

## **Pro Bono Programs**

### **Coordinated Through Cooley Law School**

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Cooley Law School operates the following pro bono programs to assist people or groups who cannot afford to pay lawyers to do the work we undertake. Each program provides law-related assistance and provides an opportunity for Cooley students to engage in legal work under the direct supervision of an attorney for no pay and no credit. We distinguish these opportunities from the many community service programs and opportunities we also offer.

### **Cooley Assists Michigan Troops**

Since 2007, Thomas Cooley's **Service to Soldiers: Legal Assistance Referral Program** has been offering free legal assistance to Michigan military personnel who are deploying to, serving in, or within six months of having returned from combat areas and who are experiencing non-military legal concerns. This program is the only one offering help to soldiers with civilian legal matters and complements the veterans' disability assistance offered by the University of Detroit-Mercy School of Law. With help from a grant from the Michigan State Bar Foundation and from the Ingham County Bar Foundation, the program has:

- recruited 100+ attorneys from across Michigan to represent enlisted military personnel free of charge;
- drafted 250 wills and powers of attorneys for deploying troops;
- assisted over a dozen deployed, enlisted personnel with civilian legal matters;
- provided free legal representation to 115 returning troops for family law, creditor, insurance, and landlord/tenant issues; and
- allowed Cooley students, alumni, staff, and Michigan attorneys the opportunity to give back to those who have sacrificed so much for our country.

To learn more about this program, call Heather Spielmaker, Director of the Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism, at (517) 371-5140, ext. 4112, and visit:

[http://cooley.edu/ethics/programs\\_service.html#soldiers](http://cooley.edu/ethics/programs_service.html#soldiers)

### **Collaboration Helps the Unrepresented**

In the past five years, Cooley's partnership with the Grand Rapids Bar Association and **Kent County** to operate the **Legal Assistance Center** has helped over 50,000 unrepresented persons obtain the legal forms and information to navigate the courts. Over one thousand patrons visit the Kent County Courthouse-based Center every month, where they are served by a Cooley staff attorney and students, other volunteers, and a full-time paralegal staff. Spanish-speaking staff is available. Most of the Center's assistance is for family-law matters, but the Center also assists with landlord-tenant matters, expunging criminal convictions, consumer disputes, and a host of other legal

matters commonly experienced by low-income residents who cannot afford an attorney. The Center can be contacted at (616) 632-6014.

## **Hurricane Victims Continue to Receive Help**

Since 2007, over 200 Cooley students have traveled to **New Orleans** during their term break to partner with legal agencies involved with **disaster relief legal work**. Students have worked on probate issues involving homes in the lower Ninth Ward helping clients clear title to devastated homes, public defender cases in criminal courts, clearing the backlog of divorce cases from the hurricane, helping people obtain and maintain public benefits, helping people stay in their homes, and related cases. Students have learned first hand about the role of a lawyer in a community recovering from a catastrophe. One student said, "The Disaster Relief Legal Association has taken me from being the typical self-serving law student always looking for the next great résumé builder, to actually caring and not just 'doing what looks good.'" Assistant Dean Chris Church organizes the program for Cooley and can be reached at (517) 371-5140.

## **Helping Train State Employees**

For the last four years, Professor Tony Flores, accompanied and assisted by between five and 15 Cooley students, has trained Protective Services and Foster Care workers as a part of their curriculum through the **Child Welfare Training Institute**, an agency of the Michigan Department of Human Services. The eight week training session has included about 170 trainees three to four times a year. Cooley students assist Professor Flores in preparing the trainees on courtroom testimony. This testimony includes the students performing direct and cross-examinations of the child welfare investigators. The examinations include issues concerning child welfare supervision, child welfare investigation, and family preservation. Contact Professor Tony Flores at (517) 371-5140.

## **Legal Services for the Homeless**

West Michigan's largest homeless mission, **Mel Trotter Ministries in Grand Rapids**, offers free legal services every week, thanks in part to Cooley faculty, staff, and students. Cooley's Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism, and the Cooley Volunteer Corps, administer the service, coordinating the schedules for the several Cooley students who volunteer to support the work of the Christian Lawyers Association and Cooley faculty members who donate their time to the free legal service. The Christian mission, located next door to Cooley's campus, also houses a residential substance-abuse program, women-and-children program, soup kitchen, occupational-training programs, and other homeless services. Contact the Center's Assistant Director Karen Rowlader at (616) 301-6800 ext. 6708 for information.

