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Don't Stop Believing: Virtual Tools Keep Us Serving Community During COVID Crisis

By Sarah Curry, Development and Communications Coordinator

The needs of our community don't stop because of COVID-19. In fact, if you saw the [op-ed penned by Kentucky legal aid directors](#), including AppalReD Legal Aid's Robert Johns, the need for civil legal aid increases.

Recently, we found a way to respond that doesn't require extra hand sanitizer.

Pro Bono Director Mary Going and Beverly Shea, retired AppalReD Legal Aid attorney and volunteer, hosted AppalReD Legal Aid's first virtual divorce clinic last week. Our first virtual clinic served people from the safety of their own home. Instead of feeling distanced, we connected with people six or even 206 miles away all at the same time. Ten clients logged in from Madison, Bell, Pulaski, Laurel and Harlan.

Virtual Clinic Reduces Barriers of Geography

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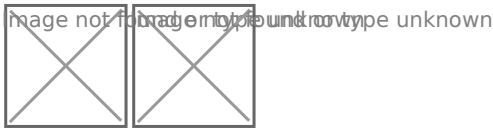
Key: Red=Attorney Location

Green=Client Location

Even though, we went “high tech” we remained conscientious of keeping it “low tech.” For example, clients registered over the hotline and were mailed paperwork, since printing can be a barrier and public libraries aren’t open. Clients were welcome to fill the paperwork out online, but this can be a hurdle.

Initially, Mary and Beverly were nervous about holding a clinic online. Beverly thought it would take longer than a traditional clinic, and Mary was nervous about the technology. In the end, the technology ran smoothly and there were no tech issues. Clients joined on their phones and computers and didn’t have bandwidth issues. At one point, a client did have to read a form to Beverly because she couldn’t see it on the woman’s phone, but they worked through it together.

AppalReD Legal Aid Attorneys Listen to Clients During Our First Virtual Clinic



L-R: Beverly Shea and Mary Going

Both Mary and Beverly came out of the experience thrilled with how technology served them and the clients. All ten clients walked away ready to file with their forms notarized remotely.

In fact, there were advantages to hosting it virtually.

- Everyone started at the same time, so Mary was able to give instructions and basic information to everyone at the beginning.
- Clients asked non-personal questions in front of the whole group and these answers helped anyone with the same question.
- Virtual break out rooms allowed anyone with a personal question to enter a “room” one-on-one with a lawyer. Sometimes space can be an issue during in-person clinics, so the ability to serve many people confidentially and offer privacy was a real asset.

In addition, to her first virtual clinic, Beverly Shea experienced another first during the clinic. She says, “As an older lawyer, this was the first situation I’ve had with a

same-sex divorce. The issues were exactly the same, and the emotional toll on the parties was just the same, too.”

In the end, AppleReD Legal Aid’s ability to forge human connections and provide high quality legal help to folks when they need it remains the same. While the two attorneys may not be YouTube sensations anytime soon, you will see them and more of our attorneys livestreaming and hosting virtual clinics in the coming weeks.

-June 9th, Scott Davies (Facebook Live), Low Income Tax Clinic Live!

-June 24th, 12:30 pm. Charnel Burton (Facebook Live) hosts a session on eviction: “Do I have to pay my rent?”

-June 25th, 1:00 pm. Michelle Fisher, Jimmy Fahringer, and Jake Johnson (Facebook Live) host “Legal Services for the LGBT+ Community: Info Session and Q & A.”

-July 16th and August 27th, 2:00 – 4:00 pm. Divorce Clinic, both with and without children. Must register. (In the following months, we’ll host clinics that serve clients with custody or other family law issues.)

Follow AppleReD Legal Aid on [Facebook](#) to catch all our Facebook Live Events. To register for clinics, call our intake line at 1-866-277-5733.

Last updated on June 18, 2020.

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