

NEBRASKA STATE PLANNING SELF-EVALUATION REPORT
Final-1.15.02

INTRODUCTION

In preparation for compliance with the self-evaluation process set forth in Program Letter 2000-7, Nebraska Legal Services (NLS), working with the Nebraska State Planning Group (Equal Access to Justice Community)(NSPG), which is sponsored by the Nebraska State Bar Association, and in concert with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Nebraska State Bar Association (VLP), the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law and the Public Interest (Appleseed), the Civil Clinical Law Program at the University of Nebraska College of Law (Clinic) and the Milton R. Abrahams Legal Clinic at Creighton University (Creighton Clinic), recruited a broad base of individuals representative of the judiciary, the legislative process, faith-based service providers, ethnic and minority populations, and human service agencies to participate in meetings at which the self-evaluation described in PL 2000-7 took place. A list of these participants is found at Appendix A.

The NSPG met either as a committee of the whole or as subcommittees and generated information and ideas that were reported back to the full group. The NSPG agreed it was necessary to form a working committee, that was representative of both the original group, as well as other interested entities within the justice community, to assess the status of equal access to justice in Nebraska, based on the work of the entire NSPG, and make recommendations regarding activities necessary to achieve this goal. This Committee, named the Equal Access to Justice Action Plan Committee (Action Plan Committee) will meet to draft a proposed action plan and timeline to implement the ideas generated by the NSPG. Upon completion of its work the Action Plan Committee will present it to the entire NSPG. A list of members of the Action Plan Committee is found at Appendix B.

On May 1, 2000, Western Nebraska Legal Services and Legal Services of Southeast Nebraska were merged into the Legal Aid Society, which then became known as Nebraska Legal Services. This merger was in response to a determination made by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) that funding for civil legal services in Nebraska would only be awarded to a statewide entity. A Board of Directors, comprised of 13 attorneys from both urban and rural communities, appointed by the NSBA, and 7 client-eligible persons, hired Douglas K. German to be the Executive Director of the new organization and he began working in June 2000.

NLS has embarked on a variety of endeavors to ensure that a comprehensive, integrated, client-centered legal services delivery system is achieved in Nebraska.

- Assessment of the statewide legal needs of low-income Nebraskans

- Development of an organizational plan for 2001, with both short and long-range goals, which will be updated each year
- Development of a mission statement and vision
- Establishment of a Management Team to address areas of advocacy, finance and administration, advocacy support and technology planning, resource development and public relations, centralized intake, and technology coordination
- Enhancement of the use and level of technology
- Encouragement of the establishment of an Equal Access to Justice Community involving all stakeholders
- Development of priorities for its Basic Field, Native American and Migrant programs
- Recruitment of private attorneys statewide to participate in its PAI contract program
- Implementation of an AccessLine as the single point of contact for determining income eligibility and providing advice and brief service
- Recruitment of a state planning group (NSPG) reflective of diverse elements in the human services and legal communities
- Formulation of strategies for successful fund raising, resource development and public relations.
- Improvement of collaboration with the other providers of civil legal aid.

To what extent has a comprehensive, integrated and client-centered legal services delivery system been achieved in Nebraska?

To what extent have intended outcomes of a comprehensive, integrated, client-centered legal services delivery system been achieved, including, but not limited to, service effectiveness/quality; efficiency; equity in terms of client access; greater involvement by members of the private bar in the legal lives of clients, and client-community empowerment?

1. What are the components of the delivery system?

Nebraska Legal Services, an LSC-funded program, provides:

- Counsel and advices, through its AccessLine

- Extended case representation through Associate Attorneys or private attorneys with whom the firm contracts
- Pro se clinics for persons seeking a divorce in which no matters are in dispute
- Mediation referrals and follow up services in family law cases in which there are matters capable of being mediated
- Substantive law clinics, in the area of consumer, housing and divorce (with extended follow up services for divorce clinics)
- Outreach, community legal education and informational brochures
- Web-based legal information, pro se pleadings and pleadings for pro bono attorneys (to be provided pursuant to LSC Technology Initiative Grant)

Its mission is to promote throughout Nebraska “equal access to justice” and the empowerment of low-income persons through outstanding advocacy, resource referral, a continuum of services, the use of appropriate organizational structures and new technologies, collaboration with client communities and other providers, community development and preventive education.

The Civil Clinics at the University of Nebraska College of Law and Creighton University School of Law provide a range of legal services through the use of certified Senior Law Students practicing under the supervision of a licensed attorney. The primary mission of these clinics is to serve the pedagogical needs of the students but provision of civil legal services to low-income persons is an ancillary benefit. The clinics are responsive to their communities, as primarily demonstrated by the Creighton Clinic’s neighborhood office in the Juan Diego Center, which helps to serve the Hispanic Community in Omaha. The UNL Clinic in Lincoln works with NLS’ AccessLine and Lincoln office so that it can obtain case types to meet student needs.

Additionally, the law school programs contribute to the delivery system in the following ways:

- Sensitize law students to the importance of doing pro bono work and participating in the IOLTA program
- Have law professors available to serve as experts/resources for attorneys working on issues affecting low income persons
- Develop internship programs that provide meaningful experiences for law students and in the process, help the service delivery system
- Assist the service delivery system through use of the schools’ technologies

The Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law and the Public Interest is a non-profit, non-partisan law project committed to equal justice for all Nebraskans. It assists welfare recipients, the working poor, new immigrants, family farmers and struggling communities. It seeks to join legal skills with civic and community-based organization leaders, other professionals, and community members to seek lasting solutions to public interest problems through education, negotiation, research, analysis, legislation, litigation, and other advocacy. Appleseed addresses root causes of injustice- such as limited access to legal representation, unfair legislation and public policy, and denial of basic rights and opportunities – rather than the symptoms. In carrying out its purposes, Appleseed utilizes

- Workshops
- Trainings
- Extended case representation, using staff and cooperating attorneys
- Brochures
- Web-based information

The Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) of the Nebraska State Bar Association

- Recruits pro bono attorneys who provide extended case services in those matters in which NLS cannot provide services due to lack of resources, conflicts of interest and firm priorities
- Provides pleadings on disc and other written materials for pro bono attorneys doing family law cases through the Family Law Initiative
- Places cases and clients with pro bono attorneys
- Attempts to serve those people who are not able to be served by any other provider
- Provides information and advice to callers, although it is hoped that as time progresses, NLS' AccessLine will absorb the majority of these types of calls and that the VLP will then focus on recruitment and placement
- Operates a toll free intake line, which allows callers from across the state to call and request assistance from a volunteer attorney. This intake line is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:30 CT
- Provides information, advice and referrals to callers
- Provides training for attorneys doing pro bono work

2. Has the legal services delivery system expanded access and services through coordination with providers throughout the state? Can this be quantified?

