

**Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services
2010 Rural Volunteer Attorney Participation Plan (VAP)**

Staff:

Winona counties plus Carver and Scott: Mary, 80%
Albert Lea counties: Debi, 50%
SW Region counties: Ruth, 80%
Leadership, etc: Larry, 15%

1. **Response to the Unmet Family Law Need:** Recognizing that our ability to place family law cases in SMRLS' rural counties has hit a plateau due to the limited numbers of family law practitioners and the inherent difficulty of placing cases in this area of law, we are increasingly relying upon self-help clinics and referrals to self-help materials and resources.
 - a. **Place 75 Extended Service Cases:** Priority given to the placement of Tier 1 cases to relieve the burden on staff. All coordinators.
 - b. **Assist 200 Persons Through Self-Help Divorce Clinics:** We will continue to hold self help clinics utilizing volunteer attorneys, law students and paralegal students. Mary (Winona, Rochester, Shakopee, and Worthington clinics) and Debi (Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Mankato clinics).
 - i. Explore going online with the clinics by using ICAN on-line forms now available on the Court website and secure computers or laptops to be utilized at the clinics so that each participant can work at a computer (with assistance from volunteers). Coordinators in cooperation with Lolita.
 - ii. Work with Central Office leadership to increase clinic utilization by Carver and Scott county residents. (Clinics in those counties so far have been predominately attended by residents from nearby rural counties). Larry.
 - iii. Make better use of down time of support staff for service/filing and explore utilizing down time of Hotline screeners for clinic preparation interviews with clinic participants.
 - c. **Discontinue the Hotline Family Law Volunteer Panel:** It has been difficult maintaining a sufficient cadre of volunteer attorneys on the Hotline panel to answer family law questions. The volunteers report that there is not much value added by providing brief advice over the phone and that those persons would be as well served by referral to the Court website and self-help forms and clinics. Explore with leadership having the Hotline send out Fact Sheets and referrals to the Court website without creating subsequent conflicts of interest while obtaining Counsel and Advice credit, if possible. Larry.
 - d. **Mediation Panel:** Maintain panel of mediators to mediate 15 contested cases arising from the Self-Help Divorce Clinics, staff cases, and volunteer attorney cases. Ruth.
 - e. **Blue Earth County Drug Court:** Persons graduating from or participating in the Drug Court need advice with re-establishing parenting time with their children and other legal issues. We are working with the local family bar on clinics at which volunteers will provide advice and assistance with self help forms. Volunteers will provide representation through the first court appearance where there are special needs. Ruth.

- f. **Child Support Self Help Clinics:** Experiment with offering self-help clinics to persons seeking to modify child support (reduce or increase) with volunteer attorneys Carl Arnold, and possibly Kalene Engel in Winona. MJF volunteer law students will screen potential participants with household incomes of 125% of poverty. Clinic will consist of an informational session on filling out the self help forms. Participants can subsequently pay a \$50 reduced fee to hire the attorney to do the motion papers, completely separate from SMRLS services. First clinic target date March 24 at the Rice County Courthouse in Faribault. Debi with Carl Arnold and Mary with Kalene Engel.
2. **Respond to Unmet Need in Other Civil Areas:** Particularly with the reduction in SMRLS staffing due to budget cuts, it will be necessary to refer more of the legal work, including Tier 1 cases, to the volunteer attorneys.
- a. **Place 75 Extended Service Cases, Including Tier 1 cases such as Evictions, TRAs, Foreclosures, and Unemployment Compensation.**
 - b. **Debtor Protection Panel:** Serve 200 rural households with phone advice from volunteer attorney Mark Vavrick (and others as needed) on non-emergency debt collection matters. Debi (SE) and Ruth (SW). See Debtor Protection Intake Protocol.
 - i. Design flyer to get the word out to local agencies and organizations regarding this service. Ruth.
 - ii. Email local agencies and organizations with the flyer, including community action agencies, human service departments, HRAs, victim advocates, debtor counseling agencies (Lutheran Social Services), court administration, and senior centers. Rural coordinators.
 - c. **Rural Bankruptcy Panel:** Develop panel of rural bankruptcy practitioners to handle bankruptcies in SMRLS rural counties with the assistance of Mankato volunteer attorney Steve Behm. Place an estimated 50 bankruptcies during 2010 (Steve estimates he alone can take 3-5 per month). Ruth.
 - i. Debtor protection protocol will be revised to provide for referrals back from Vavrick to Ruth of clients/cases appropriate for bankruptcy for placement. Ruth will financially re-screen before referring for a bankruptcy.
 - ii. With the assistance of Steve Behm, recruit bankruptcy attorneys for the Panel starting in the Mankato area and expanding out.
 - iii. Bankruptcies will be placed initially only in the south central and southwest areas feeding the bankruptcy court in Mankato due to the burden on Steve Behm, although Steve will on occasion take cases requiring an appearance in the Rochester bankruptcy court and others will be served as the panel expands.
 - d. **Immigration Clinics:** Coordinating with RIMS, explore whether former RIMS attorneys Patricia and Ana Maria would be willing to provide pro bono clinics in rural counties and whether they are willing to handle pro bono cases. Larry.
 - i. Explore whether Hormel corporate legal department would be willing, with training and support, to handle immigration cases similar to the Mayo immigration project.
 - e. **Medical/Legal Clinics:** Explore the idea of medical/legal clinics in Mankato where we have the Open Door Clinic and the Leonard Street office (they do one in Mpls)