## **Cooley Professors and Students Help Land Conservancies**

Professor Gerald Fisher has been providing pro bono **services for land conservancies** and related groups in Southeast Michigan for about 20 years. He has provided counsel on negotiating, drafting and enforcing conservation easements, and on presenting and approving millages to purchase land for conservation; and he has served on Senate ad hoc committees, assisted in drafting the Wetlands Act and model ordinance provisions, and

presented seminars on local wetland regulation and on conservation easements. Professor Frank Aiello oversees efforts to revise the model form of Conservation Easement used by land conservancies in Michigan, and has provided hundreds of pro bono hours in land acquisition transactions, including some currently in development. Each semester, one or two Cooley students assist Professor Aiello with each transaction. Examples of transactions include helping land conservancies acquire land and conservation easements against donated greenspace and other natural and undeveloped areas. Professor Aiello provided more than thirty hours of free legal service to the conservancy in connection with the transaction. For more information contact either professor at Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills campus at (248) 751-7800.

### **Pro Bono Service at Cristo Rey Helps Lansing Residents**

Since October 2006, Cooley professor Christopher Trudeau has partnered with Lansing's **Cristo Rey Community Center** to provide pro bono legal services to Lansing residents. A key part of the program is the involvement of Cooley students, who accompany Trudeau most weeks. This student involvement allows Trudeau to help more clients than he otherwise could, and it allows Trudeau to train future lawyers in many ways that traditional law classes can't. Since the inception of the program, Trudeau has met with nearly 200 clients on a wide variety of issues. The majority of clients seek advice on family law matters, such as divorce, child custody, child support, and changes of domicile, but also seek help with employment, landlord/tenant, and consumer protection issues. In 2008 alone, Trudeau and his students spent over 500 hours performing pro bono related services. This includes the actual time spent at Cristo Rey on Wednesdays, and the time spent attending to clients' needs by preparing legal documents, preparing for court, researching the law, and attending court proceedings. Cristo Rey accepts appointments from 9 a.m. to noon every Wednesday, except the third Wednesday of the month. To schedule an appointment, call Cristo Rey at (517) 372-4700 and ask for Cindy or Elaine.

### **Eastern District of Michigan Federal Bar Association Foreclosure Assistance Program**

Students from Cooley attended and helped with the administration of a two-day training program presented by the Michigan Poverty Law Program in February, 2009 to train pro bono volunteer lawyers to represent *in pro per* litigants in foreclosure cases in state and federal court. Approximately 20 of these lawyers, including Cooley alumni, have volunteered to handle cases in federal court through the Eastern District of Michigan Federal Bar Association Pro Bono Committee, and Cooley students will be paired with volunteer lawyers who request a student pro bono law clerk. The contact for students interested in this program is Cooley Associate Dean John Nussbaumer, who serves as Co-Chair of the FBA Pro Bono Committee. He can be reached at (248) 751-7800.

### **Advent House Helps Lansing Indigent**

Over the years Cooley has established a very active relationship with **Lansing's Advent House Ministries**. Students supervised by lawyers, including Cooley Professor Nancy Wonch, visit to provide general legal advice and referrals, and help with letter writing

and forms preparation for the indigent in Lansing. Professor Wonch plans to extend that assistance to one Saturday per month. Each week three student slots will be available. Advent House clients are aware of this program through the internal efforts of Advent House staff. For information, contact Advent House or Professor Nancy Wonch at Cooley Law School, (517) 371-5140.

