



# BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Bulletin

Nancy E. Gist, Director

## Opening the Courts to the Community: Volunteers in Wisconsin's Courts

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In a time when businesses and governments are downsizing and resources are scarce, it should not be surprising that the courts and the rest of the criminal justice system are seeking ways to maintain and improve their effectiveness and efficiency. Many changes to the system include partnerships with community groups, which have resulted in a basic exchange between courts and the community. Community organizations provide valuable services and information to the courts, while the courts help educate the public and give citizens a voice in the court system. These partnerships help make the judicial system more accessible and understandable. In Wisconsin, the success of the partnership between the court system and the community is evident in the number of court-related volunteer programs operating throughout the state. Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson explains:

Volunteer programs open wide the doors of the courts to the community. Through volunteer programs, communities and courts can come together in partnership to improve how courts respond to the needs and interests of the people they serve. When members of the community work side-by-side with judges and court staff, we increase the range and scope of programs the courts are able to offer and we give the community a tangible stake in its court system. Volunteers enable the courts to provide services not currently available.<sup>1</sup>

By supplementing available services, volunteers increase the resources available to the courts. In monetary terms, which may be the most rudimentary way of examining these new resources, volunteers save Wisconsin courts millions of dollars by providing free services. Wisconsin has approximately 5,050 volunteers. If each volunteer were to work an average of 10 hours each month and were paid the federal minimum wage, the total would amount to slightly more than \$3.12 million per year in increased expenses.

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***Partnering with communities stretches resources and improves the public's opinion of the justice system.***

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Increasing volunteer involvement in court processes is likely to positively affect the public's attitudes toward the courts. Too often, especially for victims, court processes appear complicated, lengthy, and unjust. Volunteering allows individuals to become personally involved in and familiar with the judicial process. A 1998 *Judicature* article on public attitudes toward the courts in Wisconsin points out that people who were recently in court have more positive attitudes than other people, including those who have had no experience with the courts.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, volunteering improves people's ability to evaluate the courts. Volunteering allows individuals to become involved in the judicial

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process. It gives them a much closer view of the courts, one which increases their understanding and appreciation of how courts operate—sentiments that they can convey to other people. Volunteer programs and the partnerships from which they arise also allow judges and court staff to better understand public concerns as the public gains a voice in court procedures and policies.

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## **Public Outreach of the Wisconsin Court System**

Over the years, the Wisconsin Supreme Court has initiated a number of efforts aimed at enhancing the public's understanding of and confidence in the courts. Justice on Wheels, in operation since 1993, takes the Wisconsin Supreme Court to different cities to give people an opportunity to attend a session of the Supreme Court.<sup>3</sup> Sessions have been held in Eau Claire, Green Bay, Janesville, Kenosha, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Superior, and Wausau. The Courts with Class initiative brings high school students to the Supreme Court to hear oral arguments and meet with the justices over lunch. The Court also maintains a Judicial Speaker's Bureau, through which judges and court staff share their experiences with the public. In addition, the state operates a Judicial Ride-Along Program for state legislators, who spend half a day on the bench with a circuit court judge.

In 1995, the Wisconsin Supreme Court embarked on the Wisconsin Families, Children and Justice Initiative, an effort to help families in crisis.<sup>4</sup> It began with an assessment of the court's handling of cases involving abused and neglected children, who are known as Children in Need of Protection and/or Services (CHIPS). This initiative offers educational opportunities for those working with families in the courts and identifies projects for federal funding.

Finally, the Wisconsin Supreme Court has actively assisted the media by maintaining an extensive resource list of publications. The court also produces and distributes a newsletter, *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice*, highlighting court-related volunteer programs, and devotes a section of the Wisconsin judiciary's quarterly publication, *The Third Branch*, to new and successful volunteer

programs. A section of the Wisconsin court system's Web site ([www.courts.state.wi.us](http://www.courts.state.wi.us)) features a brief history of the Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice initiative (discussed in the following section), describes new volunteer programs, and posts the most recent catalog of volunteer programs around the state.

## **Taking the Lead: The Role of the Wisconsin Supreme Court**

During February 1996, Chief Justice Abrahamson, with the support of then-Chief Justice Roland B. Day, organized a workshop on volunteers in the court system. Dianne Robinson, Manager of Volunteer Programs for the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts, facilitated the workshop. Judges, court clerks and administrators, registers in probate, victim/witness coordinators, state bar leaders, business leaders, educators, and representatives of leading volunteer groups attended the workshop. The workshop focused on how the courts and the community could



**Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley A. Abrahamson**

form a partnership to better address the needs of the justice system and the people it served. The workshop also identified a need to inventory existing court-related volunteer programs throughout Wisconsin.

A second workshop was held in April 1996, again under the auspices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. This workshop was conducted by Noreen Kuroski of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and focused on AARP's National Guardianship Monitoring Program. Kuroski described the program and conveyed AARP's interest in creating several pilot programs in Wisconsin.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1996, efforts were made to identify existing volunteer programs. The Volunteers in the Courts Coordinating Committee was formed and questionnaires were distributed to identify these programs. More than 350 individuals and organizations responded.<sup>6</sup> The results of this survey led to the

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publication of *Volunteers in Courts: A Catalog of Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin*, which is in its second edition (June 1998).

The results of the survey also prompted the organization of a third conference in April 1997. Almost 200 people—court representatives, volunteers, program directors, and social workers and other human service professionals—attended the 1-day conference in Madison. Forty volunteer coordinators throughout the state presented workshops.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Volunteers in the Courts: A Catalog of Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin***

The first edition of *Volunteers in the Courts: A Catalog of Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin* was published in April 1997 and distributed to agencies and interested people throughout the state. A joint project of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the State Bar of Wisconsin, the catalog provided program coordinators with resources for and information about networking and starting up new programs. Each catalog entry described the program, including the number of volunteers, identified its funding sources, and listed the coordinator's name and contact information. The first edition contained information on more than 100 programs staffed with some 4,500 volunteers, as well as information about how to start programs and tap volunteer sources.<sup>8</sup>

The second edition of the *Volunteers in the Courts* catalog, published in June 1998, added information on approximately 50 new programs. Some of these new programs were pilot projects, others replicated existing programs, and a few had not been discovered in time for inclusion in the first edition. This edition of the catalog is available on the Wisconsin court system's Web site ([www.courts.state.wi.us](http://www.courts.state.wi.us)).<sup>9</sup>

### **Twelve Types of Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin**

In Wisconsin, there are 291 courts: 217 municipal courts, 69 circuit court branches, 4 appellate court districts, and the state supreme court. At least 65 of these courts are assisted by volunteers. This assistance is found mostly in the circuit or trial courts.<sup>10</sup>

Approximately 164 programs in Wisconsin are staffed with 5,050 volunteers. The program categories used in the following discussions of Wisconsin volunteers are those used in *Volunteers in the Courts: A Catalog of*

*Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin*. When one program served two or more counties or two or more functions, it was counted only once. When one volunteer appeared in more than one program (and when this was known), he or she was counted only once.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1 on page 4 shows that program categories are not mutually exclusive. One program may offer volunteer services related to two or three other categories. For example, volunteer jail and detention center programs, although focusing primarily on the needs of jails and detention facilities, may offer overlapping probation and parole services or even juveniles services. Similarly, volunteers assisting domestic violence and sexual assault programs might also be categorized as providing juvenile services or assisting victims or providing people with court information and helping them navigate their way around the courthouse. Volunteers in probation and parole programs may do as much mentoring as volunteers in mentoring programs.

