

A Continuum of Legal Services: Can 100% Access be Achieved Through Diversified Programming?

By Monte T. Mollere

The ability of poor and modest means individuals to access legal representation in civil matters is a challenge not only to these individuals, but one faced daily by Louisiana courts, civil legal aid organizations and the private bar. One study estimates that only a small fraction of the legal problems experienced by low-income people (less than one in five) are addressed with the assistance of a private attorney or legal aid lawyer.¹ The difference between the level of legal assistance available and the level that is necessary to meet the needs of low-income individuals has been termed the “justice gap.”² In 2015, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators set out to address the justice gap issue in a resolution, “Reaffirming the Commitment to Meaningful Access to Justice for All.” The resolution reads, in part:

*NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators support the aspirational goal of 100 percent access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs. . . .*³

While the resolution recognizes 100 percent access to justice may be aspirational, the concepts included in the six short paragraphs have become the subject of significant conversation and enthusiasm throughout the nation’s civil justice community. That enthusiasm and optimism (and sometimes skepticism) have not been lost on Louisiana’s civil justice community as it strives to increase access to the courts.

The resolution suggests that “100% access” is not simply a display of unbridled

optimism, but the basis exists in the “*significant advances in creating a continuum of meaningful and appropriate services to secure effective assistance for essential civil legal needs. . .*”

This “continuum” of services presents the possibility of a range of resources in which our justice system might match needs to the most appropriate level of services, thus conserving limited resources and reaching more individuals in the justice gap. The continuum will be most effective when all members in the justice system participate. The Louisiana State Bar Association’s (LSBA) access to justice efforts have long encouraged involvement of civil justice system stakeholders and development of resources that can support and strengthen this continuum.

On one end of that continuum is the litigant who cannot afford an attorney, but may be able to help himself with access to more reliable legal information, forms or expanded self-help services provided by the court. The central portion of the continuum may focus on full representation by legal aid or pro bono attorneys to individuals who don’t have the capacity to assist themselves. The other end may focus on individuals with both capacity and some financial resources to benefit from a measured amount of legal advice from an attorney.

The resolution suggests that the work of the private bar must be included in the spectrum through “discrete task representation by counsel.” More commonly known as limited scope or unbundled representation, this practice has been facilitated by changes in Louisiana court rules. Through modest means panels and incubator programs, attorneys can also provide services to litigants who otherwise

could not afford market-rate legal services, but who may be able to afford some legal services or advice and successfully pursue their legal matters.

Viewing the provision of legal services to the poor through this continuum requires examining traditional ways of serving the poor and providing pro bono services. It also requires changes by the courts, private bar and civil legal aid providers. The LSBA’s access to justice activities regularly assess the greatest “gaps” in service to the poor and how best to close them. Our recent work with self-represented litigants, technology, the LIFT incubator program and pro bono provide a fine structure for this continuum. As the Supreme Court-established Louisiana Access to Justice Commission focuses its work on issues of modest means, funding, language access and self-represented litigation, it will only build on this structure, make the resources in this continuum more robust and move Louisiana closer to a goal of 100 percent access to justice.

FOOTNOTES

1. Legal Servs. Corp., “Documenting the Justice Gap in America: The Current Unmet Civil Needs of Low-Income Americans” (2009), p. 16.

2. Legal Servs. Corp., “Documenting the Justice Gap in America: The Current Unmet Civil Needs of Low-Income Americans” (2009), p. 1.

3. Resolution 5: Reaffirming the Commitment to Meaningful Access to Justice for All, Conference of State Court Admins. 1 (2015).

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Entergy Leads by Example

By Amelia Williams Koch

Under the leadership of Entergy Corp. Executive Vice President and General Counsel Marcus V. Brown, Entergy's Legal Department launched an expansion of its pro bono work in 2012. Entergy's Pro Bono Initiative has included Entergy's 79 lawyers and all department staff, spanning 10 offices spread over six states. Each member of the Legal Department performs a minimum of 10 hours of community service every year, with an aspirational goal of performing 50 hours each of pro bono legal work each year. Entergy's pro bono commitment has seen continued growth since the initiative began. In 2015, 83 percent of Entergy's lawyers performed pro bono work, delivering 2,072 hours of legal work to the indigent.