## **Pro-Bono Network Serves Where It Counts**

Cooley's Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism administers a network of Cooley faculty, staff, and other volunteer attorneys who provide free legal service to the poor and under-represented at community centers in the Grand Rapids area. The pro-bono sites have included the soup kitchen **Dégagé Ministries** serving a homeless population, the **Hispanic Center of West Michigan** serving an immigrant population, the **Dwelling Place Apartments** serving formerly homeless and disabled, and the **West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce** serving the self-employed. Lawyers and law students from Cooley visit the sites on the same routine schedule to serve clients on a drop-in basis. Most of the consultations involve evaluation and referral for further legal and social services, but the lawyers also review files, draft documents, and communicate on the clients' behalf with businesses and governmental agencies. Many of the consultations involve translation to serve a non-English speaking population. Contact the Center's Assistant Director Karen Rowlander at (616) 301-6800 ext. 6708 for information.

## **Tainted Evidence Reviewed for Possible Wrongful Convictions**

A recent investigation and audit of the Detroit Crime Lab uncovered systemic problems in the way ballistics tests were conducted. Accordingly, it became necessary to determine how many convictions may have been impacted by tainted forensic examinations. The State Appellate Defender Office (SADO) represents indigent defendants on appeal and had handled many of the files that required review. Given the potential number of affected cases, an informal agreement was reached between Cooley Law School and SADO whereby **Cooley students will help SADO review all case files to determine whether tainted evidence may have been used to secure a conviction.** This file review includes reading trial transcripts, police reports, witness statements, expert witness reports, and other relevant documents. Cooley professor Alan Gershel provided Cooley students with an overview of the applicable law and SADO attorneys provided additional training. The work is done in SADO's Detroit office and is supervised by Professor Gershel and a SADO attorney. At present there is no end date given the volume of cases, and so far, in less than a month, Cooley students have reviewed between 300-400 cases. Cooley students will be reviewing guilty plea cases and letters written by defendants, and reviewing the cases that were "flagged" initially as a form of quality control. When that is completed they will then be involved in drafting briefs in the meritorious cases and, finally, will be reviewing paper files. Professor Gershel can be reached at (248) 751-7800.

## **Helping the Homeless Obtain Disability Benefits**

An alarming prevalence of mental and other disabilities exists among the homeless in Michigan. In an effort to get these residents the assistance they desperately need while

offering hands-on experience for their students, Cooley has offered to team-up with the **Volunteers of America Homeless Shelter in Lansing** to help the homeless apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) benefits. Clients need help completing the initial paperwork and with checking back with government agencies to be sure the ball keeps rolling on their claims and appeals. Cooley professors and area attorneys will supervise law students as they offer legal services once per month to assist VOA clients with their applications, follow up, and appeals. Contact Professor Karen Truszkowski at Cooley for more information at (517) 371-5140.

### **The Eastern District Habeas Corpus Project**

In order to address the backlog of **habeas corpus petitions that have been filed in the United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan**, the Court has entered into a unique partnership with Thomas M. Cooley Law School. Selected law students will review habeas corpus petitions and will draft proposed opinions and orders for the assigned magistrate judge. The students will be supervised by the Executive Magistrate Judge and Professors Tammy Asher and Alan Gershel. Contact Professors Tammy Asher and Alan Gershel at (248) 751-7800.

### **Case Development Training Helps Lawyers Help Indigent Defendants**

Cooley Law Professor Marjorie Russell runs **case development sessions for lawyers representing indigent criminal defendants** at Cooley's Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Auburn Hills campuses, and Cooley students participate in the working groups. In these sessions Professor Russell uses the action methods developed at the Trial Lawyers College in Wyoming, where she has been a faculty member since 1996, for case exploration, story development, trial and witness preparation, and focus group work. This pro bono service in aid to the indigent defense community is expected to continue as long as there is a demand for it among Michigan lawyers. Contact Professor Marjorie Russell at (517) 371-5140.

### **Nonprofit Incorporation Project Boosts Services**

Cooley's Center for Ethics, Service, and Professionalism, and the Cooley Volunteer Corps, offer **start-up legal services to charitable nonprofit corporations at Cooley's Grand Rapids campus through the Nonprofit Incorporation Project**. The Project has served well over 30 organizations that offer such a variety of charitable works as taking disabled children hunting and fishing, showing inner-city children the path to become pilots, rehabilitating properties in decaying inner-city locations to anchor redevelopment, providing transitional services to Somali refugees, and providing education to the children of Niger. Contact the Center's Assistant Director Karen Rowlader at (616) 301-6800 ext. 6708 for information.