The table reveals that volunteers are found in a wide variety of judicial settings performing an equally wide array of services and duties. By far, the largest number of volunteer programs focuses on juveniles, followed by guardian services, domestic violence/sexual assault, dispute resolution, and legal services. Legal and juvenile programs involve the largest number of volunteers, followed by guardian services, alternative dispute resolution programs, probation/parole and community service, and domestic violence/sexual assault programs.

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Although the prevalence of these programs is no reflection of statewide judicial policy decisions, it suggests the importance assigned to family and children issues by local communities within the state. The distribution of these programs also suggests that some programs, although numerous, involve only a small number of volunteers per program. For example, domestic violence and sexual assault programs constitute approximately 12 percent of all volunteer programs throughout the state, but employ only 3 percent of all Wisconsin volunteers.

## Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs

According to Wisconsin statute section 802.12, which took effect July 1, 1994, judges may require disputants to seek settlement by means other than a court trial. Some alternatives can save litigants time and money, while reducing court caseloads. Mediation centers provide disputants with a place where they can resolve their disputes.

Although there are differences in how alternative dispute resolutions (ADRs) operate, two models—one mandatory and the other voluntary—are commonly found. In Fond du Lac, for example, mediation is a mandatory first step for small claims cases, through the Fond du Lac Conflict Resolution Center. Every Thursday, when parties to small claims actions appear in court, the judge tells them that they must first try mediation to resolve their cases. They are matched with a trained volunteer to begin the process the same day.

At the Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., however, mediation is not a mandatory first step, although the court may refer individuals to the program. Individuals can choose to participate after they attend an orientation session. (For more detail about the Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., see page 5.)

Several court-related volunteer programs provide ADR services for free or at a minimal charge. Typically, these programs assist in the resolution of disputes involving small and large claims, consumer and merchant disputes, juvenile and adult restitution issues, victim and offender meetings, neighborhood conflicts, landlord and tenant issues, and family issues, excluding divorce. Volunteers participating in dispute resolution programs include attorneys, university professors and administrators, teachers, business owners, homemakers, and others, many of them retirees.

**Table 1. Program Types and Volunteers in Wisconsin**

| Type of Program                      | Number of Programs | Percentage of Total* | Number of Volunteers | Percentage of Total* |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Alternative Dispute Resolution       | 18                 | 11.0                 | 541                  | 10.7                 |
| Court Information and Assistance†    | 5                  | 3.0                  | 76                   | 1.5                  |
| Court Ombudsman                      | 12                 | 7.3                  | 81                   | 1.6                  |
| Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault | 20                 | 12.1                 | 166                  | 3.3                  |
| Family Services                      | 6                  | 3.7                  | 43                   | 0.8                  |
| Guardian Services                    | 24                 | 14.6                 | 1,104                | 21.9                 |
| Jail and Detention Center            | 3                  | 1.8                  | 34                   | 0.7                  |
| Juvenile Services                    | 38                 | 23.2                 | 1,236                | 24.5                 |
| Legal Services                       | 14                 | 8.5                  | 1,292                | 25.6                 |
| Mentoring Programs                   | 5                  | 3.0                  | 107                  | 2.1                  |
| Probation/Parole/Community Service   | 8                  | 4.9                  | 256                  | 5.1                  |
| Victim Services                      | 11                 | 6.7                  | 114                  | 2.3                  |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>164</b>         | <b>100</b>           | <b>5,050</b>         | <b>100</b>           |

\* Discrepancies in totals are due to rounding.

† Includes judicial interns and people who provide information about the court system.

Source: Karen Leone de Nie, Program Assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, prepared this table. It reflects the number of reported programs and volunteers as of January 1999. Programs were categorized by their primary function.

## Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc.

The Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., is a private, nonprofit corporation dedicated to resolving disputes. Its mission is to help citizens resolve conflicts without going to court. The center, directed by Kristy Bradish, has been training volunteer mediators since 1990.

Volunteer mediators are required to complete 40 hours of training and attend an annual half-day training review. Currently, approximately 50 volunteer mediators work at the center, 7 of whom graduated from the first training class 9 years ago.

Mediation involves a wide variety of disputes: small claims (e.g., damage, accidents, vandalism, or small debts); disputes between neighbors; noise complaints; unrestrained pet issues; parking problems; issues between family members, friends, and roommates; juvenile conflicts; issues involving merchants and the law; consumer-merchant problems; landlord-tenant issues; and workplace issues, to name a few. Most cases come to the Conflict Resolution Center from the community or the courts. Cases are referred to the center from the Juvenile Restitution Program, social service agencies, schools, businesses, the courts, government agencies, and individuals from the community. By resolving disputes prior to a court trial, Winnebago County courts have reduced their small claims hearing calendars for some types of cases, such as small claims mediations, by as much as 61 percent.<sup>a</sup>

Cases from the community are generally self-referrals. These people enter mediation without a court order. Their incentive is to avoid a court appearance, a court fee, and the risk of losing. Others do not want to be limited to winning only what state law permits. Mediation allows parties the freedom to discuss any issue and reach any agreement.

For those persons referred to the Conflict Resolution Center, the problem-solving process

is fairly swift. Two weeks after being notified by the court, the center conducts a mediation orientation session. Failure to appear at the mediation orientation session results in an automatic court judgment against the party failing to appear. At this session a brief explanation is given of the process and the benefits of participating in the program. Individuals who decide to continue are assigned a volunteer mediator and an effort is made to reach a settlement within 2 hours. Refusal to mediate or failure to reach a settlement returns the matter to the court for consideration. Should the matter be returned to the court, no reference to matters discussed in the mediation may be made, and the mediators may not be called as witnesses at a trial or otherwise.

In 1998, 327 cases were mediated at the Winnebago County Conflict Resolution Center, and 90 percent were settled. Twenty-four of the settled cases came from the community, 25 cases were large claim civil cases, 9 were victim offender cases (4 of which were juvenile cases), and 245 were small claims cases.<sup>b</sup>

In addition to mediating disputes, the Conflict Resolution Center provides workshops and training. It has established more than 30 school-based peer mediation programs that teach school staff and students the fundamentals of conflict management. It fosters the development of youth leadership by improving communication skills and permitting students to become volunteer peer mediators in their schools. The center also offers a 40-hour mediation course to a variety of community organizations and individuals. Many of the center's volunteers received their initial exposure to conflict management through one of these courses.

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a. Correspondence with Kristy Bradish, Director, Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., February 10, 1999.

b. Ibid.

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## meet the **VOLUNTEERS:** **Jeanne Shiras**

**Jeanne Shiras is 70 years old and has volunteered for civil rights causes throughout her life**, helping with public school finances, civil rights legislation, and the League of Women Voters in Indiana. She raised four children and began her service as a volunteer mediator. She volunteers for the Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center, Inc., and a nature center, giving tours to fourth and fifth graders, to keep busy. Having always been interested in “peacekeeping,” Jeanne decided mediation was a good fit for her. She hopes that by learning conflict resolution skills and helping people she will also improve herself. She enjoys staying active in two organizations, Native Gardeners and the Learning in Retirement Program, and spending time with other mediators.

