

Cooley Law School Lansing Campus Pro Bono Month Events

Open Door Ministry

On October 21, 2009, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., Cooley students, under the supervision of Cooley's Assistant Dean of Students Cynthia Ward, will return to Open Door Ministry to continue offering pro bono legal services to clients of this community center. Open Door Ministry of Downtown Lansing is a charitable organization housed at Central United Methodist Church across from the State Capitol Building at 215 North Capitol Avenue in Lansing. Its mission is to provide sustenance, counseling, assistance, and love to those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. Its primary focus is on emergency or crisis situations.

Cooley Professor Nancy Wonch and a team of Cooley Law students began volunteering at the Ministry in April 2009, providing pro bono legal advocacy services. Legal advocacy services have included providing basic legal advice, writing letters, and referring clients, when appropriate, to other community and social services resources. In celebration of the State Bar of Michigan's Pro Bono Month, Cooley Law students will return to the Open Door Ministry to provide additional pro bono legal advocacy services under the supervision of Dean Ward. Benefits of this program run not only to the individuals served, but also to the law students as they apply the knowledge, skills, and ethics they learned in the classroom to real life situations and serve those who are traditionally under-served.

Shane Goodale, a second-year Cooley law student, first pitched the idea of providing pro bono legal services through the Open Door Ministry to Professor Wonch's Professional Responsibility class a couple of terms ago. "I am thankful that I have had the opportunity to work with the Open Door Ministry. I have met many great people there and have learned of many of the wonderful things that the Ministry does to help others. It has been a great learning experience for me and also satisfying in that I have the ability to help others in legal matters. Because it is both a great opportunity for law students to practice what has been learned and beneficial to those that we have helped, I hope that this work will continue beyond my time at the school," said Goodale, while reflecting about his experience during an informal planning meeting with other students and Dean Ward.

The schedule for pro bono legal advocacy services through the Open Door Ministry for the rest of the year is:

Wednesdays, October 21, November 11, and December 2 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Fridays, October 23, November 13, and December 4 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Thomas Cooley Law School embraces its responsibility to the students and communities it serves. In 2008, Cooley programs provided 169,134 hours of free legal service to the people and institutions surrounding its campuses and around the world through its legal clinics and 18 pro bono programs. At an average cost of \$150 per hour for legal help,

this legal assistance is worth over \$25 million. Of those hours, 69,651 were provided to those who cannot afford to pay for the services, reflecting a pro bono value to the indigent of over \$10 million.

Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program

On October 19 and 20, 2009, eight students, two faculty members, an alumnus, and two staff members of Thomas Cooley Law School will assist JAG officers in preparing wills and Powers-of-Attorney for 650 deploying National Guardsmen and women at Fort Custer in Augusta, MI. This support is provided through Cooley's Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program.

Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program was kicked-off by Cooley in spring 2007. The program helps servicemembers who are deploying and returning from deployment and who may be facing unexpected civilian legal issues. In those instances, faculty members and students offer consultations to recently returned servicemembers from any branch of the United States military, usually during weekend drill events. When indicated, servicemembers are connected to volunteer attorneys from across the state for free representation. The program has over 100 pro bono attorneys ready to help when called upon, and has served several hundred deploying and returning servicemembers.

The program, organized by Cooley's Director of the Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism Heather Spielmaker, will enlist the help of Cooley faculty members Karen Truszkowski and Nancy Wonch, Cooley alumnus Robert Hinman, Cooley staff member Kathleen Lawrence, and Cooley students Bethany Slomski, Rachel Thrush, Robert Golob, Kelly Spenski, Roodgine Roseberg, Thomas Erb, Jr., Kim Mlinaz, and Clouette Heichel. Falling during the State Bar of Michigan's Pro Bono Month celebration, the activities represent one of many ways that Cooley is supporting the pro bono mission the bar has adopted.

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