



**FOUNDATION**

**Issue No. 39**

**Summer 2006**

# legal hotline

**QUARTERLY**

A publication of the Technical Support  
for Legal Hotlines Project.

Supported by the AARP Foundation  
and the U.S. Administration on Aging.

## ***Administration on Aging Announces Title IV “Model Approaches” Grantees.***

On June 1st, the Administration on Aging published its Program Announcement requesting proposals for Title IV Research and Demonstration projects entitled “Model Approaches to Statewide Legal Assistance Systems”. The purpose of the awards was to develop model systems for incorporating low-cost legal assistance mechanisms, such as legal hotlines, into the statewide senior legal services development and delivery program.

### **The Awardees Are:**

- *Alabama Department of Senior Services* in partnership with Legal Services of Alabama will establish a toll-free Elder Rights Helpline;
- *Idaho Commission on Aging* in partnership with Idaho Legal Aid Services will re-establish its statewide senior legal hotline and create an web-based senior legal form library;
- *Iowa Department of Aging* in partnership with Iowa Legal Aid will fully integrate Iowa’s existing Senior Legal Helpline with all of Iowa’s Title IIIB legal services providers;
- *Maryland Department of Aging* in partnership with the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau will expand the existing Senior Legal Hotline;
- *Aging Services Division of the North Dakota Department of Human Services* in collaboration with a contracted partner and the Bar Association, will promote the North Dakota Senior Legal Hotline;
- *Virginia Department for the Aging* in collaboration with the Virginia Poverty Law Center, will pursue statewide planning and create standards to define measurable units of legal assistance.

## **Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project**

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### Inside this issue

Legal Hotline Clients Follow Up Report - Executive Summary	2
South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice Follow-up Procedure	5
Fundraising in Michigan By Keith L. Morris	7
Components of a Successful Case Statement By Ellie Crosby Lanier	10
From the Frontline By Elaine Roberts Musser*	13

The AARP Foundation is AARP’s affiliated charity. Foundation programs provide security, protection and empowerment for older persons in need. Low-income older workers receive the job training and placement they need to re-join the workforce. Free tax preparation is provided for low- and moderate-income individuals, with special attention to those 60 and older. The Foundation’s litigation staff protects the legal rights of older Americans in critical health, long-term care, consumer and employment situations. Additional programs provide information, education and

## Legal Hotline Consumer/Public Benefits Clients Follow up Report

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The AARP Foundation Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project worked with seven diverse legal hotlines to identify cases where the client was advised to take a follow up action regarding a consumer problem or public benefits issue. Hotline staff interviewed these clients after the hotline consultation to determine (1) if they followed the hotline advice; (2) whether their situation changed as a result of the follow up action and (3) whether the hotline experience had benefited them in other ways. Cases were identified during a five month period between April and September 2005, and follow up calls were made 45 days to 60 days thereafter. Mailed surveys were sent to clients who were not reached by phone. The ultimate goal of the survey was to determine if providing telephone legal advice to clients with the types of consumer and public benefits cases tracked in the study is a beneficial use of program resources, and whether additional assistance is needed by staff to assure that clients have a positive outcome in these case categories.

Whereas previous studies sampled all hotline callers, this study focused on those cases where clients were told to take a follow up action on their own because hotlines do not routinely learn of the outcomes for callers who are instructed on self-help steps to resolve a problem. In contrast, clients who call to ask a legal question are usually fully served within the context of the call and outcomes for clients referred to a free legal services program for additional assistance are usually tracked and reported to the hotline.

Participating hotlines helped identify the range of cases to be included in the study. The types of consumer cases included in the study were ones where the hotline advocate believed that a phone call or letter from the client would resolve or ameliorate the client's problem. These did not include complex consumer issues such as predatory lending or priority issues such as mortgage foreclosures or utilities

where the hotline was likely to secure free representation for the client either through its in-house full service unit or through a referral to another local program. The public benefits cases flagged for this study were ones where the case was not in a posture for the legal representation routinely provided by legal aid programs. The public benefits cases primarily were limited to identifying clients who appeared to be eligible for a public benefit they were not receiving and were advised to apply. Different surveys were used for the consumer and public benefits cases and the results were analyzed separately.

### KEY FINDINGS:

#### CONSUMER CASES:



■ **Follow up Action Taken: Seventy-two percent of callers with consumer cases surveyed took the action the hotline advised.** Of those callers who did not take action, 34 percent of them reported still planning on taking action. Only 24 percent of the minority who didn't take action said they either did not remember what to do, it was too hard to do, or they did not understand the advice. This follow up rate is quite high and most likely due to the fact that the flagged callers were advised to perform one discreet manageable task. Writing a letter to a creditor was the most frequent action taken (30 percent of those who took action). Sixteen percent wrote a letter to a business with whom they were having problems; 12 percent contacted an agency; 9 percent filed a form in court; another 9 percent went to court and 15 percent reported taking "other" action.