Brown explained Entergy's commitment to the effort:

Louisiana is Entergy's corporate home. It's also a state where many citizens face great economic hardship. Traditional legal services organizations are stretched to capacity and are able to serve only a small segment of the poorest members of our community. It is our professional responsibility as lawyers, and Entergy's responsibility as a corporate citizen, to assist with filling the gap of desperately needed legal information and representation. All of us who live and work in the community, and the overall community itself, benefit when these legal needs are met.

The type of pro bono work performed by Entergy lawyers includes staffing legal clinics and handling cases involving successions, wills, divorces, name changes, immigration issues and adoptions. Entergy lawyers also serve on the boards of pro bono organizations, provide legal advice to non-profits, and work at civil court self-help desks to aid unrepresented litigants.

In 2013, Entergy collaborated with the Orleans Parish Civil District Court, the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) and the Pro Bono Project to develop the

Self-Help Resource Center (SHRC), a help desk that assists unrepresented, low-income domestic court litigants. Entergy has provided volunteers to staff the SHRC, partnered with the court and others to draft uniform pleadings for the volunteers to use, created an onsite training model for volunteers, and developed an online system to recruit additional volunteers and schedule shifts.

The SHRC averages 25 visitors a day and, since 2013, has served nearly 8,000 individuals with domestic legal issues. A majority of the time, the issue is ultimately resolved with the SHRC's assistance. This helps keep court proceedings running smoothly, reduces the burden on judicial staff, and underscores for public that the courts are manageable, fair and open to all. Recognizing that an all-volunteer effort simply could not keep up with the high demand, Entergy also has underwritten grants that have permitted the Louisiana Civil Justice Center (LCJC) to take on the management of the SHRC team. Since late 2014, LCJC has provided staff lawyers and administrative support for the help desk, as well as assistance with volunteer recruitment and training. The combination of staff lawyers and volunteers has been a key component in providing this much-needed service.

Entergy has also been a committed supporter of the LCJC through board member Sandra Diggs-Miller, an Entergy lawyer. The LCJC, with Entergy's support, piloted a smaller scale help desk in Jefferson Parish and is working toward implementing the concept at courts around the state.

Wendy Hickok Robinson was co-chair of the Legal Department's Pro Bono Initiative at its inception and has worked to grow and formalize the department's efforts ever since. In 2015, the department created a Pro Bono and Community Service Committee, with 10 lawyers and staff representing all geographic and practice areas of the department. The committee is responsible for developing volunteer opportunities and relationships, serving as role models, setting policy, and other-

wise administering the program. Robinson highlights the satisfaction pro bono work brings:

I love hearing from colleagues what I have seen first-hand — that we can make a true positive difference in someone's life. In addition to being personally rewarding, we develop skills useful in our practice, build closer relationships with our colleagues and outside counsel, and concretely support our Company's corporate responsibility mission of creating and sustaining healthy, vibrant communities.

Entergy and its lawyers have won many awards in recognition of their commitment to providing legal services to the indigent. Corporate Pro Bono is a global partnership between the Pro Bono Institute and the Association of Corporate Counsel. It will be presenting its 2016 Pro Bono Partner Award to Entergy in partnership with the Orleans Parish Civil District Court and the LCJC for their collaborative development of the SHRC. Entergy also has received pro bono awards from the LSBA and the Pro Bono Project, which named Entergy its 2013 Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year. General Counsel Marcus Brown served as honorary chair of the Pro Bono Project's 2014 Justice For All Ball, and Wendy Hickok Robinson is on the Pro Bono Project Board. Entergy's lawyers are committed to promoting in-house, pro bono volunteerism on the local, state and national levels, and they have led by example. They are a model for corporate commitment to making legal services available to all.

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Modest Means Committee Addressing Struggles of “Working Poor”

By Mark C. Surprenant and Amy E. Duncan

There are many economically struggling Louisiana citizens who are unfortunately denied access to the legal justice system because their income slightly exceeds the eligibility requirement for free legal services. However, their income is so low that it prevents them from paying a lawyer’s regularly charged fee rate.

