Lawyer in the Library:
Bridging the Justice Gap

Presented by
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Meet Your Presenters

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Agenda

- The Justice Gap
- Lawyer in the Library Program Background
- Case Study: The Carbondale Public Library
- Adapting the Program for Other Libraries
- Q & A
What is the Justice Gap?

- Many of us have experienced a civil legal problem.
- Lack of resources and services available to meet the legal needs of low-income Americans.
- The cost of legal services make them unattainable for many, especially low-income Americans.
- The “right to counsel” (an appointed attorney) does not include civil legal cases including contracts, property, family, divorce, personal injury, etc.
- There is a divide between those who can afford to pay for legal services and those who cannot.
- 86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans in 2017 received inadequate or no legal help. (Justice Gap Report, 2017)
When thinking of ways to fill the justice gap… Why Libraries?

- Libraries connect their community to resources
- Welcoming and non-threatening environment
- Credible information
- Librarians are trusted intermediaries
- Free access to information and the internet
- Printed information and forms can be obtained
- Public libraries located in communities without courthouse or law libraries
2012 - Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice formed

"...promote, facilitate and enhance equal access to justice with an emphasis on access to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable."

2017 - Partnership created with Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts

“Coordinators will serve as a bridge, linking their courthouses with others throughout the state to share ideas, develop new resources, and establish programs for assisting self-represented litigants.”

2019 - First Lawyer in the Library Program in the First Circuit
Access to Justice and AOIC
Partnership Goals

● Understand and address the needs of Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs)

● Establish a statewide network to improve access to justice

● Fund Coordinators to bridge gaps between SRLs & the courts
SRL Coordinator Duties

- Network with other SRL Coordinators throughout the state
- Develop and/or Distribute new resources
- Communicate and collaborate with community stakeholders
- Establish programming to help SRLs
Assessing and Understanding Needs

**Library Surveys and Site Visits**

- Circuit Clerks sending patrons to the library
- Library staff need more printed resources
- Time constraints (patrons want forms filled for them)
- Patrons illiterate or don’t want to read forms
- Patrons lacking computer skills
- Library financial needs (printing, etc.)
- New technology needed for the library
- Patrons seeking advice when legal representation is needed
Legal Help for Patrons

“We are not attorneys”

“We don’t want to say anything to get in trouble”

Handouts

IL Supreme Court Safe Harbor Guide and Cheat Sheet

What Information can I Provide to Court Patrons?
Lawyer in the Library - First Circuit

Program Sites

- Marion Carnegie Library
- Carbondale Public Library
- Harrisburg Public Library District
- Stinson Memorial Library (Anna) - coming soon

Program Development & Implementation

- Three-month pilot period (Twice a month, Decide what works locally)
- Stipend offered to the attorney for the pilot period
- Attorney works pro bono with library to tailor to needs of the community

~ One Size Does Not Fit All ~
Lawyer in the Library: Success

- Program is tailored to fit the needs of the community
- Time slots are usually full
- Greater number of SRLs receiving help
- Types of cases are diverse (family, civil, probate, etc.)
- Attorneys coordinate and work directly with the library
- Relationships are formed outside of the courthouse
Lawyer in the Library: Outcomes

- Helps ensure open and equal access to courts
- Instill confidence in self-representation
- A better court experience for SRLs
Case Study: The Carbondale Public Library

- Population 21,857
- 61% white, 26.8% Black or African American
- Medium household income, 2016-2020: $24,093 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)
Carbondale Public Library: Objectives

- Meet a portion of the needs of the Carbondale community for legal consultations.
- Assist low-income and disenfranchised individuals in accessing legal help.
- Grow the library’s programming relating to legal services and resources.
- Create positive brand identification for the Carbondale Public Library.
Carbondale Public Library: Timeline

- November 2019: Immigration Lawyer in the Library
- January 2020: Lawyer in the Library scheduled for late summer/early fall 2020
- June 2020: program changed to virtual format
- July-September 2020: 6 sessions scheduled on Zoom
- Expungement/Sealing virtual event with Land of Lincoln Legal Aid
- July 2021: Lawyer in the Library resumes in person at the library with a new attorney, monthly sessions, 3 hours each
- April 2022: Lawyer in the Library expands to two attorneys, once per month, 3 hours each
Carbondale Public Library: Evaluation

- Observation: # of spots filled each session, talking to participants, talking to the attorneys
- Developing and implementing survey method
  - Survey will be given to participants after session
  - Data will be compiled over time
  - Program will be analyzed with more clarity
Carbondale Public Library: Outcomes

- Community is enthusiastic and participants have good things to say
- Most sessions are filled
- Added an additional attorney in April 2022
Carbondale Public Library: Going Virtual

- Went virtual during pandemic in Fall 2020
- Patrons registered on Zoom
- Some technical challenges
- Overall positive reviews
- Target population being met?
Adapting the Program for Other Libraries

- Consult with library director and board of directors
- Develop policy for Lawyer in the Library program
  - Confidentiality
  - Time limits
  - Appointments or first come first served
  - Time available for program
  - Coordinator
Finding an Attorney

- Look for volunteer attorneys in your community
  - Explain benefits of volunteering
- Apply for grants to cover costs
- Use word of mouth, social media, and the traditional media
- Ask previous attorney to recommend someone

Attorney Charles McGuire
Southern Illinois Law Center
Marketing the Program

- Target population
- Traditional media
  - Press release
  - Local papers and TV stations
- Social media
  - Share on community pages
  - Share on library’s page
  - Email newsletter
  - Facebook and Instagram (posts & stories)
- Other
  - Flyers to local organizations
Program Logistics

- Get the word out
- Set up table with sign-up sheet
  - Staff mans table
  - Keep information confidential
  - Keep track of waiting patrons
- Attorney in a private room
  - Meeting room or office
- Staff tracks who is in room and brings the next person when ready
Program Challenges

- Continuity of attorneys
- Marketing to target audience
- Logistics of event
- Evaluating program
- Unexpected events (pandemic)
Other Options for Legal Help in Libraries

- **One-time legal clinics**
  - Expungement
  - Family law
  - Immigration

- **Encourage staff to attend webinars and engage in training**
  - Free programs exist for librarians and library workers
  - Learn about free resources that can help

- **Create a guide or web page with local information that is helpful to patrons**
  - Self-help resources (family, local courts)
  - Local legal clinics
  - Veteran’s services
Contact Information

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For SRL Network Information In Your Area

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Resources

Resources Referenced in Session

- Safe Harbor Guide
- How Can I Best Help SRLs

Other Resources

- Free Legal Course:
  - WebJunction Course: Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice
- Carbondale Public Library’s Community Engagement, Networking, Outreach, and Programming Policy
- Evanston Public Library Master List of Local Free & Low-Cost Legal Resources
References

Questions?