Select Programs for Pro Se Patrons

The following list of programs serving pro se patrons (also called “pro per” or “self-represented litigant”) at law libraries across the US was based on an email survey conducted in July 2005.

The questions asked:
(1) Briefly describe the type of program (classes, clinics, workshops, etc.).
(2) What is the cost to patron?
(3) Include website address, if possible
(4) Provide contact name, if possible

Library & Contact:
David E. Bender, Law Librarian
William D. Block Memorial Law Library
Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, State of Illinois
18 N. County St.
Waukegan, IL 60085-4339
DBender@co.lake.il.us
(847) 377-2800

Program description:
We have an on-line program for pro se litigants in small claims court. It prompts the user with simple questions, then produces all of the forms needed to file and serve the case. The on-line program is part of the greater program known as the Center for Self-Representation. We have forms checklists, and the like for pro se litigants. The main website is http://www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/self-help/index.htm. All of the forms and checklists have been drawn up by the judges of the 19th Circuit. The best ones are for family law: http://www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/forms/family/family_law.htm. Everything is fill in the blank or check the box. The petition and response all match up line for line. There is no cost to the patron. Development cost was provided through a grant from the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation.

Website:
http://www.19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/self-help/s_claims/how_to_file.htm

Library & Contact:
Gretchen Hornberger
Coconino County Law Library and Self-Help Center
Coconino County Courts
Flagstaff, AZ
ghornberger@coconino.az.gov
Program description:

A. Legal Packets: Written and approved by the court, the packets include all the forms and instructions pro pers need to complete court procedures on their own. They cover children and family law; guardianship, conservatorship, and power of attorney; protective orders; landlord-tenant law; and court procedures. The packets are also on our website in an interactive format, especially helpful for our patrons who don’t live in Flagstaff or are physically unable to come to the Self-Help Center. Soon they will all be available in Spanish as well.

B. Self-Help Videos: In partnership with Northern Arizona University, the court has produced five 30-minute informational videos on representing yourself in court (also in Spanish), jury duty, landlord-tenant law, and protective orders.

C. Brief Legal Consultation Program: In partnership with DNA-People’s Legal Services (legal aid), we offer a one-time meeting with an attorney for pro pers to get answers to brief legal questions or help filling out forms concerning family law.

D. Access to the Law Library

E. Informational brochures from other agencies

Everything is free except for the Brief Legal Consultation Program, which is at a reduced rate of about $100, depending on the attorney.

Website:


Library & Contact:

Paula Seeger, Reference/Outreach Services Librarian
Dane County Legal Resource Center
Rm 315--210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 266-6316
(608) 266-5988 (fax)
paula.seeger@wicourts.gov
http://wsll.state.wi.us/branch/dclrc/index.html

Program Descriptions:

In cooperation with the Dane County Bar Association and the University of Wisconsin Law School, the Dane County Circuit Court offers these legal assistance programs for the public at the Courthouse. These programs do not offer legal advice.

Family Law Assistance Center
Meets Wednesdays 11:30-1:30 in Room 226
Program offers: Assistance with forms and procedures related to family court; referrals to community resources; no legal advice. Staff: Volunteer attorneys, paralegals and law students; Spanish-speaking volunteers are available the first and third Wednesdays. Schedule available on Dane County Bar Association Web site.
Small Claims Assistance Program
Meets Tuesdays 9-11 a.m. on the Third Floor (Check in Room 315 for specific location)
Program Offers: Assistance with forms and procedures related to small claims court; referrals to community resources; no legal advice. Staff: Volunteer attorneys, paralegals, and law students

Family Court Assistance Project
Meets Tuesday, Thursday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. (608) 262-2301.
Program offers: FCAP is a University of Wisconsin Law School program that can help organize information, complete and review forms, and will offer numerous workshops on family court-related issues, including Temporary Restraining Orders. Staff: Law School students, supervised by a clinical law professor. The students will supply no legal advice or advocacy. Contact FCAP at (608) 262-2301.