■ **Results Obtained: A majority of consumer case respondents (55 percent), reported a change for the better after taking the action;** Forty-five percent reported no change. However, of those who reported "no change" 41 percent were still awaiting the results of the action at the time of the survey. Had a longer period of time passed between the hot-

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line call and the survey, we expect a higher proportion of clients would report a change for the better and a smaller percentage would still be waiting for results. The most common improvement reported (39 percent) was the cessation of annoying contacts from debt collectors; fifteen percent did not have to pay a disputed bill. The average amount of the bill was \$1,924. Twenty-one percent reported working things out to their satisfaction and 18 percent reported “other” changes for the better.

■ **Other Help Received from the Hotline: Ninety-one percent of consumer case respondents reported receiving other types of help from the hotline in addition to advice to take the follow up action.** These included understanding their choices better (60 percent); understanding their rights better (65 percent); feeling calmer and less anxious (38 percent); getting their questions answered (27 percent); 5 percent felt they would know how to avoid the problem in the future. Seventy-four percent remember receiving materials in the mail after the hotline call and 90 percent of those reported the information helped with the problem.

■ **Demographic Correlations: data was analyzed with regard to clients’ gender, LSC income eligibility, age, and whether they lived alone.** Gender, LSC eligibility or whether the client lived alone did not affect the clients’ propensity to take action. However, younger clients were significantly less likely to take action when compared to older clients. While 74 percent of those between 41-60 years, and 78 percent of those 61 and older, reported taking the advised action, only 55 percent of those under 40 reported taking action. With regard to results achieved, men were more likely to report a change for the better after taking the action (66 percent) than women (50 percent), and callers who were not LSC eligible reported a change for the better at a higher rate (59 percent) than LSC eligible clients (46 percent); neither age nor living alone significantly impacted results achieved. No significant differences were found among the demographic groups for other types of help provided by the hotline.

## BENEFITS CASES:



■ **Follow up Action Taken: Seventy-eight percent of benefits cases reported taking the action suggested; making an application for a benefit (45 percent) was the most common action taken.** Seventeen percent made a phone call; 12 percent contacted an agency and 7 percent asked for a hearing; 16 percent reported taking “other” action. Of those that did not take action, 53 percent still plan on doing so; twelve percent did not understand the advice; 6 percent did not remember what to do; 6 percent thought it was too hard to do, and 24 percent (4) had some “other” reason for not taking action.

■ **Results Obtained: Sixty-five percent of benefits cases reported a change for the better with 52 percent of that group receiving an average benefit of \$1,150 per month with the range being \$79 - \$3,500.** Fourteen percent worked things out to their satisfaction; another 9 percent did not have to pay back money related to a benefit and 17 percent reported an “other” positive change. For the minority of respondents who did not experience a positive change, 40 percent are still waiting to hear from the agency and 48 percent had their application for benefits rejected. Eight percent still have to pay the benefit-related money back and 4 percent reported “other” as a negative outcome.

■ **Other Help Received from the Hotline: As with the consumer clients, almost all the public benefits clients (93 percent) said the hotline provided other types of help.** Sixty-eight percent understood their choices better; 65 percent understood their rights better; 51 percent felt calmer and less anxious and 7 percent felt they would know how to avoid the problem in the future. The public benefits callers remember receiving mailed material at a much lower rate (46 percent) than the consumer callers (73 percent). Of those who did remember receiving information on benefits, 78 percent found the information helpful.

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■ **Demographic Correlations: For benefits cases the age of the respondent affected whether they were likely to take action.** The older age group (71 and over) was significantly less likely to take the recommended public benefits action than the younger age groups. While only 43 percent of the over 71 group reporting taking action, 77 percent of the under 40 age group took action, 83 percent of the 41-60 year old took action, and 100 percent of the 61-70 year old took action. No significant differences were noted in the types of action taken. Making an application for a benefit was the most common action taken by all the age groups. Gender, LSC eligibility, and living alone did not significantly affect the client's propensity to take action nor the results achieved. No differences were found among the groups for other types of help received from the hotline.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

■ **Identifying clients who are likely eligible for a benefit they are not receiving is an extremely successful use of hotline resources resulting in an increase in monthly payments to or on behalf of the client in a substantial number of cases.** Hotline efforts to train staff to screen, identify, and counsel clients through the application process for benefits would likely lead to more clients receiving benefits at little additional cost to the hotline for providing this adjunct to the legal consultation.