When the three former LSC-funded providers merged to form NLS, some duplication was eliminated and greater coordination among the 7 offices across Nebraska took place. NLS and the VLP are coordinating resource development through the NSBA's Hour of Sharing Campaign and NLS' private bar campaigns to be certain that the solicitations do not overlap. Funds raised from that part of the VLP campaign, which encourages individual attorneys to contribute the financial equivalent of a billable hour will benefit all the service providers through a competitive grant application process.

NLS and the VLP will be exploring pooling of resources in the operation of NLS' AccessLine. As a preliminary step in this process, potential ethical problems surrounding conflicts will be examined and attempts will be made to develop a system that will overcome these problems.

In regard to quantifying expansion of access, statistics maintained by NLS and the VLP can be compared. Both organizations use the TIME case management system. 2001 figures can be used as a benchmark.

NLS can and does refer clients needing legal assistance in LSC-restricted matters to Appleseed.

The NLS AccessLine provides weekly reports to the other four providers of civil legal aid in order to advise them of the current status on intake by NLS.

Appleseed in conjunction with the Nebraska State Bar Association provides a resource web page accessible statewide to attorneys and the public. The NLS web page will be linked and provide additional resources.

The NSPG (Equal Access to Justice Community) provides a clearinghouse for the development and coordination of statewide resources.

3. What are the most important issues impacting upon low-income Nebraskans and how is Nebraska responding to these issues?

The Statewide Legal Services Needs Assessment, completed in September 2000, provided NLS and the other state planners with information regarding issues impacting upon low-income Nebraskans. A copy of that Assessment is found at Appendix C. Hanna-Keelan Associates, a community planning and research firm, developed a written survey instrument after consultation with a Steering Committee comprised of a broad-based group involved in providing services to low-income persons. A list of the membership of that Committee is found in the Needs Assessment. The survey was disseminated to legal services providers, low-income persons, community agencies providing services to low-income persons and private attorneys. In addition, focus group meetings were held in various parts of the state targeting representatives of the ethnic and minority communities, domestic violence advocates, farmers, as well as the general low-

income community. The Assessment sought feedback regarding both legal and non-legal needs. Nine priority need areas were identified:

- Family law
- Housing
- Education
- Consumer law
- Immigration
- Employment
- Juvenile representation
- Government and Community Affairs
- Public Benefits

In addition, the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) identified guardianship, conservatorships, wills and simple probate matters as additional areas of need.

Nonlegal needs impacting on low-income persons included:

- Lack of affordable housing
- High school drop out rates, particularly among minority students
- Difficulties in accessing medical care

The influx of immigrants, both those from Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, who are being resettled by various agencies, as well as those hired to work in Nebraska's meat packing industry, was identified as creating a strain on local communities. The prolonged drought and the dropping prices for agricultural products have affected farmers throughout the state and have had a general negative impact on Nebraska's economy, so much so that a Special Session of the Nebraska Legislature was called by the Governor in October, 2001 to deal immediately with projected budget shortfalls. Additionally, Nebraska's implementation of the Welfare Reform Act has been problematic and various regulations promulgated by the Nebraska Health and Human Services System have been successfully challenged by Appleseed.

Through the state planning process (NSPG) and the work of the five providers of civil legal services strategies have been developed to address the major issues affecting low-income Nebraskans. These are listed below with an update as to the status of each:

- Development of a diverse state-planning group (NSPG)

This has been accomplished, as evidenced by review of the persons who have been recruited and who have participated in the planning process to date. Additionally, the Equal Access to Justice Action Plan Committee has been recruited and will begin meeting in January 2002 to ensure that the work begun by the NSPG continues.

- Implementation of priorities developed pursuant to the results of the statewide needs assessment to ensure the same range of services across Nebraska.

This has been accomplished with input from NLS' staff members and its Board of Directors. Further review will take place within the next two months based on experiences during 2001 and the document will be circulated to the Action Plan Committee for its feedback.

- Implementation of a centralized intake system that will resolve approximately 60% of NLS' cases through advice or brief service.

The AccessLine began on January 2, 2001 and by March 1st; it had replaced the intake systems in the 7 local NLS offices. Training staff and stabilizing staff, as well as determining optimal configuration of the AccessLine and optimal hours of operation, has been a work in progress. Currently, the AccessLine has four intake paralegals and two attorneys, one of who has extensive experience with Legal Services and serves as the Director of the AccessLine. Plans are underway to update and develop written materials to send to callers and provide recorded information on a variety of substantive law topics for callers to access as they wait to talk with an intake paralegal. The recorded information will also help callers determine if the AccessLine and its services are appropriate for them, e.g. it will help to screen out callers who have criminal problems or who are over income guidelines.

- Expansion of the AccessLine to do intake for all stakeholders, thereby freeing up the VLP, for example, to concentrate on recruitment and retention of pro bono attorneys and placement of cases.

Significant work still remains on this project both in terms of finding necessary funding to increase AccessLine staff to handle the volume of calls anticipated and to establish a structure that addresses the problems posed by potential conflicts of interest. At present, the VLP serves as a referral source for NLS when it cannot represent an otherwise eligible person, due to a conflict of interest, and NLS wants to continue to preserve the VLP as such a referral source. The Action Plan Committee will explore ways in which the AccessLine can serve as an initial point of contact for all the legal services providers who desire to utilize this service while being cognizant of the conflict of interest issues.

- Continuation of a statewide Rural Response Hotline that provides intake, advice and brief service for small farmers and ranchers and other low-income rural residents.

This has been accomplished and continues to be funded by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Interchurch Ministries.

- Shifting of NLS resources to its Grand Island, North Platte and Scottsbluff offices to provide for more extended case representation to clients served by these offices.

Although it has been NLS' intention to assign two associate attorneys to each of these offices, projected revenue and expenses for 2002 will not allow for this. As more

general operating funds are received, such money will be earmarked for increased salaries and expansion of services in NLS' western offices. Through expanded use of technology and through utilization of the skills of NLS' case handlers, regardless of the office to which they are assigned, NLS has been able to maximize the amount of extended case service provided to clients throughout Nebraska.

- Conducting outreach, particularly in western Nebraska, to let potential clients and service providers know that more extended case representation is being offered.

