

Wake Lawyers 4 ALL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is this program?

The Wake County Bar Association has become increasingly aware of the heightened demand for pro bono legal services and the need to increase the number of local attorneys providing legal services on a pro bono basis to assist the Volunteer Lawyers Program (“VLP”). As a result, an ad hoc committee was formed to create the “Wake Lawyers 4 ALL” program.

Wake Lawyers 4 ALL is separate and distinct from the North Carolina Bar Association’s 4 ALL effort, however, utilizes the same model—lawyers helping the needy in the community.

Who is eligible to receive pro bono service from the VLP?

Any Wake County resident who meets the federal government poverty guidelines can become a VLP client.

What sort of cases does the VLP refer?

The VLP refers mostly civil cases. On rare occasions criminal cases that could negatively impact the stability of a household may be referred. (An example of that might be a single head of a household charged with illegal drug possession, because she did not know that one of her children in the household had illegal drugs on the premises. An entire household could face homelessness if the head of the house were evicted.)

Additionally, the VLP is currently looking for attorneys to help with Wake County Legal Aid’s Central Intake Unit (CIU) to receive calls from clients, assess cases, and provide over-the-phone legal advice. The VLP will provide you with specialized training to assist in their CIU.

I don’t know anything about those particular areas of the law.

Fear not, the VLP staff attorneys are willing and able to train you in the basics of the areas of the law with which they need assistance.

Who decides which cases are sent to me?

YOU DO! You tell the VLP Coordinator what sorts of cases you prefer to handle. When an appropriate case is available, you will be contacted. You have the final say about whether the case is sent to you.

Am I allowed to collect a fee for my services?

No fees may be collected from VLP clients. The VLP is prohibited by law from referring obviously fee-generating cases. Sometimes after all the facts are developed, a VLP attorney

discovers that it is possible to collect attorney's fees from the opposing party. When that happens, the VLP is willing to close the case as a pro bono matter, as long as the client agrees to that arrangement.

What about malpractice coverage?

Legal Aid of NC will provide malpractice coverage on any case you handle as a VLP matter. When you help our clients, you're one of us.

How do I handle conflicts of interest in my firm?

The same way you would handle any other case. A conflict check should be run and any potential pro bono matter should be declined where you would face a conflict of interest under the ethical rules. If you have to decline a case, the VLP would be glad to send you a different case to handle.

What's in it for me, as an attorney accepting a pro bono case?

- Increased experience and scope of practice skills
- Increased visibility and improved standing in the legal community
- Compliance with the NC State Bar Rules of Professional Conduct:
<http://www.ncbar.com/rules/rules.asp>
- Knowing you made a positive difference in someone's life that only an attorney can make

What other contributions can I make as a VLP lawyer?

You could co-counsel with a Legal Aid lawyer on a case or provide consultations in your specialty area either to Legal Aid or other VLP attorneys. You could facilitate pro bono clinics. You might even come up with a great new idea for pro bono service. A group of intellectual property attorneys developed the very successful Project Together program to serve domestic violence victims.

If you want to help in any way, including any not mentioned above, please call 828-4647.