■ **Providing advice regarding the performance of a discreet act to solve a legal problem also showed mostly positive results both in the number of clients who took action and the number whose situation changed for the better.** Hotlines could increase the chances for performance of the follow up action and rate of success even further by expanding the number of mailed or emailed materials they deliver to clients with detailed instructions on as many situations as possible; a library of form letters that can be quickly personalized for the client by hotline staff during or after the call should be developed and expanded to situations as they arise; protocols should be developed and resources allocated for providing

brief services to those clients who seem unlikely to be able to take the follow up action on their own. In cases where follow up is important to the client's well being, the hotline should flag the case and contact the client later to determine the status.

■ **Training staff to identify clients who may not follow up would strengthen hotline services.** The demographic analysis noted some differences in gender, age, and income related to the rate at which clients performed the follow up tasks and the success they achieved. However, the differences are not of a type that can be addressed through change in services to a whole demographic group. Rather, the differences point out the need for the hotline advocate to try to determine whether the particular client is likely to follow up, with membership in one of these groups being a factor to consider in the likelihood for success. For example, is the caller a younger individual whose time is consumed by work and/or child care and who will therefore be less likely to have time to complete the follow up action? Does the client sound too frail or timid to make a phone call on his own? Does the client's educational level seem too limited to successfully write a letter? Hotlines could be more effective by training advocates to identify those clients not likely to follow up and providing additional means of assistance for them through in-house brief services, volunteers, law and paralegal student participation, and other means.

**Read the full  
Legal Hotline  
Client Outcome Study  
2006 at  
[www.legalhotlines.org](http://www.legalhotlines.org)**

***South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice  
Legal Aid Telephone Intake Service  
QUARTERLY ADVICE FOLLOW-UP  
PROCEDURE***



Several legal hotline programs are working on projects to check up on clients who have received advice to take a step towards solving their legal problem. South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice (SCCEJ) Legal Aid Telephone Intake Service (LATIS) is the intake and advice component for the statewide LSC-funded legal services program in that state. LATIS is going to a client follow up policy at the beginning of 2007. Thomas Trent, Managing Attorney for LATIS shared the proposed policy and the follow-up post card counsel and advice clients will begin receiving next year with *LHQ*.

**SCCEJ FOLLOW UP POLICY**

It is important for SCCEJ to gauge the effectiveness of its efforts regarding those cases served only with Counsel and Advice. A letter and survey card will sent to each such client within four months of the closing letter on the date indicated by the following schedule of mailing dates:

1. April 1 (cases closed between December 1 and February 28)
2. July 1 (cases closed between March 1 and May 31)
3. October 1 (cases closed between June 1 and August 31)
4. January 5 (cases closed between September 1 and November 30)

At the time a client is sent a closing letter in a Counsel and Advice case, the advocate who drafted the letter will ensure that a quarterly advice follow-up letter is prepared, along with an appropriate survey card. *See letter and card below.* The letter and card will be placed in a central file and held until the next mailing date. On each mailing date, the Cen-

ter's Managing Attorney's designee will ensure that all such letters are mailed according to normal office procedure and copies attached to the client files.

Returned follow-up survey cards should be reviewed by the Managing Attorney. After reviewing the survey cards, the Managing Attorney should review the results with the advocates in order to get their input on the survey results. Once the survey card is reviewed by the Managing Attorney and the advocate, the survey cards will be mailed to SCCEJ Administration. The results of all advice survey cards will be analyzed at the following Managing Attorneys' meeting. Any recommendations made after the Managing Attorneys' meeting will be forwarded along with the survey cards, to the SCCEJ Priority Committee. The analysis of the survey cards will be ongoing and made part of the agenda at each at each Managing Attorneys' meeting.

Follow up postcard to be provided.



**Legal Aid Telephone Intake  
Service**

**888-346-5592  
www.sccej.org**

*(Continued on page 6)*

(continued from page 5)

### ***SCCEJ Follow Up Letter to Client***

Date \_\_\_\_\_

[Insert Client Name]  
[Insert Client Address]  
[Insert Client Address]

Re: Follow up on advice letter sent to you

Dear Mr./Ms. [Insert Name]:

Upon review of our closed cases, it is my understanding you were mailed an advice letter on [Insert date of advice letter]. I am enclosing a pre-paid survey card in order to see if the advice given to you was helpful in getting the outcome you were seeking. One of our goals at the South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice is to find ways that can better serve you. The South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice has always valued input from our clients. We realize our clients are intimately acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of their own neighborhoods.

Because of your response, we will be able to assess the needs of our client population and adapt the services that we provide to meet that need. Additionally, your return of the enclosed outcome survey card will assist us in obtaining funding for the South Carolina Centers for Equal Justice so that we can continue assisting our client population.