NLS has recently conducted an internal restructuring of its management team, replacing the two Deputy Executive Directors, who together supervised all seven NLS offices, with a Director of Advocacy and a Director of Advocacy Support and Technology Services. This new organizational structure will permit development of outreach activities designed to inform low-income Nebraskans regarding the services provided by NLS.

- Expansion of NLS' private attorney contract program so that PAI funds will support reduced fee contract work in counties that are two or more hours' drive (one way) from the closest office.

NLS has thus far recruited 73 attorneys to participate in this program and has assigned a .6FTE Associate Attorney to evaluate cases prior to placement, to contract and to review pleadings, case status and billings. NLS provides services exclusively through private attorney contracts in certain counties due to their distance from local offices. A listing of these counties is found in Appendix D.

- Planned solicitation of law firms in Lincoln and Omaha to raise general operating funds for NLS.

Using matching monies received from LSC and NSBA, NLS hired Dennis Dorgan of Management Information Exchange to evaluate the efficacy of a planned giving campaign and provide insight as to how to structure such a campaign. Co-chairs have been recruited in Lincoln and Omaha; members of the Omaha fundraising committee have been selected. Both campaigns will begin in early 2002. Thereafter, similar efforts will take place in Greater Nebraska. These campaigns are targeted toward law firms, rather than individual attorneys.

- Establishment of a resource development capacity within NLS.

In the fall of 2001 a Director of Resource Development and Public Relations was hired and the process started to significantly increase the capacity to raise funds.

- Initiation of NSBA Hour of Sharing Campaign to increase recruitment and involvement of pro bono attorneys through a pledge of one hour of legal services and

to raise funds through solicitation of individual attorneys to pledge the dollar value of one billable hour.

The Campaign was initiated in September 2001 and a kick-off luncheon was held in connection with the NSBA State Convention in October 2001, with John McKay serving as the keynote speaker. Recognizing the intense need for attorneys providing assistance in the family law area, the VLP has begun its Family Law Initiative, providing a reference manual and pleadings, to attorneys throughout the state and conducting family law training sessions in various parts of Nebraska, including Omaha, Lincoln, North Platte, Norfolk, Gering and O'Neill. An Initiative event will be held in each judicial district. As of December 20, 2001, \$34,000 has been raised and 121 attorneys have committed to accept a pro bono case. Efforts are underway involving the VLP and NLS' AccessLine to utilize volunteer time to provide low-income persons with information and advice and/or to staff informational clinics.

- Utilization of technology to improve and expand provision of services to clients.

NLS received a Technology Initiative Grant from LSC that will enable it to do the following: Provide substantive law information to potential clients waiting to talk with the AccessLine; upgrade computer technology in all its local offices; develop a website that will interface with those maintained by NSBA and Appleseed and that provides information to people needing legal assistance as well as makes available necessary form pleadings to attorneys providing pro bono assistance; and provide services to low-income Nebraskans in counties that are too far from existing NLS offices, such as the creation of "virtual offices" and "remote access points."

- Establishment by the Creighton Clinic of a legal clinic in one of the Hispanic neighborhoods of Omaha.

Spanish speaking advocates provide legal services at a neighborhood organization.

- Creation by Appleseed and the Nebraska State Bar Association of a web page providing resources to pro bono attorneys and the public.

The web page is already available and will be enhanced with additional resources during the next several years.

Assessment of the effectiveness of these various strategies will be both quantitative and qualitative. NLS' case management software, TIME (a system also used by the VLP), will provide the following information:

- Number of clients benefited by work performed and number of people in their family unit, categorized by substantive law area, scope of representation, ethnicity, age, sex and county in which the work was done.

- Amount of child support and alimony awarded to NLS clients
- Amount of government benefits received by NLS clients

In regard to qualitative tools, the following will be used:

- Client satisfaction surveys completed at the conclusion of each case to get client feedback regarding the quality of work performed, satisfaction with NLS systems, and satisfaction with the justice system in general
- Application of ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor through NLS' use of a Case Handler Manual
- Development of a system to measure the difference NLS' services have made in clients' lives
- Development of a procedure to get input and feedback from the bench and bar regarding the quality of the various service providers and unmet needs
- Periodic review of the entire delivery system by the NSPG and the Equal Access to Justice effort.

4.Has this system created mechanisms to assess its performance in relationship to the commonly accepted external guides? What is the protocol for undertaking system performance review and when was a review last undertaken?

- NLS is in the process of finalizing a Case Handlers' Manual that is patterned after the ABA Standards for Providing Civil Legal Services to the Poor. This will provide NLS with externally accepted standards against which to match its performance.
- In 1987 and 1994, the ABA evaluated the VLP. The VLP received advice from the ABA through this evaluation process and continues to pattern the operation of the program on these suggestions and relies on additional information it has gathered from the ABA Pro Bono Conferences. The Director of the program participates in listserve discussions on issues relation to pro bono programs.
- VLP has not officially adopted the ABA Standards for Pro Bono Programs but uses the Standards as a reference and guide.

There are currently no mechanisms to assess the performance of the system as a whole. In other states, the IOLTA programs conduct periodic assessments of their grantees; however, this occurs in those states where IOLTA funding is based on an annual "competitive" grant process. This is not the case in Nebraska where all IOLTA funds are distributed to NLS. NLS, Appleseed, the VLP and the Creighton Clinic all receive

funding from the Commission on Public Advocacy through a competitive grant process that requires quarterly progress reports. This creates a systemic review.

An ongoing system of evaluation of the quality of civil legal services being provided to low-income persons will be provided by the NSPG and Equal Access to Justice effort. The evaluation process will include the various stakeholders, most particularly the judiciary, clients and client communities.

5.Has the quality of services provided by the legal services delivery system improved? How?

The quality of services has improved due to the following:

- Creation of NLS' statewide Spanish AccessLine

The Spanish-speaking paralegals located in the Scottsbluff Office participate in the AccessLine. A Spanish-speaking attorney in the Lincoln Office is available to provide callers with legal advice or brief service.

- Ability to utilize expertise within NLS that crosses offices

Examples include the following: an experienced bankruptcy paralegal in Norfolk handles Omaha cases; attorneys in adjacent offices are available to serve as backup for case handling when there is a turnover in staff creating a shortfall in a given office. NLS' new technology system permits advocates to share briefs, pleadings and other documents and also permits NLS advocates to share this work with private attorneys providing pro bono or contracting services to NLS' clients.

