THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BAR FOUNDATIONS (NCBF)/
LEXISNEXIS AWARD FOR SUCCESSFUL
BAR ASSOCIATION/FOUNDATION PARTNERsHIPS

NOMINATION FORM

DEADLINE: Monday, May 6, 2013

Name of Nominee: Self Help Resource Center

Nominee’s Address: Baton Rouge Bar Foundation
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Executive Director: Ann K. Gregorie

President of Foundation: Michael S. Walsh

1. What is the name of the program? Self Help Resource Center

2. Please describe the program in one to two paragraphs. In January 2012, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project launched the Self Help Resource Center (SHRC) at the East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court to provide self-represented litigants greater access to the legal system. Since inception the SHRC has provided assistance and information to more than 1,767 self-represented litigants seeking relief in certain family law matters. Four volunteer attorneys and eight law students are required to fulfill weekly shifts at the SHRC, which is open 12 months of the year. The Self Help Resource Center (SHRC) at East Baton Rouge Family Court is a collaboration between the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation, East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Southern University Law Center, Paul M. Hebert Law Center, local law firms and the Louis A. Martinet Society. The Center does not provide direct legal services, rather it offers self-represented litigants in the East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court access to legal information, court-approved forms and community resources.

Open two days per week, the SHRC links volunteer attorneys with volunteer law students with the related goals of assisting pro se litigants and instilling the ideals of public service in soon-to-be attorneys. Volunteer attorneys supervise law students as they provide pro se litigants with court information; discuss available legal services providers in the area; assist in the completion of court-approved forms; access public records; and provide reference information on clerk of court fees and procedures. Volunteer law students and staff meet one-on-one with self-represented litigants and potential self-represented litigants. Although the Self Help Resource Center is located in East Baton
Rouge Family Court, no legal advice or legal services are dispensed and therefore attorneys from all areas of practice are welcome to volunteer. The supervising attorney serves to ensure that no legal advice or legal services are administered at the Self Help Resource Center, that volunteers and staff maintain ethical and professional conduct, and that all information dispensed is accurate. The supervising attorney also provides notary services for pro se litigants in East Baton Rouge Family Court, free of charge. The Self Help Resource Center assists litigants with pro se matters only and provides crucial information to aid Pro Se litigants in gaining access to justice.

3. What is your relationship to the organization? How are you aware of the program? The Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project administers the Self Help Resource Center. In 2012, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project dedicated over 450 hours of staff time to the successful administration of the SHRC.

4. To your knowledge, has this program received other awards or recognition? Yes, the Self Help Resource Center has been selected by the Louisiana State Bar Association to receive its Access to Justice “Friend of Pro Bono Award” on May 21, 2013. Further, representatives from the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation will sit on a panel discussing pro se clinics at the upcoming American Bar Association Equal Justice Conference.

5. How is the program funded? The Baton Rouge Bar Foundation provides staff to coordinate the volunteers and to administer the program. The East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court provides space, office equipment and consumable office supplies. Administratively, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation recruits, trains and coordinates pro bono attorneys to staff the SHRC on designated days. Specifically, the Pro Bono Project:
   a. Provides general oversight of the SHRC by coordinating resources, communicating with law student and pro bono volunteers, and serving as the primary point of contact for the court and project partners.
   b. Trains volunteers on the legal issues presented, forms available and community resources.
   c. Trains volunteers to collect data about SHRC visitors and services, and disseminate that data to project partners for analysis.
   d. Coordinates the resources of the bar and leverage justice community expertise to aid in the development of the SHRC.
   e. Coordinates externship opportunities to students at LSU Paul M. Hebert Law School and Southern University Law Center.

6. Below, please explain how the program meets the award criteria and why the foundation should be selected for this award. The primary purpose of the Self Help Resource Center is to provide access to justice to the underserved. Poverty coupled with an overburdened local legal services and pro bono programs point to the need to provide self-represented litigants with civil legal problems access to a complex judicial system. In its 2011 report, the Brookings Institution ranked the Baton Rouge metropolitan area eleventh in “concentrated poverty” among the nation’s 100 largest metro areas from 2005 to 2009. In the metro area, 19.5 percent of the population lives below the federal poverty level as contrasted to the national average of 13.5 percent. The Self Help Resource
Center helps bridge the gap in legal services and leverage resources for this underrepresented segment of our population. The SHRC is strongly supported by the local judges, district attorney, public defender and support enforcement all of whom are making formal referrals to the program.