Website:
http://www.countyofdane.com/clrkcort/legal_assistance.htm

For detailed information on Legal Assistance Programs throughout the state of Wisconsin, contact Paula Seeger (paula.seeger@wicourts.gov) for copies of a report she submitted to the District Court Administrators as part of the study “Public Access to Legal Information and Assistance in Wisconsin: A statewide survey of resources and programs,” final report forthcoming by Paula Seeger, chair, Public Access to Legal Information committee, Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin.

Library & Contact:
Bette Dengel
Law Librarian
Beaver County Law Library
Courthouse
810 Third St.
Beaver, PA 15009
bdengel@co.beaver.pa.us

Program Description:
It is almost a year now since I have added a "Pro Se Center" to the Law Library. I do not offer clinics, workshops or classes because I am not qualified to present them. Instead, I offer forms supplied by our Court (primarily child custody, expungement and driver license suspension appeals), a place for them to sit and fill in the forms and a webpage designed for the public. It has been a raging success. I had been warned that the lawyers would not like it, but I have had very few complaints and many words of praise. The Court is happy because now all the custody papers from the pro ses are alike. To say that the public is thrilled is an understatement. Patrons must pay 10 cents per page for photocopies of the forms. No other charges.

Website:
http://www.co.beaver.pa.us/lawlibrary
Library & Contact:

Kaye L. Maerz, State Law Librarian
West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, Bldg. 1
Rm. E-404
Charleston, WV 25305
kayemaerz@courtswv.org

Program Description:

In the fall of 2004, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in partnership with the WV Library Commission, funded in part by a grant from the State Justice Institute, established 10 Legal Research Centers in West Virginia with the goal of providing access to legal information to pro se/self-represented litigants. The Legal Research Centers (LRCs) provide access to print materials, videos, the LRC website and online access to the Lexis legal database. Trained librarians assist patrons on a one-to-one basis with understanding the legal process and locating legal information. The LRCs are located in 6 public and 4 law libraries across the state. Services are free to the patron.

Website:

http://www.wvlrc.org/

Library & Contact:

Sara Galligan
Dakota County Law Library (MN)
Judicial Center
1560 Hwy. 55
Hastings, MN 55033
(651) 438-8080
sara.galligan@co.dakota.mn.us

Program Description:

Dakota County Family Court Self Help Center--Volunteer attorneys assist self-help clients in sessions held three times per month in Hastings, Apple Valley, and West St. Paul, Minnesota. The sessions are scheduled from 1-4PM on regularly occurring days during the month. Each session lasts thirty minutes. Parties must be Dakota County residents. Consultations in Hastings take place in a conference room located next to the law library. Consultations in Apple Valley (Western Service Center) take place in a conference room located in the Galaxie Public Library. Consultations in West St. Paul (Northern Service Center) take place in a conference room in the Wentworth Public Library. All locations can provide family court forms, legal resources, and Internet access as well as photocopy capability. In addition to the attorney volunteers, Dakota County District Court, Legal Assistance of Dakota County, and the Dakota County Law Library collaborate to provide services for self-help clients. Dakota County (First Judicial District) initiated its legal self-help services project in July 2002, which is modeled on the centers operating in Ramsey and Hennepin counties. The Minnesota State Bar Association (MSBA) Program Subcommittee of the Pro Se Implementation Committee also endorsed the Dakota County Family Court Self-Help Center. There is no cost, but participants must be Dakota County residents.

Website:
http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/courts/self%20help%20center.htm

Library & Contact:

Eleanor Gerlott
Law Librarian
Lancaster County Law Library (PA)
50 N. Duke St.
Lancasster, PA  17608-3480
(717) 299-8090
GERLOTT@co.lancaster.pa.us

Program Description:

I am the law librarian in Lancaster County, Pa. and also now the manager of our Court's Self Help Center. The Center is not in the library, but I was and continue to be one of the key players in establishing the Center and maintaining it. The Self Help Center is a small office on the first floor of our courthouse where self-represented litigants can go to purchase (for a nominal fee) information packets that contain instructions and forms for filing certain types of actions--for example, how to file for custody or visitation, how to file for an uncontested divorce, how to file an appeal from a driver's license suspension, etc. The nominal fee for the packets, which is either $5 or $10, is the only charge to the patrons. All of the packets are also available on the court's website and can be downloaded free from that site. The Center opened last July, and has been very well received.