The aspect Jeanne enjoys most about volunteering is the success she has experienced in mediating conflicts. Mediation requires intelligence, skill, compassion, and good judgment. She feels, as does the director of the Conflict Resolution Center, Kristy Bradish, that she is successful because she possesses these qualities.

A number of ADR programs offer offender conferences or victim impact panels; the latter is discussed more extensively in this document under victim services. At offender conferences, volunteers bring victims and offenders face-to-face to talk about the crime committed. The offenses are mostly nonviolent in nature, and the offenders are often juveniles. The goals of these conferences are to help offenders realize the impact of their actions, allow victims to work through their anger or fear, and give victims and the community a voice in restitution issues. Volunteers make initial and separate contacts with victims and offenders to explain the program and provide ongoing screening for appropriate candidates. Volunteers then arrange and mediate meetings between victims and offenders as often as necessary.

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***Victim-offender conferencing is designed to help offenders realize the impact of their actions, allow victims to work through their anger or fear, and give victims and the community a voice in restitution issues.***

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The Victim Offender Mediation Program of Fond du Lac County arranges and facilitates meetings between juvenile offenders and their victims to discuss the offenses and their consequences. In Trempealeau County, trained volunteers of the Juvenile Victim/Offender Mediation Program meet with juvenile offenders and their victims to mediate discussions. Volunteers of the Kenosha County Victim Offender Restoration Program (VORP) make initial and separate contacts with victims and offenders, mostly juveniles, to explain the program, provide ongoing screening for appropriate program candidates, and forward all information to the VORP coordinator. Volunteers schedule and attend meetings between victims and offenders as necessary and prepare a final report for the VORP office. In Jefferson County, volunteers fill in for victims who are not willing to participate in mediation. These volunteers serve as voices for the community during sessions with offenders. Victims and offenders often “connect” or arrive at an understanding during these meetings. Victims sometimes offer forgiveness. A goal of these meetings is to help relieve the pain felt by both victims and offenders, so that they can move on with their lives.

### **Court Information and Assistance Programs**

This category includes volunteers in Wisconsin who provide information about criminal justice issues and court proceedings to court users. Also included are volunteers involved in programs that help judges with legal research, drafting memos, committee work, and special projects. At the Dane County Information Desk, volunteers direct individuals to the correct court or government office. Volunteers at the Municipal Court Bailiff’s Program in Kenosha County serve as bailiffs during municipal court proceedings. In Walworth County, under the auspices of the Volunteer Judicial Student Interns program, student volunteers from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and Gateway Technical College assist judges with legal research and special projects.

Providing court information and assistance frequently intersects with other volunteer service areas, including domestic violence and victim services. For example, the statewide Domestic Abuse Program serves all 11 Native-American tribes of Wisconsin. Program volunteers staff crisis phone lines and provide court information. Volunteers at the victim/witness programs of Brown and Dane Counties provide information about court proceedings and offer advocacy and support to victims and witnesses.

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## Court Ombudsman Programs

Many of Wisconsin's ombudsman programs may be equated with court watch programs, but some go beyond monitoring court proceedings by advocating for crime victims, as well as supporting and educating them. Volunteers in the Grant County Court Watch Program attend intake hearings and record the victim's name, the charges filed, and the time and location of the next hearing. This information is then reported to the Legal Advocacy Program, which tracks cases. Similar court watch programs are operating in Iowa, Jackson, and Lafayette Counties.

Because different types of cases are monitored, ombudsman programs intersect with other service areas, particularly domestic violence, sexual abuse, and victim services. Similar programs are found in Brown, Chippewa, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Iowa, Rock, and Sawyer Counties.

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A number of ombudsman programs monitor domestic violence and sexual assault cases and assist victims. In Bayfield County, trained volunteers at the Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse attend court proceedings with victims and monitor court proceedings in sexual assault and domestic abuse cases. Similarly, volunteers at the Domestic Abuse Court Watch Program of Sheboygan County observe court attitudes toward domestic abuse victims and related issues. The Women's Community Court Watch Program in Marathon County sends volunteers to sexual assault and abuse hearings to gather information. Variations of these court ombudsman programs are operating in at least 11 Wisconsin counties.

Some programs also provide support and advocacy for victims and offenders. For example, volunteers at the Milwaukee Citizens Advisory Council advocate positive changes and enhancements in the criminal justice system, such as educational programming in jails, alternatives to incarceration, and court watch programs. Volunteers also serve as jail chaplains and offer educational programs for female offenders.

## Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Programs

Volunteers working within the area of domestic violence and sexual assault often provide services akin to court watch (ombudsman), court information and assistance, and victim services programs. However, their primary activities include helping individuals obtain injunctions, monitoring court proceedings, attending court hearings with victims, providing shelter, offering volunteer training, and providing support in the form of counseling, domestic violence information, and referrals. In Outagamie County, the volunteers of the Sexual Assault Crisis Center provide advocacy services to sexual assault victims, attend court proceedings with victims, and prepare victims for court proceedings and testimony. Similar support and advocacy programs for sexual assault cases exist in Brown, Door, and Oconto Counties.

Volunteers at the Task Force on Family Violence in Milwaukee County assist domestic violence victims in obtaining temporary restraining orders and injunctions and offer daily domestic violence information sessions at the courthouse. In Iowa County, volunteers at the Crime Victim/Witness Program assist individuals during their efforts to obtain harassment and domestic abuse restraining orders and injunctions. In addition, they may attend court proceedings with, or on behalf of, victims.

In Jefferson County, attorney volunteers in the People Against Domestic Abuse Program answer legal questions from individuals seeking domestic abuse information and assistance. Volunteers from the Friends of Abused Families, Inc., in Washington County attend most of the domestic violence court conferences as victim advocates. Additionally, they ask the victims' intentions and explain legal options and proceedings, subsequently assisting in drafting and filing restraining orders. Staff or legal volunteers also represent victims at injunction hearings, if requested by the petitioner. Haven, Inc., in Lincoln County, provides transportation for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence 24 hours a day, as well as child care during court proceedings. Similarly, Advocates, Inc., in Ozaukee County, provides transportation for victims of domestic violence.

## Family Services Programs

Family services programs tend to be educational and preventive or supervisory and custodial in nature. Among the educational programs in Wisconsin, volunteers assisting the Real Life: Marriage and Divorce Programs of Jefferson and Milwaukee Counties

educate high school students on marital issues. Such efforts are aimed at preventing future divorces by providing students with a better understanding of relationships and problems related to marriage and divorce. In Waukesha County, volunteers at the Healthy Families: Bridges Program meet with overburdened families soon after a child's birth to reduce instances of child abuse and neglect. They discuss the parents' strengths, weaknesses, and goals and help the parents link to community resources. Volunteers follow up with telephone calls at 6 months and 1 year after meeting with the family.

