Involving Law Students

There are several programs which provide opportunities for law students in New York City to get involved in pro bono. Law students who volunteer with the Unemployment Action Center receive training from more experienced students to represent individuals in hearings before the New York Department of Labor that challenge unemployment benefits determinations. Similarly, the Suspension Representation Project (SRP) is an advocacy network that enlists law students to supervise other law students in representing New York City public school students in suspension hearings. The Courtroom Advocates Project relies on lawyers to train and mentor law school students, summer associates, and law firm associates not yet admitted to the bar to advocate for domestic violence victims seeking orders of protection. The Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office (CLARO), which is organized through the New York State Courts’ Access to Justice Program, supervises volunteer law students in providing limited legal advice to low-income New Yorkers being sued by debt collectors.

California’s One Justice Law Student Pro Bono Project, subsidized in part by the area’s law schools, organizes a Justice Bus that transports law students from multiple schools to help clients residing in geographically underserved areas. The Project also coordinates training and supervision by experts.

Since 1982, the Minnesota Justice Foundation (MJF) has coordinated a unique collaboration of Minnesota’s four law schools. As a result, more than 150 statewide legal services providers work with a single point of entry into the law student volunteer pool. During the 2011-2012 school year, MJF created and filled two thousand law student volunteer placements.

Idaho Legal Aid Services, in partnership Chicago-Kent College of Law Center for Access to Justice and Technology (CAJT) and the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI), is developing law school Cyber Clinics. Cyber Clinics are law school courses offering credit for law student work on developing content for statewide legal aid websites. Students initially learn about legal services by volunteering at a court help-desk, then take on a project developing web content requested by a legal aid organization, such as developing a guided interview form or template for a pro se court filing. Students research and draft a memo on the relevant statutory law, the justice problem they are trying to solve, and any relevant practical issues or hurdles they uncover. Students then develop a storyboard and template that they present to their professor and to the client – the requesting legal aid organization – and develop the online content.