

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services 2010 Metro Area Volunteer Attorney Participation Plan (VAP)

1. Intake:

- a. **Non-conflict:** Clients are screened through our regular intake process, and are referred to the VAP program if they are income-eligible and their legal issue is not one that our legal staff typically handles. Sometimes staff attorneys refer clients directly to a VAP program when the attorney is already helping the client with a different legal issue.
- b. **Conflict cases:** Conflict cases are screened utilizing a volunteer conflict screener. The volunteer conflict intake screener will report on whether the client meets financial and case-type eligibility criteria. If so, SMRLS Tuesday Night volunteer attorney program coordinator will attempt placement through either direct referral or by scheduling the client with an attorney scheduled to come in on an upcoming Tuesday evening.

2. Programs

- a. **Tuesday Night Clinic:** Approximately one hundred volunteer attorneys each come to the SMRLS office twice a year to advise and/or represent income-eligible clients. Attorneys identify areas of practice for which they will accept cases and choose two dates each year for on-site volunteer appointments. Clients are scheduled for appointments when an attorney practicing in the desired area is scheduled on Tuesday evening.
 - i. **Direct Referrals:** Where income-eligible clients have pressing legal needs that our staff cannot address and the client cannot wait for a Tuesday Night program attorney, an attempt will be made to directly refer the client to a volunteer attorney in the community.
- b. **3M Immigration Cases:** Staff at the RIMS office identify clients with specific legal issues that can be handled by non-expert attorneys and then train 3M corporation volunteers to handle those cases or those portions of cases.
- c. **Briggs Night:** Volunteer attorneys from the Briggs and Morgan firm are paired with income-eligible clients whose needs correspond to the attorneys' interests and areas of expertise. This program is just restarting after a hiatus, and we expect Briggs Night to occur going forward up to two times per year. The Briggs firm also accepts direct referral cases involving real estate concerns and rental housing repair.

- d. **HALO:** This program works with income-eligible clients who are having repair problems with their rental housing. SMRLS paralegals obtain evidence, which a staff attorney reviews, and then our VISTA volunteer sends conflict information to Briggs and Morgan, William Mitchell College of Law clinic students, and other attorneys from small and mid-size law firms by e-mail. If a volunteer attorney expresses interest in the case after receiving the conflict information, the VISTA volunteer sends the full set of information.
- e. **Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi:** Volunteer attorneys from the Robins firm are currently taking housing discrimination cases, and are exploring the possibility of taking other housing and immigration cases. Staff members identify cases that appear to be appropriate for referral and then provide limited training and support as needed.
- f. **Collaborative Law Project:** Income-eligible clients with children seeking a divorce, or who have third party custody issues, and who are seeking a less adversarial process may be directly referred to this program. This project is in the development stage. Care is taken to ensure that SMRLS does not develop a conflict that would preclude representing the primary client if the collaborative process breaks down.
- g. **Consumer and Landlord Tenant Advice Program:** Volunteer attorneys from the Minnesota Attorney General's office come to the SMRLS offices every other Tuesday evening to make telephone advice calls to clients with consumer or landlord tenant problems. Volunteers from the Attorney General's office recruit and schedule the volunteers. This program is coordinated by the SMRLS Ramsey County pro bono coordinator.
- h. **Letters to Creditors Program:** Clients with debt collection abuse problems are first referred to volunteer attorneys from the MSBA's Bankruptcy Section through an arrangement between the Bankruptcy Section and the Volunteer Lawyers' Network. Those clients for whom a bankruptcy is not appropriate are then referred back to SMRLS and placed with an attorney for the preparation of letters to creditors. Volunteer attorneys come to SMRLS' offices twice a month on Tuesday evenings to write letters to creditors. This program is coordinated by the SMRLS Ramsey County pro bono coordinator.