## meet the **VOLUNTEERS:** Melanie Guenther

**Melanie Guenther is a 21-year-old senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in psychology** with special interests in child development and school psychology. She likes kids, and volunteers for the Dane County Visitation Center to increase her hands-on experience working with children. She sees this experience as an opportunity to learn more about the courts, develop her interpersonal skills in dealing with parents and children, and increase her chances of gaining acceptance to graduate school. She would like to attend either Penn State University or the University of Texas-Austin.

## meet the **VOLUNTEERS:** Christine Kohler

**Christine Kohler is a freelance graphics designer for public schools.** She volunteers for the Dane County Visitation Center three Saturdays every month. While monitoring visits, she also interacts with parents and children. She helps set up before and clean up after the activities of each visit. She facilitates conversations and activities, talks with and reads to the children, and accompanies parents and children when they go to the outside playground. At the end of each visit, she writes up a report and submits it to the director of the center. Christine has no contact with the parents or children outside the visitation center.

Other programs work to provide a secure environment in which children can spend time with a parent or other adult who has been granted supervised visitation rights by the court, some of whom have been ordered to take parenting classes. Volunteers of the Triniteam Family Focus Supervised Visitation Program in Eau Claire County supervise weekly visits in the program office between child victims of abuse and neglect and a parent, adult family member, or guardian. Volunteers observe and document the visit, intervening only when necessary.

## Dane County Visitation Center

The Dane County Visitation Center, located in Madison, is administered by the Children's Service Society of Wisconsin and directed by Leslie Bryant Frisinger. The center, which began operating in June 1998, provides a place for the noncustodial parents of separated and/or divorced parents to visit their children while monitored by a trained volunteer. The center also provides a safe and neutral site for exchanges. Parents pick up and drop off their children at staggered times to avoid contact with each other.

The visitation center uses an existing daycare center on Friday evenings and weekends. It serves up to 24 families, who arrange, on the average, two to three visits per month. Parents are referred to the visitation center by Dane County's Family Court, Juvenile Court, Family Court Counseling Service, Department of Human Services, and Domestic Abuse

Intervention Services. Families are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Each case referred to the center is preferably accompanied by a copy of the court order specifying supervised visitation explaining why there is a need for supervision.

The visitation center uses trained volunteers who are recruited through newspaper ads and fliers distributed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, there are seven volunteers (five women and two men), each of whom supervises, monitors, and documents one family per session. The documentation consists of an account of what transpired during each visit, including any incident that would be in violation of the rules governing visits. If such incidents are of sufficient severity, visitation rights may be withdrawn from the offending parent. These reports, along with other materials, are forwarded to the referring authority monthly, who forwards them to other interested parties.

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Volunteers in another Eau Claire County program, the Triniteam Parent Education Series, provide child care and structured play for young children while their parents attend court-ordered parenting classes. They facilitate discussions with older children about issues such as behavior management and discipline. Similarly, trained volunteers of Father Carr's Supervised Visitation Program in Winnebago County supervise visitations in a monitored, neutral, safe, and secure site at the program's Wellness Center.

### **Guardian Services Programs**

Guardian services programs in Wisconsin work hand-in-hand with the probate court to provide services to and monitor the financial and medical matters of individuals unable to handle their own affairs. A few of these programs—most notably those in Dane, Eau Claire, La Crosse, and Waukesha Counties—received training assistance and help with recruiting volunteers from AARP as promised during the April 1996 workshop sponsored by the Wisconsin Supreme Court.<sup>12</sup>

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There are three types of guardianship programs in Wisconsin. The first provides guardians for individuals who are found incompetent by the probate court to handle their own affairs and who do not have family or friends to represent them. The volunteers of the Volunteer Guardianship Program in Walworth County, for example, make financial and medical decisions for adults who are not able to make these decisions for themselves—people who are deemed by the court to be demented, mentally ill, developmentally disabled, or otherwise mentally incapacitated. In Waushara County, the probate court appoints volunteers from the Volunteer Guardianship Services Program to help individuals who have no family or friends to represent their best interests. Similar programs are found in 14 other counties.

The second type of program recruits and trains volunteers to monitor guardianships. In Dane County, volunteers with the Volunteer Guardianship Monitoring

Program monitor existing guardianships, visit wards of the probate court, and serve as mentors to guardians. In Eau Claire and La Crosse Counties, guardianship-monitoring programs also audit the annual accounts of the wards of the court. Demonstrating the value of guardianship monitoring, a La Crosse County volunteer found a \$400,000 discrepancy when auditing a ward's 1998 account and reported it to the court for correction. In the Volunteer Guardian and Trustee Program of Waukesha County, volunteers are trained to serve as guardians and trustees in appropriate cases. These volunteers receive a \$100 stipend per case from the county.

The third type of program provides mediation services in guardianship cases. The Dane County Guardianship Mediation Project trains volunteers to facilitate negotiation for guardianship petitions, giving the parties involved a chance to discuss problems and identify solutions outside the courts.

### **Jail and Detention Center Programs**

The category with the smallest number of volunteer programs in Wisconsin serves jails and detention centers. These programs often overlap volunteer court watch (ombudsman) services, in which volunteers monitor jail conditions, and assist the same populations served by probation and parole programs. They also provide mentoring services to inmates and people on probation and parole that are similar to those provided to non-inmate populations.

Volunteers assisting in jail and detention center programs tend to focus on providing remedial education to jail inmates to help them obtain a general equivalency diploma (GED) or a high school equivalency diploma (HSED), but services are not limited to these activities. Volunteers with the Prism Programs in Portage and Wood Counties assist the Jail Advisory Board, provide worship services to inmates, and offer literacy and mentor programs, in addition to monitoring overall jail conditions. The Volunteers in Offender Services Program of Outagamie County offers a range of rehabilitation and self-improvement programs in jails, including treatment programs aimed at helping inmates understand and cope with their alcohol and drug habits. They also organize and lead a wide range of groups that focus on anger management, criminal patterns of thought, productive decisionmaking, recovery from alcoholism and narcotics abuse, and educational instruction leading toward the completion of GED/HSED classes.

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## Juvenile Services Programs

Many of Wisconsin's volunteer programs serving juveniles strive to stop the cycle of crime before it starts. Volunteers can help first-time offenders understand the impact of their actions, learn how to control their anger, make good decisions, and become law-abiding citizens in their communities. Volunteer mentors serve as role models for children whose parents are often unavailable for them. In Waukesha County, volunteers of the Children's Activity Program work at the Juvenile Detention Center, planning onsite activities for juvenile offenders and taking them, when appropriate, offsite for activities such as sporting events. At the Menominee Reservation, the Tribal Youth/Elder Project matches elders with at-risk tribal youth to help them develop self-esteem, respect for elders and others, and self-control.