Website:

http://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/courts

Library & Contact:

Rita Kaiser
Reference Services Librarian
King County Law Library
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 296-0940
Rita.Kaiser@metrokc.gov

Program Description:

We do classes on basic civil procedure, searching both Westlaw and Lexis for the public, and a series of three classes on doing internet legal research at the local, state and federal level. In addition, we have offered a section 1983 class that our fieldwork student designed and are in the process of rethinking our training. We don't charge for our programs at present - we are considering doing so to help with attendance - as we feel that the patrons don't value the classes - and turn up - even after they register - if there isn't a cost.

Website:

http://www.kcll.org/learnhow/lRTC/index.html
Program Description:

Sometime in the last year or two, Houston Volunteer Lawyers Association, a sub-set of the Houston Bar Association, starting placing two individuals, at least one of which is an attorney, in a reestanding gray workstation in the basement lobby of the Family Law Center either at the request of and/or with the co-operation of the Family Judges. The workstation is usually staffed from 8:30 to 12:30 and 1:30 to 3:00 Monday thru Friday. The workstation staff are there to answer questions in pro se family court matters, including reviewing petitions and decrees to eliminate any obvious problems before they get to the Judges. They are not part of the court's staff or the clerk's staff. Pro se's are not required to utilize their help. The service is not available by phone--one must show up and get in line.

If a pro se starts at the workstation, the volunteer attorney will suggest to them what forms they will probably need in their particular situation. Typically, they will provide the pro se with a slip of paper indicating the names of those forms and the particular resource they believe the pro se should use to find copies of those forms. (They do not give them copies of the forms: the process still retains many aspects of a "do-it-yourself" process.) They then usually direct the pro se to the Law Library which is located in a building about one block away. We look at the slip and use it to direct patrons to the specific resources listed on slip and explain to the pro se how that set works. It is then up to the pro se to look up the sample forms and decide whether they actually want to make a copy of them. Somewhere in this process the Library staff usually tries to make sure the Pro Se knows to return to the volunteer lawyer to answer any questions they have (i.e, is this the right sample form what does this mean? do I need this part of the form? can I just fill this in or do I need to retype it? Does my final product look ok to file?).

At the same time if a family law pro se starts at the Law Library, we strongly urge them to see the Volunteer Lawyer first and then come back and try to use our materials once they know what books and what specific sample forms they should be using in their specific situation. We also try to pass on the same suggestion whenever a pro se calls the Law Library for information about how to do their own divorce.

Library & Contact:

Coral Henning, Director
Sacramento County Public Law Library
813 Sixth St., First Fl.
Sacramento, CA 95814-2403
CHenning@saclaw.org
(916) 874-6012
Program Descriptions:

Sacramento County Public Law Library is an approved MCLE provider so they market classes to lawyers but all are open to the public. Below is a list of classes taught by SCPLL Law Librarians that appeal to the pro se litigant.

Legal Research on the Internet
Participants will explore resources available for legal research on the Internet. This hands-on computer class will concentrate on CA sources for case law, statutes, regulations and more! 3 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $70 Sacramento County Bar Member.$75 Non-County Bar Member

Introduction to Legal Research and Law Library Basics I (2.5 hours)
This class for the non-lawyer provides an introduction to the law library and its resources, an overview of the sources of law and the California court system, and general strategies for researching legal questions. Registration fee: $5.

Law Library Basics I: advanced exercises (2.5 hours)
Companion class for the non-lawyer: Hands on exercises using library materials and computer resources that build on and reinforce the information presented in the introductory class. Prerequisite: Introduction to Legal Research and Law Library Basics. Registration fee: $5.