- Ability to utilize expertise among the various service providers through better communication and coordination.
- NLS attorneys on the AccessLine are able to identify issues confronting clients that NLS cannot handle due to restrictions and refer them to Appleseed or the VLP for assistance.
- Enhanced internal training of NLS staff by NLS staff

Trainings have been conducted regarding: protections orders and other issues relating to representation in domestic violence situations; representation in Social Security hearings; and representation in juvenile court proceedings using the benefits available through ICWA.

- Establishment by the Creighton Clinic of a legal clinic in one of the Hispanic neighborhoods of Omaha.

Spanish speaking advocates provide legal services at a neighborhood organization.

- Creation by Appleseed and the Nebraska State Bar Association of a web page providing resources to pro bono attorneys and the public.

The web page is already available and will be enhanced with additional resources during the next several years.

6.Does Nebraska’s statewide system work to ensure the availability of equitable legal assistance capacities to clients – regardless of who the clients are, where they reside or the languages they speak? How does Nebraska’s system ensure that clients have equitable access to necessary assistance including self-help, legal education, advice, brief service, and representation in all relevant forums? What steps will be taken to ensure equitable access in the coming years?

- Through the toll-free AccessLine used by NLS and through the VLP’s toll-free number, clients statewide can access legal services, regardless of where they reside. The AccessLine utilizes Spanish-speaking paralegals in its Scottsbluff office, as well as a Spanish-speaking attorney in its Lincoln office. Additionally, NLS pays for the services of interpreters to aid clients who are non-English speaking and will do in-person intake in local offices to facilitate the intake and referral process for non-English speaking applicants for service. The AccessLine is open from Monday from 7:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., Tuesday from 8:00 A. M. to 12:00 P.M., Wednesday from 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M., Thursday from 12:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. and Friday from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. CT. These hours permit working clients to contact NLS either before going to work or during the lunch hour and also take into consideration the demands of clients in a state that spans two time zones. For callers whose problems can be resolved through referral to an appropriate human services agency, such referrals are made.
- Callers can access the VLP through a toll free number. The VLP’s hours of operation are 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. CT. The hours of operation allow morning and afternoon access to individuals in two time zones. The VLP uses Language Lines if the caller is non-English speaking and does not have a friend or family member to assist them with the call. As for callers who are hearing impaired, both the VLP and NLS use the statewide relay system.
- NLS has offices strategically placed statewide in Norfolk, Bancroft, Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, North Platte and Scottsbluff, which enables it to provide better access to clients.
- The NLS Migrant Worker and Native American Projects are now accessible statewide.

- For those counties in north central Nebraska that are located quite a distance from an NLS office, NLS uses private contract attorneys to provide services to clients residing in or having a problem in this area.
- Creighton's Clinic has responded to the need for having a viable presence in the Hispanic community in Omaha by staffing a clinic located at the Juan Diego Center.
- The VLP has responded to the need to recruit and train pro bono attorneys to provide legal services in family law matters through its Family Law Initiative Program. Seminars have been set up at various locations throughout the state to attract new participants willing to accept family law referrals from the VLP.
- The VLP utilizes a system whereby it faxes to attorneys whom it has recruited descriptions of legal problems confronting clients who have called the VLP and asks that they respond and identify which client they are willing to help.
- Appleseed has engaged in a variety of outreach efforts amongst welfare recipients and members of the Hispanic community. It also utilizes its web site to provide information to clients throughout the state.

The following is a listing of populations identified by the state planners as having problems in accessing the legal system, both in terms of actual difficulty in contacting providers, as well as their lack of knowledge regarding how to resolve their problems:

Those with **very little** access to the legal system

- Immigrants (both documented and undocumented) who need assistance in immigration-related matters
- Institutionalized persons both those who are incarcerated or who are in mental health facilities
- Juveniles

Those with **some to very little** access to the legal system

- The homeless
- People with no phones
- People with transportation problems
- People who have literacy issues

Those with **some** access to the legal system

- People in rural communities who have issues due to geography
- Those who think poorly of our justice system and who would not look to the system to help them
- Migrant workers

- Full-time workers who cannot access the system without taking time off
- The elderly
- Persons who are physically or mentally challenged, as that term is defined by the ADA
- Specific ethnic and minority groups, e.g. Native Americans, Hispanics, African-Americans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Sudanese, Iraqis, etc.
- Victims of domestic violence
- People with language barrier problems
- Homebound persons
- Persons who lack knowledge about their legal rights
- Farmers

The following are suggested steps to be taken to ensure equitable access in the coming years and were generated by participants in the Delivery Subcommittee of the NSPG assembled to respond to Program Letter 2000-7:

- **Self-help and legal education materials** need to be made available at public locations statewide and at the NLS, Appleseed and NSBA websites. Some information is already available on the websites but the breadth of this needs to be expanded. Additionally, there will be linkages among the websites to facilitate easier access for clients and for attorneys helping low-income persons with legal matters. The written materials need to be produced in the major languages spoken by Nebraska's low-income population. Production of brochures can be coordinated with the NSBA, which already produces brochures on various substantive law matters in a variety of languages.
- **Expanded use of websites, including use of self-help websites**, such as those operated by the VLP and Appleseed and what will be implemented by NLS as part of its compliance with the Technology Initiative Grant from the LSC. Forms and pleadings will be posted on the websites to provide support for pro bono attorneys recruited by the VLP and private attorneys contracting with NLS to provide services to low-income persons. Additional forms, pleadings and instructions will be available on NLS' website for pro se litigants and it is anticipated that through a partnership with the VLP, these pro se litigants will be able to take their completed forms to cooperating attorneys for their review. Appleseed has designed and maintains The Equal Justice Clearinghouse website and provides attorney, community legal and advocate information through the site.
- **Develop Frequently Asked Questions** by subject matter whose answers clients could access by e-mail.
- **Enhanced pro se utilizing technology**. NLS will do the pleadings and obtain necessary signatures, using a web template.