In establishing this first-ever Louisiana Modest Means Committee¹ (Committee), the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) and the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission want to reach out and assist the “working poor” in obtaining much needed legal assistance at an affordable fee rate. Thus, the primary goals of the Committee are to 1) identify those Louisiana lawyers who are willing to assist these prospective clients at a significantly reduced fee rate; and 2) communicate that list of lawyers with their potential sliding scale or flat fee rates — determined by the legal task at issue and the client’s income level — to the interested public.

To accomplish its goals, the Committee has completed an initial survey of lawyers across Louisiana who have a desire to be involved in this program. The survey results indicate that a significant interest exists.² Moreover, the Committee has analyzed those actions taken by other states to address this justice gap. More specifically, states like Arkansas,³ Wisconsin⁴ and Washington⁵ already have statewide modest means referral programs in place. The attorneys participating in these modest means programs agree to provide unbundled services, flat fees or reduced per-hour rates to individuals who do not qualify for free legal services, but cannot afford the services of attorneys at the standard rate.⁶ The legal issues covered range from criminal misdemeanors to family law and immigration. The majority of the programs reviewed allow participating attorneys to charge a maximum hourly rate of \$75.⁷ Other programs actually set a sliding-scale fee schedule based on income eligibility.⁸

While some states have set up referral

programs, others have created legal directories used by courts and made available online. The First Judicial District Access to Justice Committee in Colorado, for instance, administers a “Discounted Fee/Unbundled Attorney List,” a directory of attorneys who offer legal services at “discounted fees” or “unbundled.”

The Committee members have been carefully researching and reviewing this information to develop a program in Louisiana that addresses the unmet legal needs of modest means clients. The United Way ALICE Project recently released a report finding that, in addition to the 19 percent poverty rate in Louisiana, 21 percent (or 368,682) of Louisiana households earn above the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford a basic household budget for transportation, child care, health care and food.⁹ Although access to legal representation was not a focus of the report, it is safe to assume that access to legal services is out of reach for these individuals.

The LSBA has already begun working to increase access to affordable legal services through its incubator program, Legal Innovators for Tomorrow (LIFT).¹⁰ The program supports new attorneys in building solo practices focused on providing cost-effective legal services to modest means clients. As more and more attorneys begin to meet the demand for these services, the need to develop a system that can match modest means clients with attorneys offering reduced-rate legal representation is more important than ever. The Committee is launching a statewide program in the 2016-17 Bar year to accomplish these goals.

Attorneys interested in participating in the program should email Amy E. Duncan at amy.duncan@lsba.org.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Modest Means Committee members are Chair Mark C. Surprenant, Adams and Reese, L.L.P.; Judge Sheral C. Kellar, Louisiana Workforce Commission; Marjorie L. (Meg) Frazier, Weiner, Weiss & Madison, A.P.C.; and Stacy Seicshnaydre, Tulane University Law School.

2. The survey was distributed to solo and small

firm attorneys throughout the state. The purpose of the survey was to determine how attorneys define modest means clients; whether they were offering affordable legal rates to those clients; what those rates were and the areas of law covered; and if the attorneys would be interested in participating in a program that matched modest means clients with attorneys offering reduced cost legal services.

3. See, Arkansas legal Services Partnership: Center for Arkansas Legal Services & Legal Aid of Arkansas, *Modest Means Panel*, www.arlegalservices.org/modestmeanspanel (last visited Aug. 20, 2016) [hereinafter Arkansas Program].

4. See, State Bar of Wisconsin, For Public, I Need A Lawyer, *Modest Means*, www.wisbar.org/forPublic/INeedALawyer/Pages/Modest-Means.aspx (last visited Aug. 20, 2016).

5. See, Washington State Bar Association, *How the WSBA Moderate Means Program Works*, www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Volunteer-Opportunities/Public-Service-Opportunities/Moderate-Means-Program/Moderate-Means-Legal-Help (last visited Aug. 20, 2016).