Get More From Google: Tips For Legal Professionals
Even longtime Google users will be surprised by the many features Google offers. In this class participants will learn tips and tricks for conducting sophisticated searches to quickly find legal information, using Google to locate documents on their home or office computer, and even ideas for using Google to attract clients. 1.5 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $10

Finding People and Their Assets
Instructor: Don Vilfer, Vilfer & Associates(http://www.vilferinvestigations.com)
Need to find a witness or heir, a judgment debtor or the debtor's assets? Can't locate the individual you need to serve? Don Vilfer, attorney, private investigator, and former FBI special agent discusses resources and strategies for locating individuals and their assets. 1.5 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $40 Sacramento County Bar Member.$45 Non-County Bar Member.

Microsoft Word: Tips and Techniques for the Legal Professional
Instructor: Tammy Hunt, Certified Legal Secretary
In this two hour hands-on presentation, participants will learn how to format legal pleadings, tables of authorities, and tables of contents as well as the quickest keystrokes to maneuver through Word. 2 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $60 Sacramento County Bar Member.$65 Non-County Bar Member.

5 W’s & 1 H: Introduction to Sacramento County Public Law Library’s Online Databases
Califa, HeinOnline, IndexMaster, and NewsBank. Chances are you're not familiar with these powerful legal research tools. But you can be by attending this hands-on computer class, which will cover the basics of all the free online resources provided by the Sacramento County Public Law Library. More familiar databases such as Witkin, LexisNexis, and Westlaw will be covered, as well as our newest addition, US Court Forms. 2 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $10.

Lexis.com - Research Tips and Techniques
Instructor: Tom Otter, LexisNexis
Learn research techniques using Lexis.com. 1 hour MCLE credit. Registration fee: $10.
Westlaw - Research Tips and Techniques
Instructor: Rick Mitchell, West Group
Hands on computer class concentrating on CA research techniques using Westlaw. 1.5 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $10.

PowerPoint for Legal Professionals
Instructor: David McCusker, Training Coordinator, SCPLL
Learn how to use PowerPoint to communicate your client’s story in a compelling visual presentation. In this hands-on class, you will learn how to use animation, photos, and documents to create PowerPoint slides useful for litigation purposes. No PowerPoint experience necessary; if you have experience with Windows and other Microsoft Office software, you’re ready for this course. Registration fee includes lunch. 2.5 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee: $60 Sacramento County Bar Member. $65 Non-County Bar Member.

PowerPoint for Legal Professionals II: Advanced Exercises
Instructor: David McCusker, Training Coordinator, SCPLL
Learn how to use PowerPoint to communicate your client’s story in a compelling visual presentation. In this hands-on class, you will learn how to augment your PowerPoint presentations by presenting the facts of the case using timelines, charts, and diagrams, and by incorporating audio and video files. Prerequisite: PowerPoint for Legal Professionals. 2.5 hours MCLE credit. Registration fee includes lunch. Registration fee: $60 Sacramento County Bar Member. $65 Non-County Bar Member.

Website:
http://www.saclaw.org

Library & Contact:
John Zorbas, Director
Butte County Law Library (CA)
1 Court St.
Oroville, CA 95965
jzorbas@buttecourt.ca.gov
(530) 538-7122

On Thursdays each week, my library hosts the Superior Court's Pro Per Orders Clinic volunteers. 2 attorneys (Kim Merrifield and Satsie Veith – under the auspices of Legal Services of Northern California), together with 3 community volunteers who were pro per themselves 3, 5, and 7 years ago, utilize my four public access computers to type up Findings and Orders After Hearing forms, get them to the judge for signature, and deliver them to the Butte County Sheriff's Office for lodging and entry into the CLETS database – in DV cases. The Pro Per Calendar, which is run and supervised by Butte County Superior Court Judge William R. Patrick hears on average 28 to 45 cases each week. Longtime Juvenile Court Judge Steven McNelis hears 50 percent of the cases. The work of the volunteers lasts from about 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

My role in the process is to review Applications for Orders and Supporting Declarations (that my self-represented customers present me with at the time of Filing) for completeness - and to assist the customer in providing to the judge all that the judge is requesting. The four common things I look at are:

* Is the Caption on the Form filled out properly?
* Have all the Questions (that the Form asks) been Responded-to?
* Has the Applicant supplied Facts for the judge to see – as opposed to conclusions that give little clue to the judge as to what the Facts are?
* Has the Applicant given 24 Hours advance notice to the Respondent of his or (more typically) her intention to obtain a Restraining Order or has the Applicant supplied sufficient Facts on his or her Declaration which would be grounds to excuse him or her from the requirement.