### **Open Door Ministries Helps the Poor in Lansing**

Initiated by students in a Professional Responsibility course as a student project, students supervised by lawyers now visit the **Open Doors Ministries shelter in Lansing** once per

month for several hours to provide general legal advice, referrals, and letter writing assistance, and to prepare forms for the indigent in the Lansing area. Each session provides *pro bono* opportunities for two students. Staff of the Open Door Ministries will inform clients of the program. The contact person for this program is Cooley Professor Nancy Wonch, who can be reached at (517) 371-5140.

## **Lansing Teen Court Helps Teenagers and Prosecutors**

One way to expose law students to real-life law is to develop a relationship with the local prosecutor's office that allows the Law School to host the adjudication of criminal cases involving teenagers. The Ingham County Prosecutor's Office has such an agreement with Cooley Law School. That office screens and refers to the "**Lansing Teen Court**," juvenile offender cases involving youths ages 11-16. Local teenagers receive orientation and training and then act as jurors, while local judges and Cooley faculty preside as judges in the proceedings. The program provides teens with a diversionary program for relatively minor legal offenses, and allows other teens to not just see, but also decide, sentencing. The proceedings take place in Cooley's high-tech, state-of-the-art courtrooms. Cooley students serve as Respondent and victims' advocates, hearing observers, and as jury monitors during jury deliberations. They also assist the Respondents in completing their required orders for the Teen Court diversion from prosecution. Many of them also serve as academic mentors for the students and establish relationships with the teenagers that continue beyond Teen Court. Contact Professor Marjorie Russell at (517) 371-5140.

## **Cooley Clinics Encourage Student Pro Bono Work**

Cooley's many legal clinics allow students to do actual legal work for indigents, and receive credit for that. As it turns out, many Cooley students and clinic faculty end up working many hours in excess of what is required of them. We consider those extra hours—beyond what is needed to earn school credit—as *pro bono* work by both our students and faculty. Such *pro bono* assistance occurs at all of Cooley's clinics, including the

- **Family Law Assistance Program**—a partnership between the Oakland County Bar Association, Lakeshore Legal Aid, and Cooley Law School that coordinates private *pro bono* volunteer lawyers, Lakeshore and Cooley staff attorneys, and Cooley students in providing quality legal services to indigent domestic violence and family law clients in Oakland County (contact Professor Ashley Lowe at Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills campus at (248) 751-7800).
- The **Sixty Plus, Inc. Elderlaw Clinic**, which undertakes estate planning and wide range of civil law issues for senior citizens (contact Kim O'Leary at Cooley's Lansing campus at (517) 371-5140).
- The **Innocence Project**, where students research, draft pleadings, interview witnesses and conduct other intensive fact investigation on claims of innocence by persons convicted of felony crimes in Michigan (contact Professor Donna McKneelen at Cooley's Lansing campus at (517) 371-5140).
- **Estate Planning Clinics** in Lansing and Auburn Hills, which focus on estate planning and probate law (contact Professor Gary Bauer, Lansing at (517) 371-5140 and Professor Dustin Foster, Auburn Hills at (248) 751-7800).

- The Grand Rapids area Legal Assistance Center refers unrepresented persons who have more complex matters requiring the services of a lawyer to the **Access to Justice Clinic**, where a Cooley faculty member director, staff attorney, and law students ensure that the clients receive competent representation in family-law, landlord-tenant, and other consumer-law matters in a general civil practice (contact Professor Cindy Faulkner at (616) 301-6800).
- In a parallel access-to-justice program, Kent County refers legal matters involving systemic governmental issues to the **Public Sector Law Clinic**, a one-of-a-kind program in which a Cooley faculty member director, staff attorney, and law students explore ways to improve access to courts and other government services. This clinic at Cooley's Grand Rapids campus helps ensure that more individuals have greater opportunity to improve their lives through the orderly administration of law and government (contact Administrative Assistant Autumn Ward at (616) 301-6800 ext 6921).
- The **Washtenaw County Public Defender Clinic**, with classes in Lansing and site work in Ann Arbor, where student lawyers perform all public defender functions (contact Professor Terry Cavanaugh at (517) 371-5140).