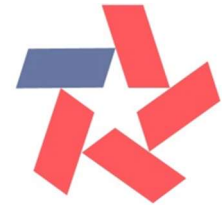


JFA CONNECTIONS



March 2020

Edition 1, Volume 1

*“Compassion is the keen awareness
of the interdependence of all things.”*

– Thomas Merton

Our collective Justice for All work is a recognition that we are connected in ways deeper than we understand. In some twisted way, the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced one of the foundational core principles of the Justice for All Initiative: we are all in this together.

This is our inaugural Justice for All newsletter, in which we will share some of the incredible Justice for All work being done across the country.

These JFA updates were drafted *before* the pandemic upended our daily routines so profoundly, but we are still sharing them both because they showcase the power of this JFA work *and* everyone deserves a “feel good” news update now more than ever.

Our collective leadership on access to justice is more important than ever in this time of heightened need. We recognize that JFA work involves a lot of diverse stakeholder engagement—often through face-to-face meetings and listening sessions—that may be challenged by the current demands of the pandemic. On behalf of the JFA Advisory Committee, SRLN and NCSC, we are here to support you, and we understand that JFA plans may need to be modified and adapted. Please let us know if there are specific things that the national partners can do to help local efforts.

Nationally, we are still continuing with our technical assistance to assist JFA states with leading effective meetings online/virtually. There is a webinar scheduled for Thursday (details in the text box), and we will move the Wednesday, May 6 day-long session on “effective and engaging meetings” online.

Details on the May 6 meeting to follow in the coming weeks as Julia, Kelly and I figure out logistics. If you were not previously planning to join us in Atlanta, but would be interested in participating remotely, please let us know.

Our goal is to circulate this newsletter to JFA leadership from across our 14 states quarterly. Please feel free to share this widely with your JFA networks; and we welcome any feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Thank you for all that you do. We hope that you, your families and colleagues are staying safe and healthy during these turbulent times. – Danielle

Leading Effective & Engaging Meetings Online Webinar

Thursday, March 26

4:00 pm EST | 1:00 pm PST |

10:00 am HST (Via Zoom)

Led by Julia Wilson & Kelly Tautges

This webinar will offer tips and suggested best practices about how to lead effective and engaging meetings virtually and online. This session will be recorded, and it posted on the JFA website.

If anyone is interested in joining this Zoom call and does not have the information, please contact Lillian for the link at lwood@ncsc.org.



Website:
www.ncsc.org/JFA



Contact:
303.308.4318



Email:
JusticeForAll@ncsc.org



Representatives from JFA states Alaska, Colorado, Kentucky, Minnesota and New York joined several NCSC staff members for dinner at the iconic Monell's in Nashville, TN during the Self-Represented Litigant Network Conference earlier this month. We look forward to future events where we can share a meal and wonderful conversation with all of you.

The updates provided below are a small sampling of the ambitious and creative work that our JFA partners are doing around the nation.

JFA STATES:

Alaska • Colorado • Florida • Georgia • Hawai'i • Illinois
Kentucky • Louisiana • Massachusetts • Michigan
Minnesota • Montana • New Mexico • New York

STATE UPDATES

ILLINOIS

With this grant, we have been leading a small steering committee of justice partners to explore an area of law that could be altered to make it simpler, more streamlined, and easier for people who cannot afford an attorney. The steering committee has settled on family law that specifically concerns children's legal issues. This includes allocation of parental time, child support, guardianship, and other similar needs. Our goal is to make it easier for self-represented litigants to access justice, to ensure their children's stability and well-being.

We think this could take many forms, such as developing community-based education, wider implementation of innovative approaches (such as early resolution programs, online dispute resolution, and court-based resource centers), creation of a family-centered court, engagement with community groups and social service organizations, and more. We are now seeking a group of statewide advisors who will help us test and strengthen these ideas.

FLORIDA

In May 2019, the commission released its first video, [Preparing for Your Day in Civil Court](#). Just over four minutes long, this video, which was developed for viewers who have never appeared in court before, offers important tips and points to helpful resources.

A second video, [File or Answer a Civil Complaint](#), was developed to provide tips and guidance for those who are representing themselves in a civil case in Florida's trial courts. These videos represent a first step in what

commission members envision as a library of video resources to help self-represented litigants.

Developed by members of the Young Lawyers Division of The Florida Bar and Office of the State Courts Administrator staff, the videos respond to a recommendation in the commission's long-range plan to develop explanatory video content for self-represented litigants. The videos were widely distributed to court partners and are also available on the commission's website and through the Florida Courts Help website and app.

NEW YORK

In New York, the Community Legal Help Project (CLHP) was developed by the Suffolk County Local Access to Justice Committee, in collaboration with a local public library, to integrate legal assistance into the existing informational and social services offered at the library. The project began with five legal services partners rotating to provide brief advice services on-site one day a week; it quickly grew as additional providers and attorneys joined the collaboration, allowing for expanded services that include telephonic intake, triage and referrals (including warm hand-offs) and on-site services at a second public library.

This successful project, which has assisted thousands of Suffolk County residents with their civil legal problems since its inception, has demonstrated the potential of partnerships with public libraries to expand access to effective assistance and serves as a model for other jurisdictions.