6. The pricing of these Modest Means Programs vary. For instance, the Modest Means Program operated by the Atlanta Bar Association defines what legal issues are offered on an hourly basis with a maximum hourly rate of \$75 or an initial retainer fee of no more than \$600, and which services are offered for flat fees. www.atlantabar.org/LRISModestMeans [hereinafter, Atlanta Program].

7. See e.g., Atlanta Program, *supra* n. 6; and Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education Modest Means Project, <https://www.azflse.org/modestmeans/>.

8. See, Arkansas Program, *supra* n. 3 (stating that the hourly rate depends on income with price per hour ranging from \$35 to \$75).

9. United Way ALICE Louisiana Report Executive Summary, www.launitedway.org/united-way-alice-report-louisiana.

10. www.lsba.org/LIFT.

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New Directions:

Pro Se, Self-Help, LEAP and More

By Michael W. Schachtman

The appearance of pro se litigants, now referred to as self-represented litigants (SRLs), is common in virtually every courtroom in the state that hears civil matters. Most of these individuals are unrepresented due to circumstance, not choice, which poses unique challenges for Louisiana courts. In response, the Louisiana Supreme Court, the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), the Louisiana District Judges Association (LDJA) and other partners have made great strides in recent years to better serve the public, while also increasing the efficiency of courts.

Pro Se and SRLs

In 2009, the Louisiana Supreme Court created a Pro Se Litigant Task Force chaired by Judge Harry F. Randow and composed of judges across the state (including Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson), LSBA Access to Justice (ATJ) staff, and representatives from the Clerks of Court Association, Louisiana Legal Service Corporations and other civil legal aid providers. The Task Force made recommendations to the Supreme Court on a variety of issues, but generally each judicial district has been free to decide if and how it would like to provide assistance to unrepresented parties.

The LSBA's ATJ Committee has since become the leader in developing programming and coordinating local and, ultimately, statewide partnerships. A Self-Represented Litigation Subcommittee was formed in 2010 to create resources for SRLs and to develop a strategic plan, and a full-time SRL counsel position was created in 2011 within the ATJ Department. During this time, the Bar was networking with individual judges interested in providing self-help services in their courts.

Self-Help

The Orleans Parish Civil District Court Self-Help Resource Center (SHRC), the first "live" Self-Help Center in the state, opened in 2011 as a pilot project coordinated by Judge Tiffany Gautier Chase and the LSBA ATJ program. Since that time, East Baton Rouge Parish has launched a similar project, as well as Caddo, Rapides, Calcasieu, Lafourche, St. Tammany, Washington, Jefferson and St. Charles parishes. Several other jurisdictions utilize online services, and at least 20 judicial districts have approved the template domestic forms provided by the ATJ Committee. All of these services were created in partnership with the LSBA, but administered by local partners.

The SHRCs provide legal information, referrals to local attorneys and legal aid providers and, for certain family law issues, fill-in-the-blank pleadings. The SHRCs also serve a valuable triage function for the court because staff are limited in their ability to assist self-represented litigants, and the SHRC is a free and reliable place to refer them. Unlike the many variations of forms sold online, court-approved forms comply with the law, are limited in scope, and much more user friendly.

Based on the success of these initiatives, the quality and prevalence of SRL programming continues to rise across the state, as does the public's perception of the court system. Courts, legal aid and pro bono organizations, private attorneys, legislators, libraries, and other community partners all play important roles in meeting the public's legal needs. For self-represented litigants in particular, collaboration is key. This is why Louisiana continues to be recognized as a national leader in this field.

To access a parish-by-parish list of live Self-Help Centers, SRL websites and courts and local bars offering forms and other information, go online to: <https://www.lsba.org/ATJ/ATJSelfRepresentedLitigants.aspx>.

Legal Education and Assistance Program (LEAP)

Louisiana public libraries play a valuable role in helping to meet the legal needs of the public. For many, libraries are the only available access point to the Internet and legal resources. This is particularly true in areas without a physical legal aid office. Growing numbers of Americans look for legal assistance at local libraries when they can't afford to hire an attorney, and the Law Library of Louisiana is proud to partner with the LSBA and the LSU Law Library to help Louisiana public libraries better serve the public's legal needs.

