiffany Chase and is now under the leadership of the court’s three family-law sections. The Pro Bono Project helps recruit volunteers, and several local firms and corporations send volunteers on a recurring basis.
- *Shreveport* – the SHRC is the most recent addition to Louisiana’s SRL network and is currently in a pilot-project phase. The program is administered by the Shreveport Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project.
- In areas of the state where courts have expressed a need for SRL assistance, but no organization is available to administer a resource center, LSBA is assisting jurisdictions in placing court-approved legal forms and instructions online.
- Legal Education and Assistance Program (LEAP) – The Access to Justice Department has brought together representatives from legal aid organizations, the Supreme Court Library, and public library members of the Louisiana Library Association to create the LSBA Legal Education & Assistance Program. The service will provide legal information and resources via public libraries across the state, as well as specialized training for librarians. The project is in its formative stage and ATJ staff is seeking volunteer attorneys to supplement services by facilitating ‘live’ workshops in libraries on specific legal issues. The project “kick-off” will be in conjunction with the Louisiana Library Association’s annual meeting this spring. A small group of libraries will be used to pilot this project.

ATJ Gap Assessment Subcommittee

- The ATJ Gap Assessment Subcommittee developed an updated survey to assess the current (2013) legal needs. This reassessment includes an examination of seasonal and regional unmet legal needs as well as issues involving limited access to courts for limited-English proficient citizens. The data has been collected and efforts are being made to gather input on ways to meet the needs identified as unmet. A full report on results and recommendation will be available soon.

ATJ Disaster Planning Subcommittee

- The ATJ Disaster Subcommittee coordinates non-profit legal community response to natural and man-made disasters. This year, the subcommittee updated and revised the Louisiana State Bar Association Access to Justice Committee's Disaster Plan for Legal Assistance. The subcommittee also provides ongoing content for the [LSBA Disaster Response webpage](#) which includes the

LSBA Disaster Plan, Disaster Volunteer resources (such as training materials and webinars) and instructions entities and individuals to create a displacement record in case of a disaster.

ATJ Funding Subcommittee

- The ATJ Funding Subcommittee completed an [educational brochure](#) explaining the work of Louisiana's Legal Services Network. Contact was coordinated with Governor Jindal requesting funding of Louisiana Legal Services Programs through a letter from the LSBA president. The subcommittee also reached out to all members of the Louisiana legislators with the request for funding and distribution of educational material. This past year, the ATJ staff again coordinated efforts for Louisiana's team to participate in the annual ABA Day lobbying event where bar leaders from throughout the country converge on Washington DC in an effort to gain support for funding of the Legal Services Corporation.

ATJ Pro Bono Subcommittee

- With local pro bono organizations, the ATJ Pro Bono Subcommittee conducts an annual pro bono summit where an annual plan is developed. The subcommittee works throughout the year to implement initiatives included in the plan. The subcommittee supports local pro bono programs and staff by providing online training, developing template CLE presentations, and encouraging pro bono participation through campaigns. Last year, these campaigns included: "Do Good, Do Well, Do Pro Bono" education campaigns to support pro bono work, particularly by new attorneys; a Pro Bono Heroes awareness campaign; a [model pro bono policy](#) campaign for law firms; a [Pro Bono Toolkit](#) for Judges (which included working with Supreme Court to encourage judicial support for pro bono); and promotion of a previously created an informational video to encourage and promote pro bono service. The subcommittee recognizes statewide Pro Bono volunteer efforts by conducting the annual LSBA Pro Bono Award Presentation and Reception.

ATJ Technology Subcommittee

- Several years ago, the LSBA accepted responsibility for development of a single, uniform case management system which is currently used by civil legal service providers, pro bono programs and the Louisiana Civil Justice Center (LCJC). This statewide case management system allows these organizations to use the same system for seamless transmission of data. This technology assists our nonprofit partners with the ability to maximize their work with minimal resources. The ATJ Technology Subcommittee developed an MOU and Operating Agreement with partner organizations for continued functioning of the system. These documents establish a steering group which provides for self-management by the SCMS stakeholders and distribution of a bi-monthly newsletter and report to keep partners and key contributors advised of its progress. In December 2013, the subcommittee organized a one-day Technology Summit for private attorneys and IT staff to discuss the future use of technology in the field and to share ideas about the direction of technology use. Data collection through this system supports the ongoing effort to acquire statewide grants. Most recently, ATJ staff oversaw the development and programming of statewide reporting functions for the Mortgage Settlement Services and Children in Need of Care grants performed by the legal aid providers and administered by the Louisiana Bar Foundation.

Children's Law Committee

- A Child in Need of Care (CINC) Orientation Video was produced by the committee to be distributed to relevant organizations and individuals involved with the CINC process. This video is targeted at children who need an introduction to the courtroom process of CINC proceedings, and will soon be available in both English and Spanish.

Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee

- A speaker series was developed with events taking place at local Law Schools as a means of educating attorneys and law student to issues related to disability law. The speaker series will act as a networking and outreach opportunity for the disabilities community.