Again, please do not hesitate to contact our LATIS Center at 1-888-346-5592 if you have any need for our services in the future. Thank you for your time and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely yours,

[Managing Attorney's name]

### ***SCCEJ Client Return Post Card***

**To help SCCEJ do a better job serving the needs of our clients, please answer the following:**

1. Briefly, can you tell me why you contacted legal services?  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you receive any advice regarding why you contacted us? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
Did you understand the advice?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

3. In your own words, what advice did you receive? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Did you follow the advice given to you? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

5. What would you say has happened with your legal problem since you received your advice letter?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you received a money benefit from the advice received, what was the dollar value of the benefit received?  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Other comments:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Case # \_\_\_\_\_

ADV \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Fundraising in Michigan***

*By Keith L. Morris\**



Like most other hotlines, the Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors does fundraising to make certain that we have funds to do our work. Over the past few years, we have learned many lessons and viewed each attempt at fundraising as a way to determine what works and what doesn't. I thought that I would share some of the lessons learned and then relate the successes of our campaign for this year.

### **1. Ask for something specific and don't make general requests.**

Your letter asking for money will likely be more effective if for a specific purpose. Our experience has been that very few want to give money to run a legal hotline or pay lawyers' salaries. Unlike other non-profits, a legal hotline doesn't bring tears to the eyes of most donors.

In years past, we started with asking for help to give seniors peace of mind and to help them sleep better. The results from that fundraising campaign were modest at best. We tried catch phrases like "help us be there to answer the calls of seniors." But, we were still not compelling enough. This year, we decided to ask for money to pay for a new phone system—something specific. It was significantly more successful. We were able to raise over \$20,000. One draw back is that if you ask for money for a specific purpose, you have to use it for that purpose.

*\*Keith Morris is Director of Operations of Elder Law Of Michigan, Inc. (ELM).*

*In addition to the Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors, ELM operates Michigan Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCafe) and the Michigan Pension Rights Project.*

### **2. Ask people that will have an interest in donating to you.**

You have to send your solicitation to people that have an interest in donating to your cause. So who are those people? We are contacting attorneys throughout the state and asking them to give.

With cooperation from the Access to Justice Initiative of our state bar, we were able to obtain mailing lists for sections of the bar that we thought would be interested in donating to the Legal Hotline. Our arrangement with them allows us to use these mailing lists if we include language about donating through Access to Justice and have the donations go through the State Bar of Michigan. All donations are designated for us because we provide a form that is already filled out with our information as the designee. The donations are passed through to us. (You will need to check with your state or local bar about terms and conditions for using their lists.)

We started with the Elder Law and Advocacy Section members because they deal with seniors and senior issues every day. Then, we did a mailing to the Senior Lawyers Section members because they are experiencing at least some of the issues faced with growing older. We also added the members of the Probate and Estate Planning Sections because they too deal with seniors and their issues on a regular basis. In general, the Elder Law and Probate Sections were larger and more generous.

The other group of people that have an inherent interest in giving to the Legal Hotline were people that have used our services in the past. Many of our clients are low income and of course can't afford to give, so we used their reported income as a way to determine who should get a fundraising letter. Clients who reported an income of at least 300% of poverty and called within the past year received a request from us.

### **3. Help the potential donors feel more connected to your organization by listing other people that support you.**

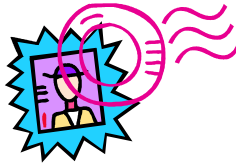
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if a staff person or board member writes a personal note on the bottom the letter requesting the prospect to make a contribution.

#### 4. Use the non-profit postage rate.

For \$300 (\$150 fee and \$150 setup for the permit), you can use the non-profit rate to mail out the fundraising letters. It is a little more complicated to prepare the envelopes for mail, but with some planning and practice it is doable and will save you a considerable amount of money. The rate is around \$0.16/letter. We pre-printed our envelopes with the permit information to save time. We are considering using the non-profit stamps for a future mailing to see if that affects the response rate, but we anticipate that most of our prospects have someone else open their mail. **Personalizing the inside of the letter is likely more important for this group of prospects than a stamp.**



#### 5. Constantly gather good stories and quotes.

We have added a portion to the bottom of our client satisfaction survey that asks for comments from our clients. We also ask for the client to share his or her name if they are willing. Then we ask for permission to share their comments. The vast majority of our clients that return the survey gladly give us permission to use their comments and information to tell others about the work that we do. These are essential in a fundraising letter or a follow-up letter!

We maintain an ongoing list of good stories that reflect how the Legal Hotline has helped make a difference in someone's life. We try to find a variety of stories and write summaries that contain only general information. These stories have a great deal of impact.

#### 6. Utilize Resources.

Writing an effective fundraising letter is hard. It takes lots of practice and consulting a good resource is essential. There are several books available on how to write these letters, how to conduct a campaign, etc. It is worth the investment to have these

handy when you are trying to put together a campaign.

