

SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

News From The Florida Bar Foundation
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Institute nurtures legal aid leaders

by Gabrielle Davis

Research funded by The Florida Bar Foundation shows that young legal aid attorneys are willing to step up the leadership ladder, but many feel they haven't had adequate preparation.

The Florida Bar Foundation is working to change that.

The Foundation has allocated \$100,000 and collaborated with the Center for Legal Aid Education (CLAE) to create The Florida Leadership Development Institute, a 14-month program that teaches legal aid attorneys the fundamentals of leadership with support from more experienced legal aid mentors.

A Foundation-funded 2007 study on staff attorney recruitment and retention in legal aid demonstrates that young legal aid attorneys are "underutilized and are leaving Legal Aid in two or three years," said Paul Doyle, director of the Foundation's Legal Assistance for the Poor and Law Student Assistance grant programs.

"The Leadership Development Institute is directed toward enabling young,



NANCY KINNALLY

Lissette Labrousse of Legal Services of Greater Miami, right, and her mentor Carol Miller of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid share in a discussion of leadership techniques at a February meeting of the Florida Leadership Development Institute.

promising advocates to be a force for leadership in the programs where they are now," Doyle said.

Through the program, the 30 Leadership Development Institute fellows develop a comprehensive set of skills essential to the exercise of leadership in a social justice context. A combination of in-person training sessions and Web-based activities provides ongoing support to Leadership Institute fellows as they apply

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Leadership and Funding for Justice in Florida

what happened to him, that's no excuse for not being everything he can be."

For Parker, being involved in Infante's legal case was meaningful to her personally, but she also believes such pro bono work makes her well-rounded professionally.

"As a transactional attorney," Parker says, "I generally avoid spending time in court," but she has now been to court four times in the course of handling pro bono custody cases and learned something each time.

A commercial real estate lawyer with Baker Hostetler in Orlando, Parker is proud of her firm for its encouragement of her pro bono work.

"Baker is 100 percent supportive of all my work with pro bono," Parker said. "They feel it's important, and that's important to me."



MICHELLE LYLES

Working with the Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association, pro bono attorney Jessica Parker of Baker Hostetler, left, helped Sandra Infante obtain legal temporary custody of her nephew, then 12, after the boy's mother, grandmother and stepfather died unexpectedly within a few months of each other.

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their new skills to projects they proposed in response to problems they had identified in their legal aid communities.

In February, the fellows and mentors met for the first time in Orlando.

One attorney is working to get financial support for domestic violence victims so that they can remain independent outside their former abusive households.

"When they get their injunctions to have their safety ensured, they can have the money to stay out of the relationship and hopefully end the cycle of violence," said Kim Banister of Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida in Daytona Beach.

Another is working on ways to address systemic changes to recurring problems identified through the implementation of a landlord-tenant legal hotline.

Ilenia Sanchez-Bryson of Legal Services of Greater Miami, who was tasked by her agency with developing the hotline, found that many of the clients' recurring problems fell outside the realm of legal advice the hotline was set up to provide.

"The problems are much bigger than me or my agency," Sanchez-Bryson said. "This is a great opportunity for me to know who the powers are and to figure out who to bring together to make things happen."

Her colleague Lissette Labrousse is researching better ways for low-income Haitians to access legal services.

Labrousse plans to recruit Creole-speaking attorneys and law office staff to break down some of the barriers Haitian immigrants face in receiving legal services. Her project also would utilize Language Line, a phone-based translation service funded in part by the Foundation.

In looking over the fellows' project ideas, many of them have what it takes to be in leadership, said Dick Bauer, CLAE senior equal justice training fellow.

"The Institute will teach them how to use those skills to get results," he said.

The Institute will convene again in Orlando in May and September and will conclude in January 2010.



COURTESY OF LEGAL SERVICES OF GREATER MIAMI

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Legal Services of Greater Miami