- **Development of court-sanctioned pro se materials.** Currently, a committee formed by the Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court, comprised of members of the judiciary and other interested persons, is studying this matter. This endeavor is still on going. A cooperative effort with the judiciary to produce and expand the use of pro se documents and forms would greatly enhance self-representation in Nebraska and overcome the antipathy expressed by many judges to this method of service delivery.
- **Interactive computer usage.**
- **Place computer terminals in courthouses, area service providers, community centers, and homeless shelters.** There would be a need for on-site trainers. Public libraries currently have computer terminals; however, in rural communities there may be a dearth of libraries and access needs to be made available in other ways.
- **Recruitment of attorneys** willing to provide pro bono and reduced fee representation needs to be ongoing. This will be done in concert with the VLP and the “One Hour of Sharing” project of the NSBA. This will help in responding to the problem of delivery of legal services to rural clients. Consideration will also be given to using NLS contract attorneys as “point” persons in the rural areas to help identify issues affecting low-income persons.
- **Use limited space in a private attorney’s office** or some local building if the volume of requests for service made to NLS in a particular area warrants establishment of a physical presence. This would help keep costs down.
- **Set up offices where particular minority groups are located,** as exemplified by the Creighton Clinic’s outreach facility in the Juan Diego Center in South Omaha.
- **Apply for more grants specifically designated for rural areas.** NLS has recently applied for a U.S. Department of Justice Civil Legal Assistance to Victims of Domestic Violence Grant requesting funds for 10 attorneys, 6 of whom would provide services in rural Nebraska counties.
- **Videoconferencing** as a method of providing lawyer to client contact and to present clinics for continuing legal education for lawyers and pro se and self-help clinics for clients. **Community colleges** can be used as sites, as well as government facilities. The legal services providers need to explore the cost of videoconferencing since private sector rates are considerably higher than state government rates. Seminars can be recorded on videotapes or recorded digitally on CDs for copying and further distribution. Tapes can be run on **public access TV** and can be placed in libraries throughout the state.

- **Public service announcements** to improve communication with clients, provide legal and other information needed by low-income persons and make people aware that Internet access is available at public libraries.
- **Encourage specialization** among case handlers with the various service providers and share the talent amongst the providers. Determine whether or not specialization improves the quality of services provided.
- Develop a **mentoring program** so more experienced attorneys will work with newer attorneys wishing to do pro bono or reduced fee work.
- Do what is necessary to **attract highly qualified attorneys** to work with NLS, including:
 - Examine overall salary structure
 - Forgiveness of a percentage of student loans for each year of service with NLS (also work with members of the Legislature to enact state subsidized loan forgiveness)
 - Have a “signing bonus” for new attorneys
 - Solicit grant funds specifically targeted to add attorneys for traditional legal services work (not specialized grants)
 - Retirement plans
- Coordinate and **promote school year and summer programs** with interns from local paralegal schools. This will help to solve the problem of inadequate support staff.
- For low- or middle-income people who may be able to pay an attorney, consideration needs to be given to **developing panels of attorneys** who will take particular matters on a flat fee contract or attorneys who will take cases at reduced hourly rates.
- Work with large law firms to develop a “**loan a lawyer” program**. The firm would loan an attorney to the service provider for a period of time or would assist in certain large projects undertaken by the provider.
- **Innovations** designed toward groups whose cultures mitigate against use of **new technology**
- Recruit more **bilingual staff** members
- Utilize a **centralized interpreter system** (by telephone, if necessary) similar to that used in the federal court system

7. Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity of client access throughout the state for all low-income persons regardless of who they are, where in

the state they reside, what languages they speak, their race/gender/national origin, or the existence of other access barriers? How is this equity achieved?

Please see the discussion of these issues in response to the questions regarding creation of a statewide legal services delivery system and the discussion of strategies to address issues affecting low-income persons.

Distance, isolation and the lack of public transportation are major barrier to access to services. 874,792 of Nebraska's 1,711,263 population live in 90 rural counties that cover 75,467 square miles. 44% of Nebraska's low-income population resides in these rural counties. Recently released census data shows that Nebraska's rural counties and those with high Native American populations had the highest percentage of residents living below the poverty level. In 41 of Nebraska's 93 counties, the percentage of people living below the 1998 poverty level was more than the national average of 12.7%. Thurston County, home to two Native American reservations, had the state's highest percentage of residents in poverty - 25.3%, while Knox County, home to the Santee Sioux Reservation, had 17.3% of its residents living in poverty. Other counties in the top 10 were farming or ranching counties across the northern half of Nebraska.

The AccessLine helps to address the problems of geography, as does NLS' PAI Plan which provides extended case representation to people who live more than two hours' drive from the nearest NLS office through private attorneys paid by NLS.

NLS is expanding extended case representation in western Nebraska by giving attorneys the time to do this work (they no longer need to provide advice and brief service to clients since this is done through the AccessLine).

The merger of the LSC-funded programs improved services for Spanish-speaking clients statewide. NLS has two Spanish-speaking staff in Scottsbluff and one Spanish-speaking attorney in Lincoln (the Executive Director is also fluent in Spanish) and calls are routed to these individuals.

NLS has developed a program to train Sudanese as court translators and received funding for this project. (There has been a large resettlement of Sudanese immigrants in the Omaha and Lincoln communities.) A professional translator worked with Sudanese who were already English speaking to improve their English and acquaint them with the demands of translating in court. Students agreed to provide a certain number of hours of free translation for indigent Sudanese.

Appleseed and the Nebraska State Bar Association have developed a web page to provide resources to *pro bono* attorneys and the public. The VLP program recruits *pro bono* attorneys throughout the state and provides training.

8.How does the legal service delivery system employ technology to provide increased access and enhanced services to clients throughout Nebraska? What technology

initiatives are currently underway and how will they support the integrated statewide delivery system?

- **NLS' AccessLine** provides all low-income persons with access to information, advice, brief service and referral to local NLS offices, when appropriate, for extended case service. It conducts initial eligibility screening and it is hoped that this service can be provided for all the participants in the service delivery system, assuming the issue of conflicts can be overcome. The AccessLine also makes appropriate referrals for persons needing assistance provided by human services agencies.

Through the Technology Initiative Grant awarded by the LSC, NLS will add to the AccessLine a self-help menu that will provide information regarding the types of services provided by NLS (to help screen out persons who would not be eligible for services due to the type of problem, e.g. criminal or personal injury, or income); substantive law information that the caller can access while he or she waits in queue (in anticipation that the information received may provide the caller with what he/she needs to resolve the problem; methods to order informational brochures/booklets.

- NLS relies heavily on a **computerized case management system**, TIME, which the VLP also uses. This system is capable of generating letters to clients and has been programmed to gather essential information from clients in various substantive law areas so that determinations can be made regarding how or whether to provide extended case representation.

Statistics stored in the system provide information matching substantive law areas in which requests for service are made with the county in which a client resides, the ethnicity of a client, and the number of persons in the family unit. All of this is important in assessing client needs.