The Legal Education and Assistance Program (LEAP) provides specialized resources for libraries on legal topics known as "libguides." In addition, law librarians have traveled across the state to present training sessions for public library staff on how to respond to legal inquiries and access current local, state and federal law. These initiatives are supplemented by the LSBA's "Lawyers in Libraries" program which places attorney volunteers at public libraries in every parish for free brief consultations.

To learn more about LEAP and other Lawyers in Libraries events, go online to: <https://www.lsba.org/LouisianaLawyersinLibraries/LouisianaLawyersLibraries.aspx>.

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Three Years Make 20: LIFT Assists 20 New Attorneys to Date

By Amy E. Duncan

In its third year of operation, the Louisiana State Bar Association's Legal Innovators for Tomorrow (LIFT) Incubator and Accelerator Program has assisted more than 20 attorneys¹ in building public interest-focused solo practices. Started in April 2014, the program is designed to address two issues: 1) the lack of affordable legal services available to people of modest means and vulnerable Louisiana residents; and 2) the challenging job market for recent law graduates. The program accomplishes this by providing new attorneys with the support, resources and guidance they need to build low bono² practices that serve the unmet legal needs of so many falling into the growing justice gap.

The program operates under two

Continued next page



LIFT Fellows in the Domestic Violence Project and partners from Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) came together at the annual Louisiana Justice Community Conference in October. Front row from left, Laura Tuggle Issokson, SLLS executive director; C. Nicole Gaither, SLLS attorney; Amy E. Duncan, Louisiana State Bar Association Access to Justice training and projects counsel. Back row from left, Coby A. Venable, LIFT Fellow; Warren C. Ehlers, LIFT Fellow; Shawon J. Bernard, LIFT Fellow; Evelyn A. Bryant, SLLS attorney; and Douglas F. Carey, SLLS managing attorney.

Interview / LIFT Incubator Fellow, Nicholas J. Hite

2014 LIFT Fellow Nicholas J. Hite, who participated in the Domestic Violence Project with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and the New Orleans Family Justice Center, discussed reasons he joined the program and decided to go solo shortly after graduating law school.

I started my legal career as . . . a contract attorney during tough economic times for new law graduates, but knew I wanted to do more in terms of advocacy for people without access to representation due to income or a lack thereof.

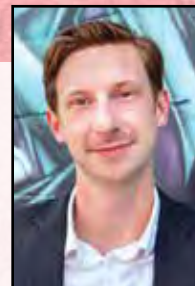
I decided to go solo because . . . I wanted to become a legal advocate and have passion for the people I represent. I heard about the LIFT Incubator program at the same time that I was planning on going solo. It just felt like everything suddenly became clear and the pieces just started falling into place.

My practice mostly focuses on . . . affordable domestic court advocacy especially for LGBTQ and Latina people with an additional focus in accessing civil remedies for adult and child survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

I address the legal needs of those falling into the justice gap by . . . offering services on a sliding scale if I'm charging an hourly rate. But I try to do as much flat-fee billing as possible to make it easier for my clients and for me.

My practice is different because . . . I chose to take a third route, I guess. It's not a standard market-rate firm and it's not a super-restricted, free legal non-profit. Instead I meet my clients where they are financially. My practice is the kind of law firm I would need and want as a client.

The best resources I've received through the incubator program have been . . . two things: office space and colleagues. LIFT literally gave me the space to spread my wings and experiment with my new practice. The incubator also hooked me up with some of the best attorneys around. Those experienced in their fields, total professionals, and just really kind people who have shared countless hours answering my questions, calming my fears, and encouraging me to keep pushing.



Nicholas J. Hite

models — the accelerator and the incubator model. Participants in the 18-month accelerator model receive a number of benefits designed to “accelerate” their low-bono law firm. Under the accelerator model, attorneys receive:

- ▶ training that includes office startup and law practice management, business training and assistance in the areas of accounting, marketing and management for solo practitioners, and procedural and substantive legal training with CLE credits;
- ▶ mentoring from experienced attorneys;
- ▶ networking opportunities with judges and solo practitioners;
- ▶ pro bono case referrals;
- ▶ opportunities to work in the courts and assist self-represented litigants;
- ▶ free case management and legal research database software;
- ▶ access to networks through the Louisiana State Bar Association; and
- ▶ referrals from legal aid programs and partner organizations.