Other juvenile programs supervise or monitor juveniles and make periodic reports to the court. The volunteers of the Wood County Restitution and Community Service Program supervise and mentor at-risk juveniles ordered by the court to perform community service. Some programs assign volunteers to juveniles on an individual basis. Volunteers may also serve on panels that review out-of-home placements for children in CHIPS, Juveniles in Need of Protective Services (JIPS), and delinquency cases. In Brown County, under the auspices

of the Juvenile Compliance Monitoring Program, volunteers monitor compliance with juvenile court orders by making home and school visits, monitoring restitution and community service hours, and reporting non-compliance to the court. Some volunteers also provide tutoring and recreational services to juveniles in the county shelter, while others work with youth under court-ordered intensive supervision and meet one-on-one with youth who are being integrated back into the community from corrections. Still other programs monitor parents visiting and interacting with their children, just as some family service programs monitor the visits between children and noncustodial parents. The volunteers of the Community Aid Program of Marquette County staff holding rooms and help with home detention and electronic monitoring.

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### meet the **VOLUNTEERS:** Curt & Elaine Creager

**Curt and Elaine Creager are a married couple who volunteer for the Dane County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Madison, Wisconsin.** Elaine was a member of the first group trained in Madison in 1995, and Curt was trained in 1997.

Curt is 56 years old and volunteers because he is concerned about child abuse and neglect and the effects dysfunctional families have on children. His most recent CASA assignments have involved advocacy for four children who were declared at-risk because of their mother's severe epilepsy. The father was unable to care for the children, and the mother could not be left alone with them because of her medical condition. As a result, the children were placed in foster care. The father distrusted "the system" because it had removed his children; consequently, he was uncooperative. However, with Curt's support, the father was able to recognize the needs of his children and began to cooperate with service providers to get his children back.

Elaine is 48 years old and works with high school students who are habitually truant, are credit deficient, or have alcohol and drug abuse problems. She provides asset-building activities for youth in the community, coordinates afterschool clubs, and provides volunteer opportunities for high school and middle school youth.

Elaine volunteers because she loves children and wants to make a difference. Her past volunteer work has included numerous school, community, and youth activities. Elaine has handled two cases since she began volunteering for CASA in 1995. The first case involved a 9-year-old girl who was sexually abused by her biological father, by her grandmother's boyfriend, and by her mother's boyfriend. Elaine established rapport with the girl and continued to advocate for her when she was placed in foster care. The girl was returned home to her mother 18 months later.

Elaine's second case involved a 5-year-old girl and 4-year-old boy. The girl was reportedly sexually abused at 1½ years of age. Both children currently live in foster homes because of the dysfunctional family life of their biological parents. Elaine continues to monitor the court orders and while the parents have not yet fully complied, they are making progress. Elaine will continue to provide some stability and continuity until the children can return home.

## Dane County Court Appointed Special Advocates

Nationally, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program has been in existence since 1977. There are now more than 800 programs throughout the United States. In Wisconsin, there are currently eight CASA programs, located in Bayfield, Brown, Columbia-Sauk, Dane, Fond du Lac, Kenosha, La Crosse, and Milwaukee Counties.<sup>a</sup> The Dane County program, in Madison, is administered by the Children's Service Society of Wisconsin and directed by Marsha Varvil-Weld. It began training volunteers in 1995. Currently, approximately 35 trained volunteers provide about 1,400 hours of services to abused and neglected children each year.<sup>b</sup>

Dane County CASA volunteers, like all CASAs, are specially trained adults appointed by juvenile court judges to monitor and represent the best interests of a child in court. Each year hundreds of Dane County children are abused or neglected. Juvenile court judges make hard decisions about these children, decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Some of these children are placed in foster homes; others remain with their families and are aided by a variety of treatment programs.

CASAs review all records and documents pertaining to the children assigned to them. In each case they talk to the child and parents, family members, social workers, school officials and teachers, social service providers, and anyone else involved in the child's life. They visit the child regularly to check on his or her progress, evaluate the home situation, and monitor the degree to which court orders are being followed. With the close supervision that CASAs provide, in some cases these children are able to live in their own homes, eliminating the need for or reducing the length of time in foster care.

At a minimum, Dane County CASA volunteers make weekly contacts with the children and monthly contacts with all the social service providers involved. In addition, they write monthly reports for the program coordinator, who in turn passes the reports on to the court. These reports provide judges with the detailed information they need to make informed decisions about a child's future welfare. The reports are shared with the lawyers and social workers assigned to the case. CASAs are also expected to keep the CASA coordinator, the guardian ad litem, and the court informed about the status of each case by attending all court hearings and meetings pertaining to the child.

CASA volunteers are assigned only one case at a time, but each case may include two or three siblings. CASA volunteers make a 1-year commitment to each case. The initial training of CASA volunteers in Dane County lasts for 3 weeks. In addition, potential volunteers spend 4 hours observing juvenile court proceedings. Inservice training occurs every other month for approximately 1 hour. CASAs generally put in about 10 to 15 hours of work a month on behalf of the child. This time is spent driving to and from the child's residence, making phone calls about support services, and visiting with the child. Being a CASA volunteer is a big commitment, but Dane County CASA Director Marsha Varvil-Weld told a *Portage Daily Register* reporter there is no shortage of volunteers. "It's amazing," she said. "There is a tremendous number of people out there who are interested and willing to help an abused child."<sup>c</sup>

The following is an actual case from Dane County illustrating the important work performed by CASA volunteers.<sup>d</sup>

"Jackie" was only 2 months old when her 18-year-old mother brought her to the emergency room for treatment of a broken leg. Doctors suspected that it was caused by physical abuse. Despite initial denials, both parents entered a "no contest" plea, and Jackie was determined to be a Child in Need of Protection and/or Services. The father was subsequently criminally charged, found guilty, and served his sentence.

The assigned CASA volunteer visited Jackie and her mother on a weekly basis, and quickly established a close working relationship with both of them. Jackie's mother began parenting classes, and the father was ordered to attend anger management and parenting classes. Both parents cooperated with the CASA volunteer and came to look to her for parenting advice and support. The case was successfully terminated a year later when the parents had gained the necessary skills to parent on their own.

a. *Wisconsin CASA*, March 1998: 1-2, Madison, WI: Dane County CASA Program, Children's Service Society of Wisconsin. (This newsletter is produced by the Dane County CASA Program.)

b. *Ibid.*

c. *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, August 1998.

d. *Wisconsin CASA*, March 1998: 2, 5. The more recent (concluding) facts pertaining to this case were provided by Marsha Varvil-Weld, Director, Dane County CASA program.

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**Guardians Ad Litem.** In Wisconsin, a guardian ad litem (GAL) is an attorney assigned by the court to advocate for a minor (or, in some cases, an unborn child). These attorneys look out for the best interests of the children and, in so doing, may file petitions in pursuit of these interests. At the age of 13, children in Wisconsin have the right to private legal representation. This raises the possibility, in very rare cases, of a minor having a court-appointed GAL and a private attorney. The private attorney is constrained to respecting the wishes of the client. The GAL is required to pursue the best interests of the minor, regardless of whether the child recognizes these best interests. In addition, child abuse and neglect cases are also represented by the Department of Human Services, which has the best interests of the entire family in mind, rather than only those of the child.