- NLS and all attorneys throughout the state utilize **computer assisted legal research** made available by NSBA through dues to enhance services to clients.
- There are **websites** maintained by NLS, Appleseed, the NSBA, the law schools, the judiciary and the Legislature, all of which have important information for clients and advocates. NSBA sends weekly emails to members containing the latest appellate court decisions. NLS, through its Technology Initiative Grant, will establish linkages with these websites.
- Appleseed and the VLP will be developing a password-protected module on the Appleseed website, which will contain **pleadings and forms** for pro bono attorneys to use. Additionally, Appleseed is developing list serves so that advocates with specialties in particular substantive law areas can communicate with each other.

- NLS will be establishing an **attorney-assisted enhanced *pro se*** project with funding received from the LSC Technology Initiative Grant.
- The VLP utilizes **mass rapid faxing** as a method of interesting volunteer lawyers in cases that need placement.
- Appleseed designed and operates The **Nebraska Equal Justice Clearinghouse website** with additional linkages to other poverty law and law-related sites.

9. How has the legal service delivery system expanded its resources to provide critical legal services to low income clients?

- Through the efforts of the NSBA, Nebraska’s Legislature approved an increase in **filing fees** that benefits providers of civil legal services to low-income persons. These funds are administered by the Commission on Public Advocacy and currently fund grants to NLS, Appleseed, the VLP and the Creighton Clinic. Consideration is being given to seek an additional increase because the unmet legal needs of low-income Nebraskans are so great and the abilities of providers to respond are limited due to lack of funds. If such a request is made, the NSBA will take the lead, assisted by the various providers who will provide information to demonstrate the need.
- A partnership between the NSBA and NLS has been formed to focus on fund raising among the **private bar**. The NSBA campaign targets individuals and is part of its “One Hour of Sharing” project, while NLS is focusing on solicitation of law firms. In this endeavor, NLS is being assisted by Dennis Dorgan. Campaign Chairpersons have been recruited in Lincoln and Omaha and a Committee is recruited in Omaha. The solicitation will begin in 2002 and lawyers have pledged to raise between \$750,000 and \$1,000,000 over three years. NLS has hired a Director of Public Relations and Resource Development to assist in this and other fund-raising and grant writing activities. It is also being aided by the Monaghan Group that has prepared “talking points” and campaign presentations at no charge.
- NLS has expanded its **migrant, farm hotline, and Native American programs to serve those populations on a statewide basis**. There needs to be an increase in available resources dedicated to these programs in order to meet client need. The advocates working with these populations are often “in the field” and available to provide on the spot information and advice.
- NLS currently has U.S. Department of Justice Civil Legal Assistance to Victims Grants in Omaha (to expire 12/31/01) and in Lincoln (awarded on 10/01/01 to continue the Lincoln project and provide statewide services.) Unfortunately, the 12-month Lincoln Grant only supports 3 attorneys, which severely limits its ability to provide **statewide services to victims**. A Grant seeking \$1.8 million over a two-year period, which would fund 10 attorneys, 6 of whom would provide services in rural areas, has recently been submitted to the U.S. Department of

Justice. This Application involves a collaboration between NLS and 22 partnering agencies.

- The use of **toll-free access lines** by both NLS and the VLP enable these projects to provide intake screening and initial information and advice by telephone to low-income clients regardless of where in the state they reside and regardless of whether they do or do not have the ability to journey to a local NLS office.
- NLS' **private attorney involvement** program is targeted at serving low-income clients residing in locales that are farthest from NLS offices through contract programs with private attorneys, thereby expanding personnel resources.
- Nebraska Advocacy Services, the protection and advocacy agency in Nebraska providing for the legal needs of **developmentally delayed and mentally ill** clients, works in concert with NLS.
- There is an unmet legal **need of prisoners** in Nebraska's correctional facilities in civil matters and strategies need to be undertaken to respond to this need.
- NLS' Director of **Resource Development** will explore applying for new grants in an effort to increase revenue available to serve the legal needs of low-income Nebraskans.

The VLP currently has one attorney director, 1 full-time legal assistant and 2 part-time legal assistants and a budget of \$145,249. It is supported by the NSBA, the Commission on Public Advocacy and a Golf Tournament.

Appleseed has 4 attorneys and 5 non-attorney staff members and a budget of approximately \$300,000. It is funded by individual donors, religious organizations, private foundations, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Commission on Public Advocacy.

NLS has a budget of \$3.4 million, 37 attorneys, 12 paralegals, 7 support staff and 25 different funding sources.

The NSPG identified a need to establish a standing committee to develop a comprehensive resource development plan that encompasses all available avenues to maximize resources. Issues to be addressed would include:

- Preparing an inventory of current and potential funders
- Developing a comprehensive resource development plan.
- Developing a needs assessment of "programs/areas" that could be targeted for grant requests
- Building coalitions with other organizations, e.g. the Indian Center, to collaborate on grant requests

- Exploring the option of a unified fundraising effort coordinated with many organizations
- Determining the mechanics of “who” will raise, distribute and administer the grant funds
- Involving the judiciary in the long-range planning process
- Educating the public regarding clients who receive legal services so they are aware they are not only people receiving public assistance
- Working to improve the public image of legal services
- Identifying the “gaps” in the delivery system
- Identifying other stakeholders

10. Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity in terms of the availability of the full range of civil equal justice delivery capacities throughout the state? What mechanisms have been developed to ensure such relative equity is achieved and maintained? Since 1998, has there been improvement in the relative equity in the development and distribution of civil equal justice resources throughout the state? Are there areas of the state that suffer from disproportionate lack of resources (funding as well as in-kind/pro bono)? If so, is there a strategy to overcome such inequities?

People, including those with low-incomes, and resources are concentrated in eastern Nebraska, as are attorneys. The percentage of low-income persons in the general population is greater in the rural than urban areas. 49% of Nebraskans live in Douglas, Sarpy and Lancaster Counties, while 44% of low-income Nebraskans live in the remaining 90 rural counties. Additionally, one-half of the active members of the Nebraska State Bar practice in Douglas County, one-quarter in Lancaster County and the remaining one-quarter in rural Nebraska. The relatively small number of private attorneys practicing in rural counties creates additional problems in providing pro bono or reduced fee services to low-income persons because of the high probability of conflicts.

The 2000 Census has identified that three counties in Nebraska are among the 10 poorest counties in America. Additionally, many rural Nebraska counties are seeing dramatic decreases in population and a concomitant aging of the existing population creating unique challenges for the legal system.