While the Statement of the Facts (the factor listed third in the bulleted listing above) is in many instances difficult for many customers to intuitively state, the Statement of the Emergency (why the Respondent will respond with violence if Notice is given: the factor listed fourth in the bulleted listing above) is most often the most difficult part of the process for the customer to address intuitively. We're here to help.

Library & Contact:

Amy Hale-Janek
San Diego County Public Law Library
1105 Front St.
San Diego, CA 92101-3904
(619) 531-4437
ahale@sdcll.org

Program Descriptions:

Here is what we do for pro pers: First, we hold monthly classes in the basics of legal research for pro pers. Classes are 2 hours long and cost $5 per person. We show them how to find a code, a case, Shepardize, and use the library's databases. Materials for this class can be found on the web: http://www.sdcpll.org/presentations.htm#lawmadepublic. We also give classes on pre-trial procedure and the appeals process.

Second, the Law Library hosts two free legal clinics. The first is a clinic by the San Diego Volunteer Lawyers. Free legal clinics are held on Monday and Tuesday afternoons at the Main Law Library. Please note that priority for the Tuesday clinics is given to seniors. Members of the San Diego Volunteer Lawyers Program will be available to answer questions on any civil matter. Pre-registration is required and clinics fill up quickly. (We supply the room and the Volunteer Lawyers conduct the clinic.) The second legal clinic is through Legal Aid and is a clinic. They give advice and assistance to people who have issues with the IRS. This is held once a month at the Law Library.

Third, we have many sample pleadings and pathfinders that we have put together so that when pro pers come into the library, they can see a sample of what an Ex Parte Motion looks like. You can see the different packets here: http://www.sdcpll.org/guides.htm.

Finally, we participate in California's Ask Now program, which is virtual e-mail reference. Find information about that here: http://www.asknow.org/.

Library & Contact:

Steve Anderson, Director
Maryland State Law Library
Robert C. Murphy Courts of Appeal Bldg.
361 Rowe Blvd.
Program Description:

The Maryland State Law Library cooperates with the People’s Law Library: http://www.peoples-law.org/. It’s receiving AALL’s PAGI Award this year! We are not officially affiliated with them, but do provide some logistical support and content. Additionally, LLAM’s "Legal Research Institute," which happens every two years, has historically been open to the general public.

Website:

http://www.lawlib.state.md.us/

Library & Contact:

Barbara Mule
Executive Assistant to the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives.
New York State Courts (Judge Juanita Bing Newman)
Self-Represented Litigants in the New York Court System.

Program Descriptions:

(1) In the 4th Judicial District, we have partnered with the public library system (the Clinton, Essex and Franklin Library System (CEFLS)) to open CourtHelp Resource Centers in four public libraries and the Awkwasane Indian reservation. The centers are designed to assist the self-represented by providing information about the law and the courts. Public librarians, who have received specialized training offered by the court system, are available to answer questions and assist with research. Informational brochures as well as reference materials for the self-represented are available. A relationship has been developed with the Public Access Law Librarians in order that the public librarians have available resources and support when assisting the public.
Contact: Elizabeth Rogers, CEFLS, 518-563-5190.

(2) In Suffolk County, the Suffolk County Library System has developed, working with my office and the Suffolk County Administrative Judge, an on-line Court Help Resource Center (http://www.suffolk.lib.ny.us/law/courts.html). They have also created an "alcove" within their libraries for self-represented resources.
Contact: Diane Eidelman, Suffolk Library System, 631-286-1600, ext. 1335.