**Teen Courts.** Teen, peer, or youth courts are alternative approaches to the traditional juvenile justice system. As of October 1995, approximately 190 teen court programs were operating in 25 states. Winnebago County started the first teen court in Wisconsin in 1996. Other teen courts are in Bayfield, Brown, Iowa, Jefferson, La Crosse, Sheboygan, Trempealeau, Vilas, and Winnebago Counties, among others.<sup>13</sup>

In Wisconsin, juveniles appearing before the teen court are usually first-time offenders. Many teen courts require defendants to plead guilty prior to participation in the program. Having pleaded guilty, they are sentenced by other teenagers under the supervision of a judge. Sentences are generally tailored to the offense. For example, a juvenile arrested for shoplifting might be “sentenced” to writing a letter of apology to the store owner and serving a term on a teen court jury. Sentences often involve community service, counseling, restitution, a written apology to the victim, and a turn as juror on the teen court.

Teen courts serve a number of important functions. First, they help reduce court caseloads by removing lesser offenses from crowded court calendars. Second, they provide communities with an opportunity to mold the behaviors and attitudes of youth. Because the judgment of the court is delivered by a group of the teen’s peers, the implication is that the peers do not condone the behavior being judged. It is hoped that this judgment will deter repeat offenses and keep teenagers out of the legal system. Third, teen courts provide an opportunity for teens to play the roles of different court players, thus increasing their appreciation for and understanding of the court system.

In Wisconsin, teen courts employ a diverse mixture of volunteer youth and adults. In the Sheboygan County teen court, which, in 1997, was the second teen court started in Wisconsin, youth volunteers serve as defense attorneys, prosecutors, bailiffs, clerks, and jurors. Adult volunteers help manage the process by keeping youth on track, while attorneys and law enforcement officers volunteer as judges. Offenders, after admitting guilt, are referred to the program by the county court. The youth and his or her guardian meet with the program coordinator to discuss the teen court and decide if they are willing to comply with its rules. Teen court is held once a month in the county courthouse. Following sentencing, the program coordinator monitors compliance and is in contact with offenders at least once a month. These contacts, by telephone and written reports, inform the program coordinator of the youth’s school attendance and any new encounters with police. As of January 1999, 23 juveniles had completed the program. None has reoffended.<sup>14</sup>

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***Teen courts provide communities with an opportunity to mold the behaviors and attitudes of youth.***

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The teen court in Iowa County was started under the leadership of Circuit Court Judge William D. Dyke in October 1997. Teen volunteers are drawn from eight area school districts. They are selected by school volunteers and are trained to act as jurors, prosecuting and defense attorneys, clerks, and bailiffs, with Judge Dyke presiding. The court is held twice a month. Defendants are first-time offenders between the ages of 12 and 16 who have committed theft, received or concealed stolen property, trespassed, obstructed justice, engaged in disorderly conduct, damaged property, possessed tobacco, shoplifted, been truant, or committed other suitable misdemeanor offenses. Cases involving drugs or weapons violations are ineligible. Referrals come from the court, juvenile intake, law enforcement agencies, and schools. After pleading guilty, defendants are admitted to the teen court and their charges are put on hold until the completion of the program. Defendants who satisfactorily complete the sentence imposed by their peers and who stay free of crime for 1 year have their charges dismissed. As of November 1998, 19 juveniles had successfully completed the program, and an additional 14 were

working toward completion of their sentence. Between October 1997 and November 1998, 63 students volunteered 997 hours of their time and 24 adults volunteered 108 hours.<sup>15</sup>

Volunteers in La Crosse County's peer court serve in a number of capacities: law enforcement officials assist in court proceedings and are on hand to answer questions; hospital personnel staff a mandatory decisionmaking course for juvenile offenders; attorneys assist in jury training; and youth serve on peer panels and help with training sessions. Adult community members meet bimonthly to evaluate the progress of the cases processed by the court.

In Bayfield County, student volunteers attend training sessions with the judge and district attorney prior to hearing cases each month. They sit on a panel of seven, question the offender and his or her parents or guardians, and recommend sentencing. A juvenile court intake worker monitors sentences through a deferred prosecution order. Each student volunteer is required to recruit a replacement when his or her term expires. Teen courts in Trempealeau and Vilas Counties also use panels of four student volunteers drawn from school districts. These students listen to and question juvenile offenders who have pleaded guilty to a nonviolent misdemeanor.

In Brown County, volunteer attorneys serve as judges in weekly teen court proceedings and help direct student discussion. Students serve as lawyers, clerks, bailiffs, and jury members in proceedings for juvenile defendants ages 12 to 16. The defendants have pleaded guilty to an ordinance violation. Volunteers recommend sentencing such as jury duty, community service, written apologies, essays, projects, and periods of supervision.

### Legal Services Programs

Attorneys volunteer their time and expertise in many ways. As volunteers, they are found in virtually every volunteer service area of Wisconsin, providing both legal and nonlegal assistance. Three organizations in Wisconsin provide free or low-cost legal services to low-income residents: Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., which serves 11 counties throughout the state; Wisconsin Legal Services; and Judicare. Many attorneys in Wisconsin accept pro bono referrals from these services. In Dane County, for example, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., holds clinics in locations such as the YMCA or homeless shelters to determine if prospective clients are eligible for free or low-cost legal services. Those who are eligible are referred to Dane County's

Volunteer Lawyer Project. The courts may also refer individuals to Legal Action if a case is too complicated to be handled without an attorney. In addition, law students and paralegals working with the Volunteer Lawyer Project make referrals to appropriate agencies.

Volunteer attorneys also help educate parents seeking divorces to plan for the needs of their children. In Milwaukee County, volunteer attorneys working with the Milwaukee Bar Association Divorce/Adoption Project represent foster parents seeking the initiation of divorce proceedings of a foster child's biological parents who have been separated longer than the state requires for a divorce. The divorce allows the foster parents to adopt the child.

## meet the **Henk** **VOLUNTEERS:** Newenhouse

**Henk Newenhouse is 72 years old and an active volunteer in the Richland County, Wisconsin, Resource Center.** For 7 years, as an independent contractor, Henk was the mediator for court-mandated divorce mediations in 5 Wisconsin counties and was instrumental in mediating more than 1,200 divorces. After relinquishing these efforts because they were too stressful, Henk became an officiant, which allows him to marry people. He now marries people, free of charge, often in a private ceremony at his home. He has become so popular that he officiates nearly one wedding ceremony each week.

In 1998, Henk volunteered to help Richland County Circuit Court Judge Edward Leineweber and local attorneys organize the Richland County Courthouse Resource Center, or the Pro Se Center.

### Mentoring Programs

Most mentoring programs in Wisconsin help juveniles. The Kinship of Polk County Program matches adult volunteers with delinquent juveniles referred by the juvenile court system. It also provides mentoring services for at-risk children who are not involved in the courts. In the La Crosse County Bar Association Truancy Program, attorneys are matched with truant middle school students to encourage them to stay in school. Similarly, volunteer attorneys in Outagamie County's Juvenile Diversion Program act as mentors to juvenile offenders. The alternative would be to refer these juveniles to the juvenile court for processing.

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## Richland County Courthouse Resource Center

Discussions and planning for the development of the Richland County Courthouse Resource Center began in August 1997 under the leadership of Circuit Court Judge Edward Leineweber. Richland County's per capita income is \$18,000, compared with \$24,000 for Wisconsin as a whole, so the discussions focused on providing services that residents need but otherwise could not afford.