NLS has distributed equitably its undesignated revenue amongst its 6 offices (funds received from the LSC, Nebraska Lawyers Trust Account Foundation and the Commission on Public Advocacy) through establishing a uniform attorney to low-income person ratio. The Bancroft office is not included in this allocation process since the attorney in that office only represents clients in tribal court and is mostly supported by Native American funds received from the LSC. This distribution results in two rural offices being staffed by one attorney and two having two attorneys, while the two urban offices have 4 and 5 attorneys, respectively, supported by undesignated funding. Despite its best efforts, NLS has had difficulty in recruiting and retaining attorneys in its rural offices over and above the general problems it has in attorney retention due to salaries that are significantly lower than what is paid in both the public and private sectors.

Following the merger, as described previously, NLS equalized salary and benefits for advocates and support staff across the state and continues to try to increase compensation for all.

For strategies to overcome inequities, please see the previous discussions regarding the work of Appleseed, the Creighton Clinic's establishment of a clinic in an Hispanic neighborhood in Omaha, and enhanced usage of technology and pro se.

11.Does the legal services delivery system operate efficiently? Are there areas of duplication?

The three former LSC-funded programs maintained separate administrative, fiscal and resource development components and sometimes competed with each other for grants, such as from the Commission on Public Advocacy and the Nebraska Lawyers Trust Account Foundation. The merger has eliminated this duplication; however, the needs of an organization with revenue of \$3.4 million has resulted in establishment of a management team to effectively oversee the firm's operations.

NLS and the NSBA have coordinated efforts regarding resource development with one campaign targeted to a firm solicitation and the other towards an individual attorney campaign.

Assuming that NLS is able to utilize its AccessLine for itself and the VLP, the VLP staff will be freed up to do recruitment and retention of pro bono attorneys and placement of cases and support for the attorneys accepting such cases.

Presently each of the five providers of civil legal aid operates their own intake systems and resource development efforts.

The NSPG/Equal Access to Justice effort will provide a forum to plan, coordinate and prevent duplication.

12.Has the system expanded the way it involves private lawyers in the delivery of essential services to low-income persons? Does the system effectively and efficiently use the private bar to deliver essential services to low-income people?

See responses previously furnished. The VLP is undertaking its Family Law Initiative to increase the number of pro bono attorneys willing to handle family law cases. The One Hour of Sharing Campaign seeks to increase the available pool of pro bono attorneys. Appleseed recruits cooperating attorneys to assist in its litigation. NLS has targeted its PAI Program toward attorneys in rural communities.

13. What steps have been implemented within the legal services delivery system among client communities to identify and nurture new leaders? Do the existing leaders reflect the diversity within Nebraska and within client communities served by Nebraska's delivery system? Does Nebraska's equal justice leaders reflect the gender, race, ethnic and economic concerns of important but sometimes-overlooked groups within Nebraska? Does the leadership provide opportunities for innovation and experimentation; does it support creative solutions to meet changing needs; are new ideas welcomed; are clients nurtured as leaders? Has the leadership been given sufficient authority and resources to implement needed changes?

- **Board Leadership.** NLS' Executive Director is working with current NLS Board Members on issues of Board development, recruitment and diversity. Profiles have been developed as to what characteristics NLS seeks out in both its attorney and client-eligible Board members. As part of this project, the Executive Director is collaborating with community agencies and client groups throughout the state to help identify and develop future client leaders.

NLS' 20 person Board of Directors is comprised of 1 Native American, 1 Hispanic individual, 2 African-Americans. It is evenly split as to urban and rural representation.

Client Board members receive reimbursement of all costs, including mileage, childcare, and wages lost in attending Board meetings.

- **Client Leadership.** Those members of the state planning group that have the most direct involvement with clients can help identify training, leadership development and other strategies that are needed to develop a cadre of client leaders. This is an area that needs development and will be addressed by the Action Plan Committee.
- **NLS Leadership.** NLS has organized a management team consisting of the Executive Director, Director of Advocacy, Director of Public Relations and Resource Development, Director of Technology Services and Advocacy Support, Director of the AccessLine and Technology Coordinator. Additionally, individual Managers in each local office are encouraged to meet by telephone prior to Management Team meetings and discuss areas of interest or concern and bring those to the Management Team. NLS in its development of a 2001 Plan has relied heavily on the leadership of firm members. In these ways, NLS is identifying and nurturing new leaders and indicating that the opinions of all are worthwhile and valued and that each member of the firm has a potential leadership role in NLS.
- **Nebraska State Planning Group.** The NSBA, through its Executive Director, Jane Schoenike, and its Past President, Woody Bradford, has taken a leadership role in organizing the NSPG. The Group, as a whole, agreed that its work needed to continue and that was the genesis of the Action Plan Committee.

A review of the membership of the Action Plan Committee will demonstrate its diversity. This group is charged with continuing the state planning process and following up on implementation of the ideas generated by the larger original group.

14. What will be the next steps to achieve a client-centered, integrated and comprehensive delivery system within Nebraska? How will clients be actively involved in the determination of these next steps?

- The NSPG will continue its work to establish an Equal Access to Justice effort in Nebraska and to develop broadly based involvement in the building of additional service delivery capacity.
- NLS was excited about the opportunity to participate in the Hershey Conference, where leaders from across the country met and strategized regarding what are the best practices to use in developing a client-centered, integrated and comprehensive delivery system. It is hoped that some of the discussion and ideas generated at that Conference could be used by NLS in charting its future direction and those of other service providers.
- The ongoing process of state leaders who are committed to equal access to justice meeting periodically to review progress being made on goals that the Committee has set is crucial. The membership of the Action Plan Committee is reflective of the faces of Nebraska and will ensure that all constituencies are represented in constructing a Nebraska justice community.
- Discussions regarding whether and if so, how, the NLS AccessLine will do intake for the VLP and other providers need to take place. As an initial step, it will be necessary to formulate a strategy regarding how to avoid conflicts and then get an opinion from the Ethics Committee of the NSBA as to the feasibility of this plan.

More effort is being made both through NLS Board development and through greater inclusion of clients and client advocates in the statewide justice system to involve clients in charting the course of a client-centered, integrated and comprehensive delivery system.

15. What has been the greatest obstacle to achieving a statewide, integrated, client-centered delivery system and how was that obstacle overcome or alternatively, how do you plan to overcome that obstacle?