HAWAI'I

Civil Family Case Assistance at Supreme Court Law Library

Attorneys specializing in family law are now volunteering at the Hawaii Supreme Court Law Library to provide limited legal advice to self-represented litigants with their civil cases in the Family Court. This "Lawyer in the Law Library" program is a satellite of the Kapolei Access to Justice Room, previously available only at the Kapolei Courthouse.

Opening day was November 23, and attorney Ann Isobe volunteered for all four appointments, plus a walk-in. (Typically, this service is by appointment only.)

One of the participants noted in her evaluation: "Law library staff very helpful. Downtown location very convenient. Attorney was very knowledgeable, efficient, and helpful."

Beginning January 2020, appointments at the Supreme Court Law Library will be available two Fridays a month. Meanwhile, the Kapolei Courthouse will continue to have appointments available the first and third Thursday of the month. Appointments are for 30 minutes between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. at both locations. [Online story](#)



In addition, the Hawaii State Judiciary is currently designing an online pilot small claims program designed to ensure self-represented litigants are provided knowledge and procedural tools to actively engage in their court case. The small claims online program will provide easily consumable instructional content, step-by-step workflow to simplify the legal process from case initiation, to court form completion and submission, and online dispute resolution. The Judiciary aims to increase access to justice through these innovative initiatives.

LOUISIANA

In Louisiana we are working to integrate the JFA process into our existing work and events. For example, the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) Pro Bono Subcommittee recently hosted a "Self-Represented Litigant (SRL) Summit" event. Practitioners, providers, and court personnel from all over the state came to discuss the availability of services to SRLs, as well as issues affecting them. At that event, we held breakout sessions on 4 components (well, technically 5, but two combined) and had group members complete "Component Issue Log" worksheets to have them identify issues and share their opinions. This surfaced some valuable qualitative feedback for our report. Additionally, we believe this approach will assist the JFA in becoming a more sustainable endeavor.

The second is our success in leaning on our Advisory Committee for support as we plan our Community Listening Sessions. Notably, a few of our members have statewide reach. For example, our Advisory Member Veronica Sizer is Executive Counsel at the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP). Additionally, member Leslie Keen is the Director of Community Relations for Peoples Health of Louisiana. These individuals can offer hosting locations in virtually every parish across the state, and we find their support critical for the success of this portion of the process.

GEORGIA

The Georgia JFA initiative received significant support from the Georgia State Bar to support their JFA programming for another two years. In addition, they have submitted a proposal as they seek sustainable funding for Justice for All initiatives.

The following is the current statute language and the proposed statute revised language. O.C.G.A. § 36-15-7 currently states:

“Any one or more county boards of trustees in the judicial circuit may participate in the establishment of the law library or libraries, and, for the purpose of such participation, may enter into agreements regarding the proportional share of expenditures to be borne by each county board of trustees.”

The proposed revision to the statute reads:

“Each county law library board of trustees in the judicial circuit shall participate in the establishment and maintenance of a judicial district law library in its judicial district by apportioning thirty (30) percent of

its law library fees annually to the law library designated as the Hub for the judicial district under criteria established and adopted by a committee in each judicial district chaired by the district court administrator of said judicial district and comprised of county administrators from each of the judicial circuits in said judicial district.”

These small funding changes would allow larger sums of money to be pooled to create comprehensive resources, materials and services. This change will ensure there is at least one high-quality law library-based self-help center operating in each judicial district of Georgia. This change to the law library funding statute would allow for testing this approach, prior to requesting or seeking out additional funds to address this immediate need to improve access to justice in Georgia.

Additional information can be found in this article in that appeared in the [U.S. News & World Report](#).

MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Justice for All project began with a yearlong assessment in 2017, moved to implementation phase in 2018-2019, and the momentum shows no signs of stopping. Much of the work has centered on the creation of a statewide online portal through the LawHelpMN.org Guide (“Guide”). The Guide was launched in February 2019 and directs people to legal resources regardless of income, civil case type or geography.

The Guide is central to our Justice for All work because it provides a clear method for identifying legal issues being raised by users and identify gaps when resources are not available. As detailed in the Minnesota Justice for All Strategic Plan, our state has strong civil legal aid and court self-help resources that have been incorporated into the Guide design. Our biggest gaps were around legal representation and alternative dispute resolution resources for people who are outside civil legal aid income or priority guidelines. Using Justice for All grant resources, Minnesota has now implemented a statewide

unbundled roster and statewide remote mediation services that are integrated into the Guide. We are now collecting data on the use of the services and trying to improve the user experience of being matched with resources efficiently and effectively. The Guide evaluation plan includes many metrics for measuring progress towards 100% meaningful access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs across our civil justice system.

Having one user-friendly website has improved our ability to do outreach to trusted intermediaries. Legal Services State Support received funding to hire a staff person who trains community partners on identifying legal issues and how to use the Guide. Civil legal aid organizations now all refer to LawHelpMN.org rather than their individual websites. Court staff have also been trained on providing the LawHelpMN.org as a centralized referral. We hope that this public relations campaign starts to chip away at the number of people with legal issues who never seek assistance.