For example, did you know that the post script is one of the most important parts of a fundraising letter? Studies have shown that people usually open a mailing, look at who signed it, and then read the P.S. before they decide whether to read the rest of the letter.

You also **MUST** have a software program to assist in these efforts. We have finally found one that we really like and highly recommend it. It is GiftWorks. You can obtain it for \$35 by going to [www.techsoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org).

#### 7. Remember that fundraising is a continuous process.

We have started sending out a newsletter three times a year to everyone that has donated to us in the past or who may be a potential donor in the future. We are currently working to set up an email version and gather email addresses to lower costs even further and allow us to communicate with them more often. People need to hear from you more than once a year when you are asking for money.

Another point in this regard is that the successfulness of a campaign must also include a look at how many new donors you acquired. In one of our mailings, we acquired 16 new donors that were attorneys and gave an average gift of over \$187. Studies show that once a person donates to an organization, the probability of them donating again is very high if you can keep in touch with them and let them know how the money that they gave is being spent. So, how much could we potentially receive in donations from these 16 attorneys over the next few years if we cultivate them? That would be the true measure of success for that campaign.

#### 8. Don't forget about your clients and their willingness to give.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the clients that we serve are low income. In 2005, almost 60% of our clients were at or below 200% of poverty. However, quite a few of them give \$5, \$10, \$25 donations. We send almost every client some type of corres-

(continued on page 9)

*(Continued from page 8)*

has the discretion to remove that language if he or she feels it is not appropriate in the situation.

One of the most effective ways that we found to increase this type of giving is to ask for a donation on the client satisfaction survey. We send a survey to every client and on the bottom of the survey is a small statement: "If you found the Legal Hotline to be a valuable service, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the organization. Your gift will allow us to continue to provide this much-needed service to Michigan seniors."

Another component of this is to offer alternatives to giving. We have a letter that basically gives the client the option to tell a friend about our services, call his or her legislators and tell them how the Legal Hotline is a valuable service, or allow us to use their story to publicize our work. This allows the senior that wants to help but cannot give financially other options.

We have raised almost \$3,000 this way and it required no additional effort on our part because we would be sending them correspondence anyway.

### **Our Fundraising Efforts this Year**

We were forced to step up our fundraising efforts this year because our phone system was beginning to fail. What good is a hotline without a phone system? This also gave us the specific item to ask for in our letters. We completed three fundraising mailings so far this year.

The first was a mailing to attorneys asking them to give for Law Day. Even though our state does not have pro bono requirements, each attorney is encouraged to donate their time or in the alternative at least \$300 to a non-profit legal services organization. We used this publicized event, the \$300 suggested donation, and our need for a phone system to ask for funds. Law Day is May 1, and stands out from the year end barrage of donation request.

The second mailing was to the Senior Lawyers and Probate Sections asking for help to buy a new phone system. The third was to higher-income clients with a similar request.

A follow-up to the Elder Law Section was also done for the first time and resulted in several small gifts as well as one large contribution of \$6,500.

### **The costs of all this fundraising**

We tracked every cost associated with the fundraising, including printing, the paper, the labor, etc. Between the 3 mailings, it cost us an average of \$0.64 per letter. However, for every dollar that we spent on the process, we raised an average of \$4.15. It is important to note, that this is quite high and is due in part to one of the campaigns having a donor that contributed \$6,500.

To keep the costs down, we utilized the non-profit postage rate and did the processing of the mailing in house. This requires a lot of organization because your letters have to be in zip code order and prepared just right for the post office. However, after the first two, our staff figured out a routine to do it efficiently.

It is crucial to note that none of this would be possible without the hard work of Kate White, Executive Director, Penny Gamet, Administrative Assistant, and our dedicated staff. We hope to continue this momentum and build on the successes and lessons learned.

**If you have any questions  
or would like copies of  
some of the materials,  
contact:  
[kmorris@elderslaw.org](mailto:kmorris@elderslaw.org).**



ELDER LAW OF MICHIGAN, INC.

## ***Making Your Fundraising Case: Components of a Successful Case Statement***

*By Ellie Crosby Lanier*



### **Why Hotlines Need to Make their Case**

Though hotlines are a proven delivery method for legal assistance to low income persons, hotlines, like other civil legal services, continue to struggle to secure long-term and stable funding from private, government, and non-profit sectors. Hotline clients are among the most vulnerable members of society, often unable to advocate for themselves or to express the value of hotline services to funding sources. In days of stagnant or shrinking grants, it is crucial for hotlines to effectively express the critical need for the services provided and the positive outcomes generated for needy clients and for society as a whole. A case statement is a comprehensive document that includes a broad range of elements and is highly adaptable to the needs and interests of the reader or potential fund source. A successful case statement describes the need in your community and the way your hotline is poised to address it, but it also brings your hotline to life for the reader by illustrating the positive differences you make in your clients' lives. This article provides an overview of the variety of components that might go into a case statement. It is based on campaigns of successful legal services programs and on the work of the Campaign for Equal Justice, a national effort to support increased funding for legal services programs across the country.