As the three regional Legal Services programs merged into one statewide program, NLS has had to address issues posed by different office cultures and different systems utilized to serve clients. By furnishing information to staff, by involving members of the firm in development of the 2001 Plan and by establishing uniform statewide systems through

creation of the AccessLine and the position of Director of Advocacy, obstacles and barriers have been overcome. Additionally, the Executive Director, through discussions and meetings with all funders and providers within the delivery system, has helped to break down barriers. There needs to be continued collaboration between the providers and funders to avoid duplication of services and integration into a seamless delivery system. It is anticipated that the Action Plan Committee will assist in ensuring that this occurs.

Other obstacles include getting all the major stakeholders involved, and a public awareness of the need and role of civil legal aid.

16. Has any benefit-to-cost analysis been made in terms of creating a comprehensive, integrated and client centered legal services delivery system in Nebraska?

There has been no formal benefit-to-cost analysis done. NLS has done an internal reallocation of dollars and staffing in each of its offices based on clients to be served to be certain that undesignated funds are distributed equitably to provide statewide client services. Additionally, there are some economies of scale that have been achieved through centralized administration of NLS. If NLS' AccessLine is able to serve as the initial point of contact for those seeking services from the VLP and, perhaps, Appleseed, those entities will be able to free up resources to devote to other client-centered activities. NLS is planning a study and analysis of the economic benefit to the state of Nebraska generated as a result of the provision of civil legal aid.

17. What resources, technical assistance and support would help Nebraska meet its goals?

- Attorneys and other case handlers who are well trained and committed to remaining with NLS and its partners are essential in enabling Nebraska to meet its goals.
- Significantly increased financial resources are essential if Nebraska is to meet its goals. NLS has made the necessary financial sacrifices to equalize salaries on a statewide basis and provide an attractive benefit package. In order to continue to offset increases in the cost of living and raise salaries to a level that is competitive with other similar positions in the public sector, NLS needs steadily increasing funding. It is anticipated that \$150,000 is needed each year to provide salary step increases and COLA's. This does not take into consideration any major salary readjustment or the steadily rising costs of health insurance benefits. Money is needed for an employee retirement plan and some system needs to be developed to address the student loan forgiveness issue.

- The statewide system will benefit from an increase in the services of volunteer attorneys who may help staff clinics or the AccessLine or who will accept clients for extended case representation.
- It is important to garner the support of the judiciary, client groups and the Legislature in order to effect support for the delivery system, to continue to identify emerging or changing client needs and strategies to deal with these and to increase financial resources to ensure stability amongst the providers.
- The partners in the client-centered service delivery system will benefit from utilization of advanced technology. The LSC TIG is enabling implementation of such an advanced technology system to take place in NLS. Ideally, each of the partners will be able to electronically transfer or otherwise access information in the others' systems, so long as confidential information is protected. Financial resources will be needed to maintain the state-of-the art technology and there must be planning for these future needs.
- Student loan forgiveness programs on the state and federal levels.

18. Are the best organizational and human resource management configurations and approaches being used?

a. For calendar year 2001, what is the current configuration of programs that deliver services to low-income clients, i.e. what are the components (size, areas of responsibility, governance) of the delivery system? What are the funding sources and levels for each of these components of the delivery system?

b. Since October 1998, what other configurations and/or approaches have been seriously explored? Were any adopted? Were any rejected? Are any changes contemplated in the coming year?

As more fully described previously, NLS, a statewide LSC-funded provider, came into existence in May 2000. No changes in configurations are contemplated, at this time, with the exception of exploring utilization of NLS' AccessLine as an initial point of contact for the VLP. Theoretically, the AccessLine already serves as an initial point of contact for persons who need referral to Appleseed. NLS is solidifying the internal gains it has made in setting up a consistent oversight and support system for its advocates and in building on relationships it has and is developing with members of the private bar, the judiciary and client and human service communities.

c. Is there any identifiable duplication in capacities or services in the state? How many duplicative systems-accounting systems, human resources management systems, case management systems, etc. – currently exist? Does the service delivery system now in use minimize or eliminate duplications that existed prior to October 1, 1998?

Prior to October 1, 1998, when there were three LSC-funded providers in Nebraska, each had an Executive Director, Financial Officer, and separate accounting and case management systems. With the merger came a single accounting system, a centralized Management Team consisting of one Executive Director, one Director of Financial Resources, a Director of Advocacy, a Director of Technology Support and Advocacy Services, and a Director of Public Relations and Resource Development, and a single case management system, which is also used by the VLP. This system certainly serves to eliminate previous duplications. It is anticipated that through better collaboration with the VLP and through an AccessLine that is a central point of contact, advice and brief service for all low-income callers, the VLP can focus its energies and talents on recruitment and training of volunteer attorneys and placement of cases, rather than needing to do both this and advice and referral.

The various providers need to be cognizant of web-based information they are posting so as to avoid duplication or at least to ensure that there are linkages.

Presently each of the five providers of civil legal services operates its own intake systems and resource development efforts.

d. Since October 1998, what innovative service delivery systems/mechanisms/initiatives have been adopted in Nebraska? Have any been explored and then rejected?

The AccessLine is a new initiative adopted in Nebraska. NLS has explored, in certain of its offices, an assisted pro se family law project, wherein the client attends two classes. During the first, the client completes all necessary pleadings to initiate divorce proceedings, under the supervision of an attorney. During the second, the client completes the paperwork for a final hearing and gets instructions on how to set a hearing and how to testify at the final hearing.

Please see the previous discussion of the innovations that will be instituted as a result of the NLS Technology Grant from the Legal Services Corporation.

NLS has built a successful partnership with the 6 mediation centers in Nebraska. In contested matters, NLS attorneys will attempt to refer clients to mediation in order to resolve some of the less problematic matters. For clients who may be appropriate for the pro se clinics but for some unresolved matters, such as visitation, they are referred to the mediation centers and if they reach a mediated agreement, they can participate in the clinic. This partnership has expanded access to the legal system for clients whom NLS would not have helped because of the nature of their problem and program priorities.

The VLP has developed the Family Law Initiative to provide forms and instructional materials and training for volunteer attorneys throughout the state who may have limited familiarity with family law representation.

The VLP's Hour of Caring Project will raise money for the various service providers and will increase the number of pro bono hours pledged to help low-income persons, as well as increase the number of volunteer attorneys willing to accept clients for extended case representation.

The VLP and Appleseed will have available password protected pleadings and forms for volunteer attorneys to use available on their websites.

The Creighton Clinic has established a satellite clinic in an Hispanic neighborhood of Omaha.

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