The first volunteer service offered dealt with divorces. With the assistance of Richland's Office of Continuing Education at the University of Wisconsin, a course entitled "How Parents Can Help Children Through Divorce" was offered to area residents. The success of this course led to a small grant from the Richland County Department of Social Services to buy educational materials and print brochures. This course is now financially self-supported and offered regularly.

Following the development of this course, attorney volunteers started offering assistance to individuals wishing to file pro se divorce cases—that is, people who want to represent themselves in court. The goal was to make the court more accessible to these

litigants and to ensure that individuals filing pro se forms understood and were in compliance with legal procedures.

This Pro Se Center, as some call it, opened for business on September 2, 1998. An average of three persons now receive assistance the first Wednesday afternoon of every month. Volunteer help is also planned for paternity cases, name changes, small claims, children's court, and postjudgment divorce proceedings.

In Richland County, pro se legal services were originally offered by volunteer attorneys and by the Western Wisconsin Legal Service. In early December 1998, however, it was decided that these services would be assumed by nonattorney volunteers. Currently, the pro se legal services offered by the Richland County Courthouse Resource Center are being transferred to the Richland County Courthouse Resource Center, Inc., run by a seven-member volunteer board of directors, and will be operated by nonattorney volunteers following a detailed training manual.

A number of agencies provide mentoring services to both adults and juveniles, especially in association with probation programs, including the Dane County Volunteers in Probation Project and the Outagamie County Volunteers in Probation Program.

### Probation, Parole, and Community Service Programs

Probation, parole, and community service program activities tend to overlap those provided by juvenile services programs. Volunteers mentor juveniles, work inside and outside prisons, and are sometimes involved with victim impact projects. The general goal of probation and parole programs, which serve both adults and juveniles, is to help offenders become productive and law-abiding members of their communities. To meet that objective, many volunteers help arrange, monitor, and supervise community service obligations.

Community service, as a condition of sentence in lieu of jail time, offers defendants an opportunity to repay their debt to society and help improve the community.

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***The general goal of probation and parole programs, which serve both adults and juveniles, is to help offenders become productive and law-abiding members of their communities.***

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Likewise, it provides the community an opportunity to observe that debt being repaid. It also provides the offender an opportunity for rehabilitation and, frequently, a chance to learn new job skills and have secure employment. Community service helps judges relieve jail overcrowding, saves tax dollars, helps offenders connect to the community, and provides volunteers for local organizations and agencies. For example, juvenile offenders help maintain community gardens in Barron County and a young woman now has a permanent job at the agency where she volunteered as

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## Outagamie Volunteers in Probation

Outagamie Volunteers in Probation (VIP) is one component of Outagamie County's Volunteers in Offender Services (VIOS) Program. VIP programs were originally started in Royal Oak, Michigan, in the early 1960s, under the leadership of Keith Leenhouts, a circuit court judge who kept seeing the same individuals returning to his court. He thought these offenders needed opportunities to change their lives and that by mentoring sentenced offenders on a one-to-one basis such opportunities could be created. Thus was born the Volunteers in Probation concept.

In 1972, Judge Nick Schaefer of Outagamie started a VIP program for first-time misdemeanor offenders. At the same time, another program was under way in the Outagamie County jail, providing services to inmates on work-release. In 1985, Outagamie's County Commission combined these programs to create VIOS. In 1991, the state legislature recognized VIOS in law, defining its goals and functions and limiting its work to misdemeanor offenders.

VIOS is made up of jail rehabilitation programs, community service programs monitored by volunteer coordinators, and VIP. VIP recruits, trains, and matches community volunteers with offenders who are sentenced to probation.

Offenders who are candidates to participate in VIP have been sentenced to probation for first-time misdemeanor offenses, such as property crime, writing a bounced check, or committing welfare fraud. The age of offender-clients ranges from the teens to the eighties; the average age is in the twenties.

Conditions of VIP program clients' probation may include volunteering up to 100 hours of community service to a nonprofit or government agency. Clients may also have to pay court costs and restitution to the victim, and they may need alcohol and other drug addiction (AODA) assessments and followup counseling. VIP offenders are responsible for keeping the VIOS office informed, often through a volunteer, of their employment and residency.

Once an offender has been accepted into the program, he or she is matched geographically to a volunteer. The strengths and weaknesses of

both the offender-client and the volunteer are considered. For example, a recent high school graduate who is not certain of his future might be matched with a volunteer who has been a community businessman for many years.

Volunteers act as role models and help offenders cope with the challenges of everyday life. In the case of the high school graduate and the businessman volunteer, they might explore the community colleges and universities together. They might make appointments to meet with counselors at these schools to discuss career and study opportunities. Other volunteer activities might include attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, should that be part of the client's required activities. Or they might simply meet over coffee. The goal of the volunteer is not to preach to offenders, but to suggest options that might help them make positive life decisions.

VIOS has nearly 150 volunteers. Within a given year, 100 to 120 of these individuals are actively involved in a VIP or jail program. Volunteers come from all walks of life and include retired persons, business executives, homemakers, and people in between jobs. One volunteer has been with VIOS for nearly 13 years and continues to get a great deal of satisfaction from volunteering. Some volunteers are former offenders who have straightened out their lives or have been otherwise involved in the justice system. As the result of their life experiences and struggles, these individuals become very valuable VIP volunteers.

Volunteer screening involves a lengthy one-to-one interview, a background check through the Wisconsin Department of Justice, and three references. Following the screening process, volunteers attend formal training. During this training, the philosophy and history of VIOS and its programs are explained. A circuit court judge is present to answer questions, as are representatives of the sheriff's department, some of whom also offer instruction. Tours of the jail are given during which special attention is given to jail policies and security issues. Volunteers are also invited to regular inservice training on communication skills, motivating individuals, AODA issues, and patterns of criminal thinking, among other topics.

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## meet the **VOLUNTEERS:** Kim Lewis

**Kim Lewis is 26 years old.** She enjoys being active and involved in her community. Kim volunteers because she is concerned about the amount of violence and aggression in society today.

In the past, Kim has volunteered to work with at-risk youth, to serve on a local community's alcohol and drug board, to participate in media promotions, and to work with community members who have been placed on probation. She has been a volunteer for the Winnebago County Volunteers in Offender Services Program since 1995.

Kim believes in investing time and effort in the lives of those in her community who have previously broken the law and have been placed on probation. She feels it is important to help those on probation learn to be productive, responsible individuals, thus enriching their lives and the lives of those around them.

part of her sentence after being convicted of welfare fraud. Community service requirements, however, are difficult to monitor. To help monitor the community service aspects of offenders' sentences, volunteer community programs were created.

Volunteers with both the Barron County and Langlade County community service programs supervise adult and juvenile offenders who are ordered by the court to perform community service hours as part of their sentence. Similarly, Richland Community Service Project volunteers in Richland County arrange, monitor, and document offenders' community service, performed mainly for government agencies and nonprofit organizations. The Oconto County Volunteers in Probation Program provides supervision of nonviolent offenders as an alternative to state probation. The Winnebago Volunteers in Probation Program matches volunteers with adult first-time offenders to provide mentoring and guidance in meeting court-ordered obligations.