### **Elements of a Case Statement**

On one level, a case statement is a form of marketing or a way to "sell" your hotline to those who can provide funding or other support. Just as successful commercial advertising campaigns target different pitches to specific audiences, a successful case statement should be designed to appeal to the particular interests of a targeted fund source, whether it be the federal government, state or local governments, or grant-making foundations. While the list of elements provided below may seem somewhat daunting, not

*\*Ellie Crosby Lanier is a consultant for the AARP Foundation Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project and former managers of the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline*

every case statement will include all of these elements. A program wishing to construct a case statement should start small and build the statement based on the needs and interests of its target audience.

Despite the broad range of uses and components possible for inclusion, there are some common elements in most successful efforts. According to Patricia Pap, Executive Director of the Management Information Exchange, a national organization whose mission is to provide support to legal programs serving low income clients, comprehensive case statements do the following:

- have a title that expresses a succinct theme, sets the tone and draws the reader in;
- grab the reader early on with a client quote or story;
- express the need and the urgency of the problem;
- explain the agency's unique position to address the need;
- describe the agency's goals;
- list specific and measurable objectives that address the goals, while explaining the methodologies for meeting goals;
- address potential partner agencies for collaboration to meet goals
- contain a plan for evaluation;
- include the mission and history of the agency;
- describe the structure of the organization and discuss board and staff roles;
- include a financial statement and budget; and
- contain a fundraising plan.

### **Employ a Variety of Approaches**

You may find it helpful to develop a variety of materials with the same theme. Use a full case statement where it is appropriate, but have ready short versions in a variety of formats for other purposes. You may only have a short amount of time to make your case. One successful program calls this approach the "elevator speech,"<sup>1</sup> and recommends that all staff and board members have the ability to tell the story

*(Continued on page 11)*

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of the agency and the need met in the brief time an elevator ride might take. If an audience is intrigued by your materials, you can provide additional information to support your request later.

### **A look at the essentials:**

As mentioned above, not every case statement will include all of the above elements. Rather, these components represent a range of items that might be addressed in a comprehensive case statement. A statement that includes all of the above elements has the benefit of answering most, if not all, questions that a potential fund source might have. However, the actual content of your case statement will depend upon your intended audience and the overall purpose of your case statement. For example, if you are responding to a specific request for proposals your case statement will need to be tailored to the fund source requirements. Case statements can also be used to introduce your agency to a potential fund source in the hopes of generating interest in your organization and a request for more information or a specific proposal. Regardless of how you decide to use it, a case statement should include a few essential elements, and these are discussed in more detail below.

### **A Title that Expresses your Theme**

It may be helpful to develop a one-sentence tag line that can be used in all of your marketing and fund-seeking efforts. Per the National Legal aid and Defender's Association Campaign for Legal Access, the key underlying values of legal aid that resonate with mostly deeply with the public include fairness, equality and the responsibility to help those most in need.<sup>2</sup> A title for your campaign or case statement that expresses your values in a succinct manner can be used in a variety of ways to get your message out: as part of a full case statement, on posters, flyers and brochures, and in many other ways. Your title or theme should be clear and unambiguous, leaving no question for the audience about the purpose your hotline serves or the services provided. Successful marketing efforts "brand" the product (or service) in a consistent way. Use your tag line or title in all of your material.

An example of an effective tag line for civil legal services is one used by many U.S programs: **"Justice, it's what we're about."**

For hotlines, sample titles include the following:

- ◆ (Senior) Legal Hotlines Change Lives;
- ◆ Legal Hotlines: Helping Needy and Frail Seniors;
- ◆ (Senior) Legal Hotlines Get Results;
- ◆ (Senior) Legal Hotlines: We're here for those in Need;
- ◆ (Senior) Legal Hotlines: A World of Knowledge for those in Need; and
- ◆ (Senior) Legal Hotlines Bring a World of Knowledge to your Telephone Line.

These short, theme-based mottos give you a flavor of what an effective title tries to do, namely, to boil down your service to an essence that is easily communicated and understood. Extra points go to those titles that also express core legal services values, such as justice, fairness, or equality.

### **Tell a Story**

Your case statement should grab the reader/audience early on by illustrating the meaning of your work in a concrete way. There are a number of different ways you can achieve this, but when done correctly all result in explaining your hotline by showcasing its benefits to real people with real problems. Client quotes, a client story or a description of a typical client all serve to help the reader develop an appreciation for your work and for the urgent need it meets. Statistics about clients served or the financial efficiency of the hotline model might be impressive (and these figures definitely have a place in a case statement), but numbers do not effectively tell the story and they should not be the only thing you use to "sell" your hotline to potential fund sources. Like your title or theme, lead with the material that makes the need for your service understandable. Use the other information to illustrate the reason your hotline is in a great position to provide high-quality services that meet the need efficiently.