A few participating attorneys have led the way in expanding the type of training and hands-on experience received through the program. Attorney DeVonn H. Jarrett, a 2015 LIFT Accelerator Fellow, led the way in forming a partnership between LIFT and the Entertainment Law Legal Assistance (ELLA) Project. The ELLA Project, operated by Tulane Law School Professor Ashlye M. Keaton, Gene Meneray and the Tipintina’s Foundation, provides legal assistance to low-income artists and musicians state-



Professor Ashlye M. Keaton, left, and DeVonn H. Jarrett at the musicians’ legal clinic in New Orleans.

wide.

Three LIFT incubator project models have developed through collaborations between LIFT, Legal Services Corporation programs and nonprofit organizations. They include:

▶ **Domestic Violence Project.**

Through a collaboration with the New Orleans Family Justice Center and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, LIFT Fellows receive office space and work with attorneys in family and domestic violence law to increase access to legal presentation to survivors.

▶ **Immigration Bond Project.** LIFT, in collaboration with the New Orleans Pro Bono Project, provides support and mentorship to LIFT Fellows practicing immigration law.

▶ **Post-Conviction Relief Project.**

The Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana (JAC) works with LIFT,

in support of its collaborative lawyering initiative, to address legal barriers individuals face after incarceration, including expungement services and civil legal needs of participants in the Re-Entry Court programs.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an overview of the LIFT Incubator and Accelerator Program and a list of participating attorneys, go to: <https://www.lsba.org/LIFT/>.

2. “Low bono is a term that many bar leaders, law faculty and new graduates have heard but may not fully understand. A definition of low bono is not yet in Black’s Law Dictionary but the frequency of its use is increasing in the legal profession. Low bono is used synonymously with the practices of offering reduced legal fees.” Luz E. Herrera, “Encouraging the Development of ‘Low Bono’ Law Practices,” U. M.D. L.J. Race, Relig. Gender & Class 2-3 (2014). Types of reduced rates can include a sliding-fee schedule based on income, flat fees or unbundled legal services. However, the meaning of reduced is typically subjective as viewed from the client’s perspective of what he/she can afford and the lawyer’s perspective of what he/she can charge.

Amy E. Duncan is the Louisiana State Bar Association’s Access to Justice training and projects counsel and directs Legal Innovators for Tomorrow (LIFT), a statewide legal incubator and accelerator program that provides young attorneys with resources to develop innovative, public interest-focused, solo law firms. She received her JD and MBA degrees from Loyola University College of Law. (amy.duncan@lsba.org; 601 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130-3404)



Coming Soon (to Your Inbox)

Louisiana Statewide Pro Bono Survey of Attorneys

The Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) is announcing participation in a new project to gather information about Louisiana’s commitment to pro bono. The LSBA’s Access to Justice Program and Louisiana pro bono projects are partnering with the American Bar Association to distribute a statewide survey to collect valuable information concerning pro bono access throughout the state. Specifically, the survey is designed to assess the state of pro bono in the legal profession, quantify and recognize the pro bono work done by attorneys, and understand the factors that encourage or discourage pro bono service.

The LSBA needs your help and input, whether you’ve volunteered within the last year or not. The survey will be distributed electronically in January 2017. Stay tuned!

Louisiana Civil Justice Center:

Justice is Just a Call Away

By Jonathan M. Rhodes

With nearly 20 percent of all Louisiana residents living in poverty, the state has the second highest poverty rate in the United States and the highest in the South. These statistics indicate that, for the approximately 1 million people in Louisiana who cannot afford even the basic costs of living, they are also likely unable to pay the cost of legal counsel in connection with critical issues. The reality is that those citizens who cannot afford the cost of representation may not be granted equal access to justice.

