

Pro Bono Involvement in Your Advocate Site
The OST Perspective....January 21, 2004

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Pro Bono Involvement in Ohio's website:

1. Pro Bono Research Group: Ohio State University Moritz College of Law's PBRG provides research assistance to Legal Services and Legal Aid attorneys throughout Ohio. Second and third-year Research Fellows conduct quality research and gain practical legal experience. In addition, PBRG sponsors events that promote public interest law, including the Frank Woodside III Speaker Series, an annual poverty law symposium.

Ohio's website has section for Research Requests to PBRG. The page includes announcements from PBRG, a form to request research and the list of recent research requests. Tennessee's website will have a similar project which will become part of the possible OST modules that can be adopted by other states.

2. Pro bono attorney access to the advocate website. Some attorneys have full access; some can have limited access.
3. Advertising pro bono opportunities. Ohio's public website as a section devoted to opportunities for lawyers to volunteer services. The page has links to other information by other organizations as well as some description of how to become involved. Southeastern Ohio Legal Services' Low Income Taxpayer Clinic is using this section to advertise its program and to provide easy access to forms and brochures for its pro bono attorneys.
4. HotDocs project. Our document assembly project for assisted pro se is being made available through our advocate website and is being piloted at Interfaith Legal Clinics around the state. Interfaith Legal Clinics are free, monthly, walk-in legal clinics held at various locations and sponsored by legal aid programs and local bar associations. For the attorneys who volunteer for Interfaith Legal Services, these clinics represent an opportunity to live out one's faith by serving others. Volunteers are thus able to integrate their faith with their professional lives. For low-income clients, the clinics provide access to legal counsel that these persons might otherwise be unable to afford. Depending on the individual client's situation, a volunteer attorney may offer brief advice, may refer the client to an agency or program that can assist the client, or may consider representing the client on an ongoing basis.

When they have Internet access, the clinic attorneys are accessing and completing court forms for clients using our Hot Docs project.

website for the Interfaith Legal Clinic: _____
<http://www.olaf.org/probonoresources/interfaith.shtml>

Other OST sites:

1. Separate websites: Pine Tree Legal Assistance manages its own Volunteer Lawyers website. The site is integrated with the other sites managed by Pine Tree but is exclusively directed at volunteer lawyers. <http://www.vlp.org/>
2. Scheduling appointments: Wisconsin's Jeffrey Myer tweaked the calendar in the OST to serve the needs of a law school clinic. <http://www.badgerlaw.net> He's gotten rave reviews for this. Here's his description:

I teach a clinic at Marquette Law School with about 6 students and 12 private attorneys who volunteer 1 or 2 nights a semester to supervise the students. Clients call 1 of the private atty's staff to schedule appointments, who has been keeping a paper appointment schedule. But the appointments are at the law school, not my office or any of the private attorneys' offices, so the schedule had to be faxed so the administration at the law school knows who has appointments when. The students and the lawyers need access to information protected by atty/client privilege, but the law school administration people *can't* have access to that information (because of the privilege).

As you might imagine, this has been a scheduling nightmare. Only 1 person can schedule appointments (to avoid overbooking). Clients forget their appointments and call our office or the law school, but we don't have the scheduling calendar. Volunteer lawyers forget which night they're on. The secretary making the appointments forgets to fax the law school the appointment schedule. Students can't tell if there are any appointments and (if the law school can't tell them) sometimes commute 60 minutes to find there has been no one scheduled.

Well, since just before Christmas, I took the OST template calendar feature, cut and pasted and fiddled with the forms and then a local role here and there, and I've got this remarkably (to me!) appointment system/rudimentary database in which:

1. Multiple people (even without full group security rights) can enter appointments. With just a generic username and password (and without being separately registered on the private side) the 1 person who has been keeping the appointment schedule, my receptionist staff here, any volunteer lawyer, and anyone at the law school administrative office can make an appointment. And they can check to see which appointments have been made so there won't be a conflict.
2. The law school can, the night of interviews, print that day's schedule.

3. Students can see the appointment information in advance and contact clients by phone, changing the appointment if necessary (and editing the appointment schedule showing the change).
4. Supervising attorneys and students (but not the law school administration folks) can share information that IS protected by the atty/client privilege because they have greater security rights.
5. The Supervising attorneys and students who are scheduled for a given date can be displayed publicly to the entire advocate side (no confidential information), but the all client info kept discretely limited to the students, volunteers attorneys, and the law school admin. people and privileged client info kept even from the law school admin. people.
6. The substantive training materials can be made available to the volunteer attorneys with active hyperlinks to the supporting law.

In the works:

1. OST Enhancements: one of the proposed Enhancements to the OST is a directory like the legal services directory but for attorneys to search for pro bono opportunities.
2. Case Descriptions: Wisconsin's Jeff Myer is developing a system to share case descriptions and then allow pro bono attorneys to email him if they would like to accept the case.