Knowledgeable, trained volunteer attorneys explain basic legal information and terms to the litigants. SHRC volunteers do not give legal advice, rather, they assist pro se litigants in preparing documents for specific family court matters. Law students assist in the completion of the forms, provide instructions for filing with the clerk’s office, provide online assistance and make referrals to legal services or other community resources. All litigants are provided information on outside services including free advice clinics, free notary services, nonprofit legal services organizations and pro bono programs. Currently, the SHRC provides the only free legal assistance to child support payors in need of support modifications in East Baton Rouge Parish.

In 2013, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project will assist through the SHRC a minimum of 1,200 low-to-lower-middle income individuals, some of whom face disabilities that further challenge their access to justice. Statistics collected from January 1, 2012, to April 30, 2013, indicate:

- More than 1767 self-represented litigants have been assisted by the Self Help Resource Center since its inception in January, 2012.
- The SHRC was open 87 days (348 hours of service) and assisted 1196 self-represented litigants in 2012.
- The SHRC has been open 31.5 days (108 hours of service) and has assisted 571 litigants from January – April 2013.
- A breakdown of the litigants by gender shows that 45% are female and 55% are male.
- Divorce is the most requested form with 63% of the litigants requesting this resource.
- Self-reported family income shows that 68% of the litigants make less than $40,000.

Located on the 4th floor of the district courthouse, the SHRC is in an accessible location that provides accommodations to visually and hearing impaired litigants. Further, the desk is equipped to provide some services to non-English speakers in their native language. The SHRC was staffed by Spanish speaking attorneys on 16 different dates in 2012 and provides referrals to other Spanish speaking social services and charitable organizations in our area. Non-US citizens are generally not eligible for assistance in family matters through legal aid providers in East Baton Rouge Parish; however, the SHRC can assist these individuals in certain matters, bridging a services gap and helping to aid this underserved population. The SHRC also provides referrals for victims of domestic violence including litigants who are non-US citizens.

The Pro Bono Project coordinates and recruits volunteer attorneys and volunteer law students while collaborating with other stakeholders including the East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court, Southern University Law Center, Louisiana State University Paul
M. Hebert Law Center, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and local law firms. Procedures, guidelines, and practices governing the operation of the SHRC are overseen by these partners. Each partner serves an integral role in the success of the program and is committed to the further development of innovative pro bono programs that will insure access to justice for the under-served in our community. The SHRC has proven to be a popular outreach opportunity for BRBA members and law students, with many volunteering for multiple days. The SHRC is open twice a week (Tuesday and Thursday), closing only for major holidays. Volunteers sign up to take two to four hour shifts. Since inception, 45 attorneys have been trained to serve as the supervising attorney.

The SHRC is easy to replicate as it draws upon the intrinsic knowledge of a bar association’s members. As attorneys are only asked to assist with a two or four hour shift, it provides an opportunity to volunteer on a micro level. However, many of our volunteers elect to accept multiple shifts over the course of a year. Further, in its capacity as volunteer coordinator for the Self Help Resource Center at East Baton Rouge Family Court, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation staff routinely provides information, guidance and support to similar programs emerging in other jurisdictions in Louisiana. This support has included the distribution of form packets, visitor data, training materials, and by providing first hand accounts. The Self Help Resource Center provides crucial assistance to the community through and is committed to promoting the provision of legal services to the poor East Baton Rouge Parish and in Louisiana.

The Self Help Resource Center at East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court has quickly gained community acknowledgment as a hub for information and non-legal assistance and has received direct referrals from numerous agencies including the Office of Support Enforcement Services.

NOMINATED BY:

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Your Signature: Ann K. Gregorie Date: May 6, 2013