and Rochester with the Mayo Clinic. Larry to discuss with Senior Leadership first. Debi has already discussed the Mayo idea with Gary H. Larry, coordinators.

3. **Senior Targeted Services:** We will adjust our focus this year to be more efficient and to re-focus more of our efforts on lower income seniors and seniors of color, including refugees/immigrants.
 - a. **Senior Community Legal Education & Seniors Clinics:** The number of these events will be scaled back, and generally, only done as requested to meet the expectations of the Region 10 Title III grant by doing 10 events in the Albert Lea counties and 5 in Olmsted County. Debi will do these in her part time capacity as a SE seniors paralegal.
 1. Tom Zera, SMRLS Senior Initiative coordinator will coordinate, with the assistance of volunteer interns/paralegals in Mankato, 5-10 similar events in the SW Region.
 2. Priority and focus will be put on events for immigrants/refugees and low income seniors when possible.
 - b. **Mankato and Rochester Senior Fairs:** This will be left to Seniors Initiative to determine SMRLS participation in the senior fairs in Mankato and Rochester.
 - c. **Steele County Senior Fair:** We will continue to participate in this Fair, but Debi will be much less involved in putting the Fair on. Debi.
 - a. “Law Day Clinics”: We will experiment with having 3 day-long clinics open to both seniors and non-seniors but focused primarily on low income and refugee/immigrant seniors. The goal is to reach more of these targeted seniors by opening up the clinics to their younger family members. The events will likely be in the Fall in Rochester (coordinated with LAOC), Mankato and Owatonna. If successful, we would hope to offer clinics in Worthington and Winona in 2011.
4. **Develop and Maintain Volunteer Attorney Capacity:**
 - a. **Email VAP Newsletter:** Develop a quarterly, one-page email-newsletter targeted to volunteer attorneys, the bar and the judiciary to remind them of SMRLS programs, available support (CLEs, manuals, “buddies”, etc.) and pro bono opportunities. Larry.
 - b. **Awards:** Nominate local volunteers for annual Judicial District pro bono awards and other awards, as appropriate and as opportunities arise. Coordinators. Ruth and Larry will present special “Lifesaver” awards at the January 2009 SW staff meeting to 2 extraordinary volunteers from last year. Distribute a few SMRLS Centennial pins to key volunteers. Coordinators.
 - c. **CLEs:** We will also host MLSC and MnCLE video replays in the Mankato office (usually 3-5 per year). Ruth.
5. **Integrate VAP and the Campaign for Legal Aid:** Continue expansion of the Campaign in the SW Region by holding meetings with volunteer solicitors selected from the local bar and provide them with materials and support to solicit local firms and attorneys. Program is active in the 6th District (Mankato), Waseca County and Brown County. Ruth, who will coordinate with Kathie and Larry.
6. **Improve VAP Administration:**
 - a. **Firm-Wide Coordination & Policies:** Larry will continue to work with Steve Wolfe re firm wide coordination. Larry will ask Lolita to put a VAP folder on the firm server where VAP protocols and policies can be posted as developed.
7. **LEP Compliance:** Interpreters will be provided as needed to assure compliance with SMRLS’ Policy on Services to Persons With Limited English Proficiency (LEP).