*(Continued on page 12)*

(Continued from page 11)

An example of a powerful client quote comes from 70 year old caller to CARPLS, an Illinois hotline:

*“The hotline was very useful because they gave me great advice and clear instructions that worked. I got my money back from (a shady business.)”*

A 78 year old caller to the Maryland hotline put it this way:

*“The greatest thing that ever happened is this service.”*

Quotes can be even more effective when paired with the client’s story. For example, a 74 year old woman was having trouble getting her eyeglass prescription filled, and she had a great deal of difficulty functioning independently without them. A call to the Connecticut hotline was all it took to get her problem resolved. The caller said:

*“I am so grateful for this service. I will recommend it to all my friends and family.”*

Another powerful way to explain your hotline is to provide information about the clients served in a way that humanizes them. In other words, rather than simply saying that a certain percentage of your clients live at or below the poverty line, instead explain what that means- your clients often have to make a difficult choice between maintaining adequate shelter and having enough to eat or being able to keep their apartment heated in the winter. Or, if your hotline serves vulnerable or disabled persons, explain that a typical client might not be able to access help any other way because they are unable to leave their home to travel to a lawyer’s office.

### **Unmet Need**

Data demonstrating the unmet need for your service can be persuasive to fund sources. Explain the needs your hotline meets at present and how additional funds will be used to address unmet need. Sources that demonstrate unmet need include formal or informal legal needs assessments, census data on your target population, information from courts on unrepresented individuals, numbers of clients turned away due to lack of funding, etc. Explaining what could happen to clients if you were not around to provide

service is another effective way to illustrate the benefits your hotline provides. Quotes from partner providers who routinely refer clients to your service can strengthen your case for funding. Partner agencies that rely on you to help their clients have an interest in seeing your hotline continue to thrive; use them to help explain the value of your service to real people with critical needs.

### **Demonstrate Positive Results**

As mentioned above, move away from solely describing your service in terms of numbers served and try to tell your hotline’s story in terms of the concrete benefits received by clients because of your efforts, and the ways the hotline has improved the lives of those in need. In other words, think outcomes not outputs, and explain how your hotline provides a valuable service that makes a huge difference in the lives of the individuals served. If you don’t do so already, begin to keep information on successful results for clients. Many case management systems enable the advocate to enter information at case closing about outcomes, including financial benefits gained by clients, money recovered or saved, and other positive results. This data is invaluable for fund sources because it shows concrete results in the community for the dollars committed to your agency. For example, if your hotline is involved in helping callers sign up for the Medicare Part D Low Income Subsidy, put an accurate dollar amount on that benefit and report that for a certain time period, your hotline was able to secure additional benefits for callers, and provide either the total dollar amount or the average dollar amount secured.



### **Conclusion**

People with money will more readily give it to you if they have a good understanding of what you do and why it matters. Competition for funds is greater now than perhaps at any other time in the history of civil legal services. Managers need to know not only how to run a high-quality hotline, but also how to attract and maintain funds. A key component of that is being able to market your program effectively to fund sources. Management Information Exchange offers courses for managers on fundraising and on how to

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

use a case statement to maximize funding opportunities. In addition, the AARP Foundation's Technical Support for Legal Hotlines Project is working with Senior Legal Hotlines to develop sample program case statement materials.

*Endnotes:*

1. *Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery*, [www.ccar-recovery.org](http://www.ccar-recovery.org)
2. *Campaign for Equal Access, "Bringing Justice Home, How to Frame and Pitch Stories on Civil Legal Aid"* at [www.NLADA.org](http://www.NLADA.org).

**For more information visit the following websites:**

**[www.legalhotlines.org](http://www.legalhotlines.org), for current data on hotlines and annual reports);**

**[www.m-i-e.org](http://www.m-i-e.org), for information on how to frame and pitch stories about legal aid);**

**[www.nlada.org](http://www.nlada.org), for information about how to frame stories related to legal aid;**

**[www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org), for information about how to frame stories related to economic justice;**

**[www.jfworcester.org](http://www.jfworcester.org), for examples of how to explain unmet need;**

**[www.ccar-recovery.org](http://www.ccar-recovery.org), for creative information on how to express urgency and for information on "the elevator speech,") and;**

**[www.main.nc.us/pls/](http://www.main.nc.us/pls/), for effective explanation of legal services outcomes secured.**

## ***From the Frontline***

*By Elaine Roberts Musser\**

**TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK, THAT IS THE QUESTION!**

As any hotline attorney knows, once the fateful decision is made to pick up the telephone, precisely what to ask the caller becomes of paramount importance. When the person on the other end of the line begins their tale of woe, the attorney must interject the appropriate inquiry to keep the client on track. Make the mistake of asking the wrong question, and it can spell trouble!