(3) Partnerships have been developed between the Public Access Law Library and Offices for the Self-Represented in three counties: Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester. In each of these counties, the Office for the Self-Represented is housed within the library and a system has been worked out for jointly assisting the self-represented.
Contacts: Westchester, Sonia Davis, 914-824-5664; Nassau, Charles Bahamonde, 516-571-1651.

Program:

New Orleans Pro Bono Project
http://www.probono-no.org
The New Orleans Pro Bono Project coordinates volunteer lawyers and clients. They do simple divorce/custody cases (no litigated custody), where no real property or child/spousal support are at issue. They also do adoptions, bankruptcy, some contractor/repair issues. They will consider requests from the elderly on a case-by-case basis. They will do name changes. They will write wills and open successions (probate in the other 49 states) but they refer clients for these matters to New Orleans Legal Assistance, which will do as many as it can and refer the overflow back. They will also do appeals from VA and Social Security benefit denials. They do NOT do emergency filings, complex cases which involve a lot of discovery and costs, personal injury, employment discrimination/civil rights, or unemployment claims, although they WILL do past-due wages claims.

Program:

New Orleans Legal Assistance
http://www.nolac.org
(504) 522-1000

Part of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. Clients must earn no more than 125% of the federal poverty level. New Orleans Legal Assistance provides help in various civil matters, including child custody/adoptions/abuse/support; divorces; evictions; some foreclosures; past-due wages and some other employment matters.

Program:

Louisiana Supreme Court
http://www.lasc.org
The website has Louisiana Uniform Abuse Prevention Forms for obtaining restraining orders and registering them with a central agency. Unfortunately, they are hard to find. For forms and directions, click on the Judicial Administrator link, scroll down and click Louisiana Protective Order Registry, and choose Public User for DIRECTIONS FOR FILLING OUT THE FORMS. The directions are written for the public. They are easy to understand. Go back and choose PRO USER for the forms themselves. Scroll down and click on LPOR FORMS. Once you get there, scroll all the way down and click the links to choose individual forms. This is a better option than the one at the top of the page which has the forms in big zipped files. These are set up for someone who practices in the area and wants the forms on his/her own PC.

Program:

LawHelp.org
http://www.lawhelp.org
There are several websites across the country created and maintained by local and state bar associations and legal services entities including the Legal Services Corporation. The websites are state specific – containing information for the general public on their legal rights, obtaining legal assistance, and basic legal information. The website addresses include www.lawhelp.org as the basis of the URL, followed by the state abbreviation. Examples of states included: Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Washington. They are hosted by probono.net.
The Community Legal Information Center (CLIC) is an Associated Students program that provides free legal information to the Chico community as well as surrounding areas. California State University, Chico student paralegal interns staff CLIC and provide free legal information in the forms of seminars, workshops, and limited representation to clients in administrative law hearings. CLIC also can assist with filling out various court forms, however CLIC strictly provides legal information, not advice.

To effectively dispense information, CLIC is divided into thirteen specialized programs, each one focusing on a unique area of the law. Students at CLIC take great pride in their organization and the services they provide for the community. CLIC also prides itself in being a student run organization, in which student Program Directors supervise the performance of student Paralegal Interns. CLIC’s Program Directors are supervised by two Administrative Directors, also students, and the CLIC staff also includes three student Office Managers. CLIC has four supervising attorneys that advise the students on all legal cases and issues. CLIC does not charge for any of its services, and is funded primarily through the Associated Students, but also receives support from the city of Chico, the Foundation of the State Bar of California, and the California State University, Chico Department of Political Science.


Madelynn Herman
Knowledge and Information Services
National Center for State Courts
300 Newport Avenue
Williamsburg, VA 23185
757-259-1549
757-564-2045 (fax)
mherman@ncsc.dni.us

Selfhelpsupport.org
http://www.selfhelpsupport.org

There are several references to library pro se programs under their Pro Se Assistance/Library Programs folder. You must join the site to access the resources, but membership is free.