

Showcase of Pro Se Assistance Programs Program Profile

DELAWARE FAMILY COURT SELF-HELP CENTERS

Bill Johnston, Room 205

State: Delaware

Name of Program & Brief Description:

Administrative Office of the Courts Self-Help Center and Family Court Resource Centers.

The Administrative Office of the Courts Self-Help Center and Family Court Resource Centers provide litigants with a central location where they can find resources they need to help guide them through the legal process and to deal with the emotional challenges resulting from their legal circumstances. At the Self-Help and Resource Centers, litigants have access to resources such as: an information desk, court forms, instructions, educational materials, legal self-help books, books addressing the emotional aspects of people's cases, a data bank of attorneys who are willing to represent a litigant on a specific area of family law, notary services for court forms, computers with Microsoft Word and Internet access, a high speed printer, a photocopy machine, a television and VCR for free viewing of court-related videos, a fax machine and other equipment to enable litigants to prepare for their cases at one location. Instructional materials range from Instruction and Forms Packets and other court-related materials to how to address an envelope.

In addition to the resources available, litigants file their Family Court documents at the Centers and have staff review the documents for completeness – verifying that there are no signatures or necessary attachments missing and that all of the appropriate areas on court forms are completed. There is even a kid's corner where children will find toys and books (in English and Spanish) to keep children occupied while their parents avail themselves of the resources at the Centers.

Distinguishing features of the Self-Help Center from the Resource Centers include: the availability of the Limited *Pro Bono* Legal Assistance Program in which eligible self-represented litigants can receive free fifteen-minute consultations in many areas of family law, the ability of the public to file landlord-tenant complaints and receive correlating staff assistance, and the availability of instructional and informational materials for areas of law pertinent to each State Court.

Date Program Was Established:

The Family Court Resource Centers opened in Kent County in December 2000 and in Sussex County in April 2001. The Self-Help Center opened in September 2002. The Limited *Pro Bono* Legal Assistance Program commenced February 2004.

Program Sponsor(s):

The Delaware Judiciary including the Administrative Office of the Courts

Partnerships:

The Delaware State Bar Association (DSBA), Delaware Volunteer Legal Services, Inc., Community Legal Aid Society, Inc., Legal Services Corporation of Delaware, Inc., Widener University School of Law, The *Pro Se* Litigation Assistance Committee, the Legal Services to Low-Income Persons Committee, the Commission on Family Law; the DSBA Family Law Section; The American Inns of Court for *Pro Bono*; the Melson-Arsht Inn of Court; the Richard S. Rodney Inn of Court, and the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League, Inc. Committees assisting with the inception of Family Court's *pro se* program include: the Supreme Court of Delaware's Committee on Delaware Task Force on Citizen Involvement in the Judicial System, the Special Committee on Family Court Internal Operating Procedures, the Phoenix Governmental Services, the Council of Court Administrators Committees on the New Castle County Courthouse (Shared Functions, Technology, Clerks/Cashiers Office), the Committee on Home Page, other Delaware State Bar Association's Committees, the *Pro Bono* Committee and Committee on Public Access. On a national level, partners include: the National Center for State Courts, the American Judicature Society, Inc., the Justice Management Institute, the *Pro Bono* List serve and more.

Target Group(s)/No. Clients Served per Year:

Target Group(s): Self-represented litigants in the area of family law and for the Self-Help Center, also landlord-tenant law.

During fiscal year 2006 (July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006), the Self-Help Center staff assisted over 19,000 people in New Castle County. The Family Court Resource Center in Kent County assisted 13,760 litigants. The Family Court Resource Center in Sussex County assisted 12,734 litigants. These figures do not include people who use the resources at the Centers but bypass the staff desk. We do not log assistance rendered when staff circulates throughout the Center and their assistance is requested. Furthermore, these figures do not include the telephone assistance that staff provides or assistance provided relating to any court other than Family Court.

Cost/Funding Source(s): General operating funds.

Staffing (FTE, Part-Time, Titles):

The Self-Help Center is staffed by two/three full-time Family Court employees, one/ two full-time Administrative Office of the Courts employees and a varying number of part-time volunteers and interns. The Family Court Resource Centers are employed by full-time Family Court staff.

Contact Person and Contact Information:

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