Outagamie County's Juvenile Diversion Program includes community service as a means of providing troubled youth with opportunities to successfully complete a project and learn self-discipline. According to Outagamie County Circuit Court Judge Joseph M. Troy, "Rather than simply providing lectures about self-esteem, we have attempted to offer them experiences to help develop it."<sup>16</sup> Volunteers of Outagamie County's Volunteers in Offender Services (VIOS) Program place and monitor offenders, including traffic offenders, at jobs

in which they complete assigned tasks as part of their sentence. This service is, in part, repayment to the community for their offenses. By monitoring offenders, volunteers help ensure that community service hours are completed, restitution is paid, and counseling services, if needed, are provided.

In Dodge County each month, Circuit Court Judges Andrew P. Bissonnette, Daniel W. Klossner, and John R. Storck organize a group of youth offenders to participate in a court-ordered community service project. These efforts have become known as the Responsibility Adjustment Program (RAP). These judges, along with other community volunteers, have supervised close to 80 youth on weekend projects. Other community service programs are operating in Grant, Langlade, Marquette, Racine, and Wood Counties, among others.

### Victim Services Programs

Victim services programs cover a wide range of activities; consequently, they overlap many other volunteer services in Wisconsin, including court information services, juvenile services, mediation services, domestic dispute services, and family services. Volunteers at the Victim/Witness Program of Dodge County provide support to victims and witnesses as they work through the court system. They also provide office services such as photocopying and staffing the telephones and fax machines. Volunteers at the Pierce County Victim/Witness Program notify victims and witnesses of court hearings. Brown County Victim/Witness Assistance Program volunteers act as court escorts, prepare witnesses for court hearings and testimony, and provide information about court proceedings to victims and witnesses. In Dane County, volunteers at the Victim/Witness Unit of the District Attorney's Office advocate for and provide support and court information to victims and witnesses. Iowa County's Crime Victim/Witness Program volunteers assist victims in obtaining harassment and domestic abuse injunctions. They also attend court proceedings with and on behalf of victims.

In addition to these services, volunteers in Wisconsin clean and staff shelters for victims of domestic and sexual abuse, provide transportation for victims of domestic abuse, answer crisis lines, and take children of victims on field trips. All shelter volunteers receive basic domestic violence and sexual assault training. Such shelters are located in Barron, Price, Richland, Rusk, Sawyer, and Washburn Counties and at the La Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation.

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Some Wisconsin programs mediate outcomes of offenses for both adults and juveniles. Many of them involve victim-offender conferencing as well as the use of impact panels (defined below). In La Crosse County, volunteers of the Small Group Conferencing Program work with juvenile offenders, victims and their families, support and school personnel, and community members before any court action is taken. They discuss the impact of the juvenile offenders' behavior on others to identify possible consequences and remedies for their actions. Trained volunteers assisting the Victim/Offender Mediation Program in Manitowoc County meet separately with victims and offenders to facilitate face-to-face mediation. Offenders are mostly juveniles, but the program also works with adults. Volunteers submit reports to the coordinator, who keeps track of the cases. Project Payback Restitution, Community Service, and Mediation in Washington County are programs assisted by trained volunteers who meet individually with the victim and offender to schedule a future face-to-face mediation. As in Manitowoc County, these volunteers submit reports to the case coordinator.

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***Some Wisconsin victim services programs involve victim-offender conferencing as well as the use of impact panels.***

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Attendance at victim impact panels, like victim-offender conferences, is often part of a drunk driving sentence. These impact panels allow victims of drunk drivers to tell their stories to offenders. The goal is to give offenders a lasting and powerful impression of the substantial and frequently devastating consequences of impaired driving. Volunteer survivors working with the Victim Impact Panel of Outagamie County meet with offenders who have been arrested a second time for operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated. Survivors narrate their stories to give offenders a personal view of the impact their impaired driving habits have had on other lives. A similar program exists in Waukesha County.

## Conclusion

In Wisconsin, court volunteer programs are flourishing. Volunteer programs have had a major impact on the state's families and children. Family, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and juvenile programs assist both children and adults. Other programs such as mentoring, jail and detention, probation and parole, and victim services, especially victim offender conferences and victim impact panels, pay particular attention to the needs of youth. One of the earlier initiatives of the Wisconsin Supreme Court—Wisconsin Families, Children and Justice—focused on how the courts were handling cases of abused and neglected children.

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***Volunteer programs help make court processes more accessible, understandable, and visible.***

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Many programs aim at making a juvenile's first encounter with the justice system his or her last, and others work to protect the safety and interests of young children and families. Many other programs work primarily with adults, offering alternatives to jail, mentors and tutors to individuals on probation, alternative dispute resolution services, and opportunities for offenders to connect with their communities.

The success of Wisconsin court volunteer programs is due in part to the actions of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the Director of State Courts Office, which have helped create an environment conducive to program development. Most notably, the court's Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice initiative, along with projects such as Court with Class, the Judicial Ride-Along, and Justice on Wheels, helped foster the development and extension of volunteer programs within the state. These efforts have helped make court processes more accessible, understandable, and visible. Volunteers increase the number of resources available to the courts, help lower the cost of case processing, reduce court caseloads, and help break down communication barriers between the judiciary and the community.

## Notes

1. *Volunteers in the Courts: Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin*, Second Edition, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court and State Bar of Wisconsin, June 1998, 4. Cf. also *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice—History*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, November 1998.
2. Kritzer, Herbert M., and John Voelker, “Familiarity Breeds Respect: How Wisconsin Citizens View Their Courts,” *Judicature*, 82(2): September–October 1998.
3. *Public Outreach Programs*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, October 1998.
4. *Wisconsin Supreme Court*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, August 1998.
5. *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice—History*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, November 1998.
6. *Volunteers in the Courts: Court-Related Volunteer Programs in Wisconsin*, Second Edition, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court and State Bar of Wisconsin, June 1998, 4. Cf. also *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice—History*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, November 1998.
7. *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice—History*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, November 1998.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Correspondence with Karen Leone de Nie, Program Assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, September 27, 1999.
11. These figures were prepared by Karen Leone de Nie, Program Assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.
12. Correspondence with Karen Leone de Nie, Program Assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, February 17, 1999.
13. *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, August 1998.
14. Correspondence with Karen Leone de Nie, Program Assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, February 10, 1999.
15. Data provided by the Iowa County Teen Court.
16. *Volunteers in the Courts: A Partnership for Justice*, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Supreme Court, August 1998.

## For More Information

For additional information concerning Wisconsin court volunteers or for copies of the literature cited that has been published by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, contact:

### Wisconsin Supreme Court

P.O. Box 1688  
Madison, WI 53701-1688  
608-266-1298  
Fax: 608-261-8299

For general information on court-based volunteer programs and other criminal justice topics, contact:

### Bureau of Justice Assistance

810 Seventh Street NW.  
Washington, DC 20531  
202-514-6278  
World Wide Web: [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA)

### Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
1-800-688-4252  
World Wide Web: [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org)

Clearinghouse staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern time. Ask to be placed on the BJA mailing list.

### U.S. Department of Justice Response Center

1-800-421-6770 or 202-307-1480

Response Center staff are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern time.

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