

PRO BONO Matters



The Newsletter of the Public Law Center

November 2009

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PLC on YouTube

Why Pro Bono?

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Rising to the Challenge

PLC staff members Ken Babcock and Leigh Ferrin are featured in a video by Equal Justice Works

Thank you to the

2008-2009

Access to Justice Annual
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Welcome to the inaugural electronic version of Pro Bono Matters, the Public Law Center's periodic newsletter. We hope the information we provide in this and future editions of this newsletter inspire you to join us as we seek to provide access to justice for low-income Orange County residents.

Ken Babcock
Executive Director

Inaugural National "Celebrate Pro Bono Week" a Success in Orange County



As part of the American Bar Association's first ever "[Celebrate Pro Bono Week](#)" the Public Law Center held several events designed to spotlight pro bono. Combining training, service and celebration, PLC's participation in the inaugural pro bono week was a huge success.

On Monday, October 26, over two dozen lawyers received training on guardianship law so they could participate in PLC's weekly Guardianship Clinic held in partnership with the Orange County Superior Court and the Orange County Bar Association. Supervising Probate Judge Mary Schulte was among the panelists who gave these new volunteers the tools needed to assist self represented litigants in guardianship proceedings.

On Tuesday, October 27, we were proud to have 52 volunteers participate in PLC's "Justice for All" Legal Clinic Day. Free legal

PLC's work is life-changing for thousand of children, families, adults and seniors each year. They depend upon PLC for assistance in civil matters that threaten their safety and security in basic areas of living. PLC, in turn depends upon the financial support of the Access to Justice Annual Fund to ensure that Orange County's low-income residents receive vitally needed legal assistance. Make your contribution to the 2009-2010 Access to Justice Annual Fund Today.



clinics were held during the day and into the evening in Costa Mesa, La Habra, San Juan Capistrano and Santa Ana. Through these clinics, 115 low-income clients were able to meet with a PLC volunteer. Cases included bankruptcy, foreclosure, domestic violence, dissolution, eviction and immigration. As volunteer Stephen Sargeant told the [Orange County Register](#), "Personally, I just like to help people." Along with our many volunteers, all of PLC's staff pitched in to help - led by the indefatigable Evelyn Fuentes, one of our administrative assistant/intake screeners who attended clinics in Costa Mesa, San Juan Capistrano and Santa Ana, and was still ready for more work at 10:00 pm as the day wound down; her colleague Ada Aleman also helped at both the Costa Mesa and La Habra clinics.

On Thursday, October 29, PLC capped off the week with the [4th Annual Volunteer Appreciation Reception](#). PLC volunteers during the past year were invited to attend a night of camaraderie with fellow volunteers and food and drink (and Game 2 of the World Series) at J. T. Schmid's in the District in Tustin. The 150 volunteers in attendance were inspired to further action by the words of Rutan & Tucker associate and PLC volunteer Eddie Gerard who shared a few words about his pro bono experience with PLC. Thanks to our generous donors who underwrote this important PLC *friend* raiser.

Historic Right to Counsel Legislation Becomes Law

On October 11, 2009 Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law [Assembly Bill 590](#). Authored by Assemblymember Mike Feuer (D, Los Angeles) the legislation addresses two important issues regarding civil legal services for low-income Californians.

The legislation creates the Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act. For the first time ever, low-income parties in civil matters involving critical issues affecting basic human needs will have counsel appointed for them. Beginning in 2011, the California Judicial Council will provide funding for pilot programs designed to provide representation for low-income litigants in selected courts in cases involving housing-related matters, domestic violence and civil harassment restraining orders, probate conservatorships, guardianships of the person, elder abuse and proceedings for sole legal or physical custody of a child. The pilot projects will be designed to address the substantial inequities in timely and effective access to justice that often give rise to an undue risk of erroneous decision because of the nature and complexity of the law and the proceeding or disparities between the parties in education, sophistication, language proficiency, legal representation, access to self-help and alternative dispute resolution services.

The legislation also makes it unlawful to use the name "legal aid" or any similar name unless the organization using the name is a non-profit group providing free civil legal services to the poor without charge. Injured consumers or legitimate legal services programs can sue to enjoin use of such confusingly similar names. Organizations like PLC and the Legal Aid Society of Orange County regularly encounter clients who complain they were defrauded by groups purporting to be legitimate legal aid programs which were not.

Abused Immigrant Child Finds Justice at Public Law Center



Felipe*, an eight year-old boy, recently came to the United States from Mexico to live with his maternal aunt, Leonora*. Felipe never knew his father and his mother was tragically killed in an automobile accident in Mexico. For a time, Felipe lived in Mexico with a maternal aunt. When this aunt went to work, she left Felipe with caretakers but the caretakers abused him. In desperation, his aunt sent him to her sister, Leonora, in Orange County.

Leonora attended a Public Law Center legal clinic at the La Habra Family Resource Center seeking assistance in obtaining guardianship of Felipe. Bruce Lee of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker LLP (Paul Hastings) responded to the posting on the [PLC Case List](#). Because PLC provides regular guardianship trainings, including one at Paul Hastings in the summer of 2008, Mr. Lee felt comfortable taking on a guardianship case.

Mr. Lee assisted Leonora in obtaining guardianship over Felipe. In the process Mr. Lee discovered that Felipe qualified to petition the government for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status to obtain his legal permanent resident status ("green card"). Special Immigrant Juvenile Status is available to abused, neglected, or abandoned children who are under the jurisdiction of a California juvenile court. At the guardianship stage, Mr. Lee successfully demonstrated that Felipe was eligible for long-term foster care and that reunification with his parents was not viable. Mr. Lee then persuaded the administrative branch of Immigration Services that it was not in Felipe's best interest to be returned to Mexico.

Felipe will now be well taken care of in the legal and physical custody of his Aunt Leonora. He will also now have opportunities to live, work, and educate himself legally in the United States as a permanent resident. In five years, Felipe will be eligible to become a United States Citizen. Mr. Lee's successful navigation of the case through Probate Court, and at Immigration Services made an everlasting difference in the life of this young boy.

* Not their real names

Want to help your neighbors through the recovery?

Like many non-profit organizations, PLC has seen a drastic increase in client demand for services brought on by the recession. Clients needing help with Chapter 7 bankruptcy or with negotiating a loan modification to avoid foreclosure are coming through our doors in record numbers. Thanks to Recovery Act funding PLC will be receiving over the next three years through the City of Santa Ana, PLC will be increasing its assistance to Santa Ana tenants at risk of becoming homeless. PLC provides training in all three of these areas of great client need for all volunteers interested in helping low-income residents of our communities recover from the recession. [Sign up](#) for the bi-monthly PLC Case List to be kept advised of upcoming trainings, legal clinics, and cases that need pro bono representation.

