



January 2014 Tip of the Month: Making the Case For Legal Services

Submitted by Martha Delaney, Deputy Director

What difference do your pro bono legal services make?

Thanks to you who completed our online case closing form in 2013, we know that **in full representation cases alone, we protected or recovered a combined total of more than \$3 million of our clients' scarce resources** - through bankruptcy discharges, establishment of child support, garnishment prevention, judgment prevention, etc. - and that's a conservative estimate.ⁱ Given that **keeping cash in the homes of struggling families is an effective anti-poverty tool**,ⁱⁱ we are having a profound impact on the families in our community.

Furthermore, regardless of any monies protected or recovered, **in 84% of applicable cases, you thought it likely that the client's life was tangibly improved as a result of your legal work, including improved housing, improved ability to find or keep a job, better quality of life, etc.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Beginning January 2014, most Minnesota legal services programs are required to gather this type of essential data as we collectively work to educate our funders and community about the benefits of legal. Since VLN is the largest volunteer-based legal service provider in the state, we face some unique challenges as we work to gather this valuable data. This is why your help is so important to us.

Below are a few pointers about the online form, which takes about 10 minutes to complete (please add that to the estimate of your pro bono time). And, if you have any suggestions or questions about the form, please contact me at 612-752-6676 or martha@volunteerlawyersnetwork.org.

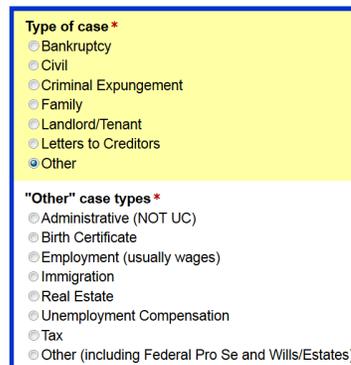
As always, thank you for the work that you do to promote equal justice for all!

Tips for completing the form (www.formstack.com/forms/vln-closing)

1. Please complete the form in order of questions asked, not skipping questions to come back to later. The fields that appear to you (out of the hundreds on the form!) are determined by your answers to preceding fields. For example:

If you select "other" under "Type of Case," a new field with more case type options appears. 

The type of case you select will bring up a field with results specific to that case. For example, see reverse for the fields specific to bankruptcy and letters to creditors.



Type of case *

- Bankruptcy
- Civil
- Criminal Expungement
- Family
- Landlord/Tenant
- Letters to Creditors
- Other

"Other" case types *

- Administrative (NOT UC)
- Birth Certificate
- Employment (usually wages)
- Immigration
- Real Estate
- Unemployment Compensation
- Tax
- Other (including Federal Pro Se and Wills/Estates)

BANKRUPTCY: What best describes the service you provided?*

- Obtained discharge
- Brief services (letters, phone calls)
- Legal advice
- Referred after legal assessment
- Insufficient merit to proceed
- Attorney or client withdrew before end of service
- Other:

Letters to Creditors: What best describes the service you provided (select one)?*

- Sent letters to client's creditors
- Brief service (one round of letters and one month follow up work only)
- Legal advice
- Attorney or client withdrew prior to any service
- Other:

2. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. We really have worked to minimize the number of questions. Some questions are required by funders (such as whether a veteran resides in the household). Others help us meet best practices in program administration (such as asking for the client's up-to-date contact information).

3. When answering the outcome questions (see right), there may be questions you aren't sure how to answer. In those cases, please use the "more likely than not" standard so we are consistent with other programs across the state.

4. There is extra space on the form so that you may provide additional information.

As a result of my legal services, it is likely that my client . . .

... is more able to pay for daily necessities*

- Yes No N/A

... is less likely to be harassed by creditors*

- Yes No N/A

... is now in a better position to keep or find a job*

- Yes No N/A

... is now in a better position to keep or find housing*

- Yes No N/A

... has improved housing conditions*

- Yes No N/A

... is physically safer (including OPF or safety plan)*

- Yes No N/A

... is more able to keep his/her children safe*

- Yes No N/A

... has improved quality of life*

- Yes No N/A

Did your legal services protect money/benefits for the client?*

- Yes No

Especially applicable in bankruptcy and garnishment cases, as well as others

Did your services recover money/benefits for the client?*

- Yes No

Especially true for family law and housing cases, as well as others

ⁱ A significant number of attorneys indicated on the case closing form that they had protected or recovered money for their clients but did not provide the specific dollar amount.

ⁱⁱ See, e.g., <https://decorrespondent.nl/541/why-we-should-give-free-money-to-everyone/20798745-cb9fbb39>

ⁱⁱⁱ This is also most likely a somewhat conservative estimate as, when we compare attorney answers and client answers, clients tend to report more concrete benefits.