### **A Failure to Ask Enough Questions: Acquire all the facts.**

I had a client tell me she was having difficulties obtaining a refund from her internet provider. Apparently high speed connection service had been ordered for her computer. It was not until many months later there was discovery she was still receiving the slower dial-up linkage. Infuriated at paying extra for a service she never received, she complained to the company. Personnel from the corporate complaint department insisted refunds were never given retroactively. It took some doing, but after extensive intervention on my part, the internet provider agreed to confer full reimbursement. Only much later did my client blurt out that she had given a dilatory relative the equipment required to accept high speed service - but he had never bothered to install it! I never thought to ask and neither had she.

### **A Failure to Ask the Right Question: Don't assume anything.**

A fragile senior called the hotline, in severe distress. According to her poignant account, she had been ejected from her own residence by her former business partner and his spiteful wife, after welcoming the ungrateful pair into her home. Desperation found my client eventually living with some kind Samaritans. Galvanized into action, I contacted adult protective services, legal aid, law enforcement, coordinating a massive effort. Over a period of many months an odd picture began to develop.

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*(Continued from page 13)*

In essence, this “frail elder” and her “business partner” were operating a nifty scam. My client was ostensibly dropped off at some kind person’s house by her “estranged business partner”, with a promise of forthcoming rent from him, which of course never happened. A subsequent sob story would be spun by my client about a business deal gone sour and the loss of her home, so she could sponge off any good-hearted person willing to listen. Accepting food, clothing, and shelter without a qualm, never would this insincere huckster contribute one thin dime towards her upkeep, all the while collecting and squirreling away government benefits. Once a sucker caught on to her nonsense, she would move on to the next meal-ticket. Always have a degree of skepticism for those claiming severe victimization - because he or she may not be the victim, but rather the perpetrator!

#### **Asking One Too Many Questions: Cases mushrooming out of control.**

A lovely gal had separated from her husband two years prior, because of his drinking and gambling habits. Much to her surprise, the lady’s husband filed a motion for reconsideration of the separation agreement immediately after his bankruptcy concluded. The cad suddenly disliked the terms of the original settlement, claiming he had been hoodwinked by the legal system while intoxicated. A bigger piece of the community pie was what he was after - once his assets could no longer be attached by the bankruptcy court! Before I knew it, I found myself sucked into a whirlwind of trouble. Domestic violence became a concern, after I learned the estranged husband was a former demolitions expert, kept loaded guns everywhere, and thought nothing of stalking my client as an intimidation tactic. Mental health issues crept into the picture, when I learned my client’s adult son was threatening violence. Child protective services appeared on the scene when it was decided my client should take charge of her troubled grandson - to keep the little tyke away from an addicted mother involved with dangerous drug dealers. Being an old softy, I always found myself asking one too many questions, instead of sticking to the legal topic at hand.

#### **Asking the Wrong Question: Don’t ask questions too personal in nature.**

A sweet senior citizen called me one time, to tell me about a car accident she had been involved with. Writhing in pain from a bowel obstruction, my client had unwisely chosen to drive herself to the emergency room. Her vehicle broadsided another car, with the steering wheel of her vehicle forcibly pushed downward, crushing her legs. As I was drawn into her complicated circumstance, assisting her with legal matters attendant to the vehicular accident and medical situation, often the conversation would drift into more personal matters. Trying to keep her focused, invariably the forlorn woman would talk about whatever topic was of particular interest. For a lonely shut-in in need of companionship, I had become her sole confidant. She would check in every so often, to advise me of the latest gossip. Extricating myself from this tricky situation took some deft handling, but it was a necessary evil. Questions too personal in nature can invite a client to delve into things other than legal matters, wasting valuable time better spent on other casework.

#### **Don’t encourage improper questions: The requested information may be outside your area of expertise.**

I found myself saddled with a very complicated and tragic case, involving a retired school teacher. She had been improperly coaxed by her bank into transferring her entire life savings into an unsuitable investment account. Unfortunately the account’s net worth had decreased to only a quarter of its original value. As would be expected, I facilitated a suit against the broker in question. Understandably, my client decided to transfer what was left of her money into a safer investment. But where? Unfortunately, my client looked to me for the answer. Repeatedly she was informed I was not competent to give out that sort of fiscal advice. No matter how many times I echoed the same refrain, the insistent lady kept inquiring what I would do if I were in her shoes. She had learned to place absolute trust in my judgment, because I had worked wonders ferreting out the convoluted details of her intricate case. Be careful not to wander with your client into territory where it is not wise nor ethical to go.