Recognizing this fundamental unfairness, Louisiana's legal service providers have worked tirelessly to provide access to free legal services for our most vulnerable citizens. However, Louisiana's federally funded legal service programs and pro bono organizations — the primary source of legal assistance for the poor — estimate that they can only serve about 20 percent of those in need of legal services. This leaves 80 percent of those in need unable to secure assistance on issues that could significantly impact their children, families and financial security. As the gap in legal services continues to grow, Louisiana is in need of a legal assistance program that can effectively reach greater numbers of those in need.

Founded in 2005 during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana Civil Justice Center (LCJC) was established to provide disaster legal assistance and connect displaced residents with legal services through a statewide, toll-free legal assistance hotline. In this role, LCJC is proud to partner with the American Bar Association, FEMA and the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) as the agency responsible for emergency legal assistance under the LSBA emergency disaster plan. Over the years, LCJC has been at the front line of disasters, providing critical legal services in response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in 2008, the BP Oil Spill in 2010, Hurricane Isaac in 2012 and the historic and catastrophic flooding in March

and August 2016.

In addition to disaster response, LCJC's role in the justice community has grown to meet the growing legal needs of Louisiana's poverty population. By developing innovative service delivery systems and community partnerships, LCJC is now the first line of communication for nearly 15,000 individuals a year in resolving legal problems that affect their basic quality of life, such as maintenance of housing and income, stability of a family, or the health and well-being of their children.

The core program is the toll-free legal assistance hotline, which provides easy access to legal assistance regardless of income or geographic location. Through the hotline, LCJC attorneys and paraprofessionals help nearly 10,000 callers a year with legal information, brief advice and limited scope services all designed to help them resolve their legal issue. Similarly, the Help Desk for self-represented litigants at the Orleans Parish Civil District Court allows LCJC to help thousands more resolve family law and domestic violence issues. Visitors to the help desk can meet with attorneys and receive assistance filing court forms and moving through the litigation process.

LCJC is always looking for innovative ways to serve those in need. For example, to serve Louisiana's many rural parishes that are not covered by a pro bono program, and may be hours from the nearest legal aid office, LCJC launched the "Justice Tour" in 2016. During the tour, LCJC attorneys traveled to 15 of the poorest parishes across Louisiana with a focus on providing services in rural locations that would not otherwise be served.

Most recently, LCJC launched the Family Legal Center at Children's Hospital in New Orleans to help improve health outcomes for vulnerable children. Simply put, those living in poverty are more likely to suffer from poor health and chronic health conditions. This is particularly troubling for children in the Greater New Orleans region — with nearly 40 percent

living below the poverty line, children are especially vulnerable to the negative health impacts of poverty. Whether it's a child whose family suffers from housing instability or unsafe housing conditions, a child in need of protection from abuse, or a child in need of equal access to education, these and many other social determinants experienced by the poor are often the root cause of poor physical and mental health. Through a medical-legal partnership, LCJC has the unique opportunity to identify health-harming issues, resolve the problem at its source and evaluate the impact on health for vulnerable children in the region.

We know that with poverty comes inequality, and with inequality comes injustice. At LCJC, we believe that lawyers have an important role to play in helping to build more just, equitable and prosperous communities. As a small organization with a large mission to serve Louisiana's poverty population, LCJC is focused on developing innovative and cost-effective programs to reach those in greatest need.

For more information, visit LCJC online at: www.laciviljustice.org. To reach the hotline, call 1-800-310-7029.

Jonathan M. Rhodes is executive director of the Louisiana Civil Justice Center, where his work focuses on providing legal assistance to vulnerable populations across Louisiana. He serves on several boards and committees, including the Louisiana State Bar Association's Criminal Justice Committee, and has participated in several commissions of the Louisiana Legislature, including the Louisiana State Law Institute Expungement Reform working group and the Criminal Justice Funding study group. He is a graduate of the Loyola University New Orleans Institute of Politics and studied as an associate student at Oxford University's Centre for Socio-Legal Studies. He received his BA degree in philosophy from the University of Dayton and his JD degree from Chicago-Kent College of Law. (jonathan.rhodes@laciviljustice.org; 601 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130)

