



Legal Aid of the Bluegrass: Service Through Partnership

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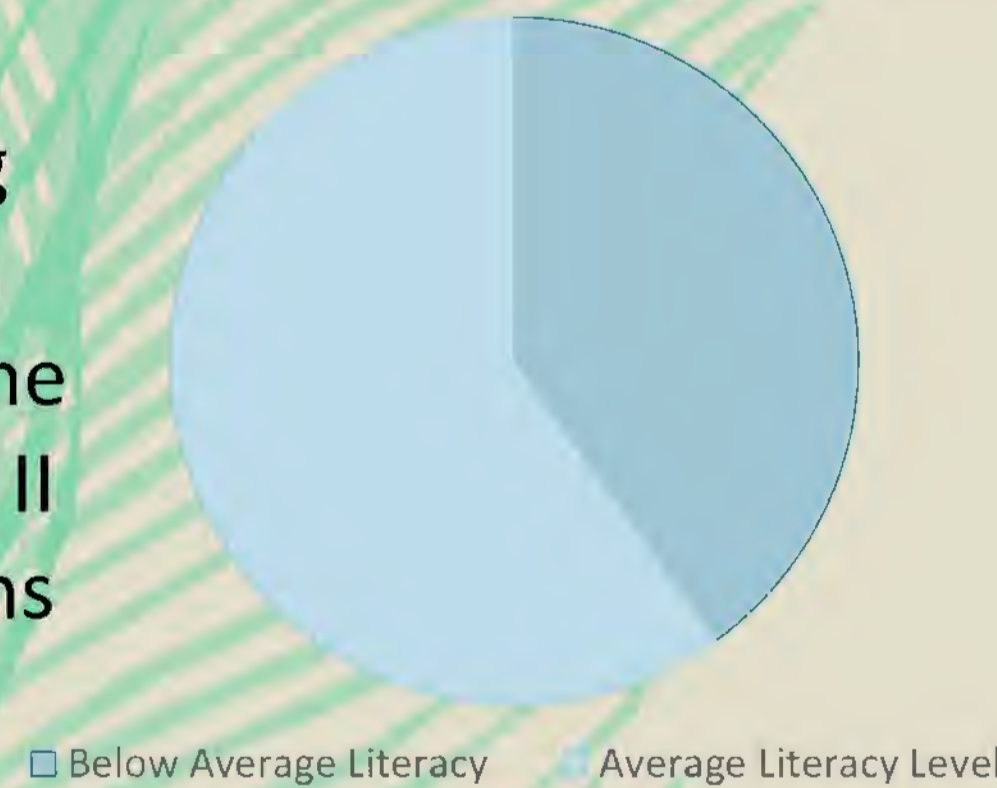
Legal Aid of the Bluegrass (LABG) serves the poor and vulnerable populations in 33 counties in eastern, northern and central Kentucky. 213,000 poor people live in the service area. Many of those who are served are elderly or victims of domestic violence, including immigrant victims. Typically, 75% of clients are at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, 30% are working poor, and 54% who seek service and meet priority and income guidelines **cannot be helped because of resource limitations.**



Challenges Students Faced

- Limited Work Space
 - Students learned to work on their projects without constant access to resources or their mentors.
- Complex Legalities
 - Students had to grasp the legal fundamentals associated with *pro se* divorces and the regulations concerning ombudsmen and nursing homes.
- Communication Barriers
 - 40% of Kentucky's Working Age Population, which was approximately 1 million at the time of the study, is at a I or II Literacy Levels; these persons cannot read at all or can minimally read.
 - Assistance has to be provided for participants in the *pro se* clinics who cannot read their divorce documents. The low level of literacy can affect the data of the Ombudsman program if residents do not understand the Ombudsman's questions.
 - Low-income clients can also be difficult to reach due to lack of phone service. These limitations can prevent clients from fully receiving the help they need and prevent volunteers from fully offering their assistance

KY Working Age Population



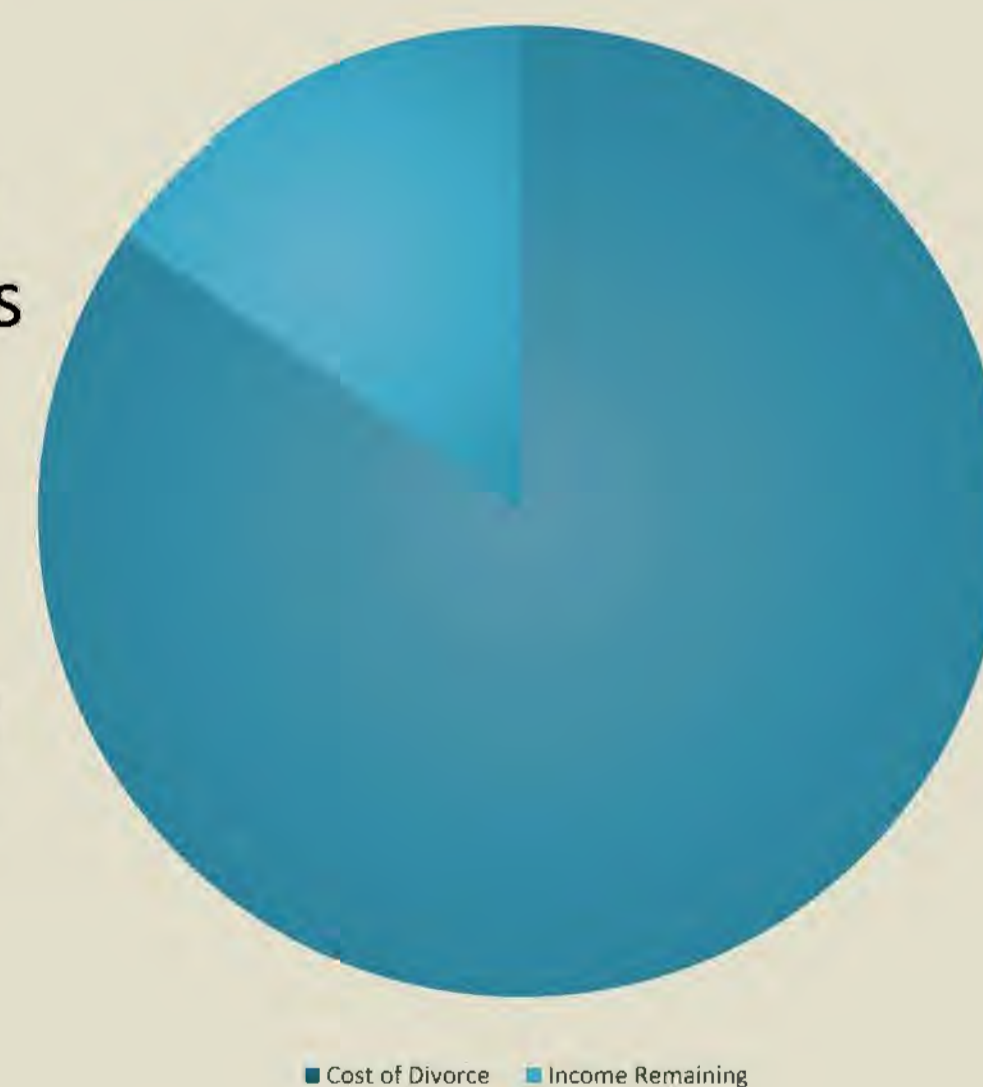
Partnership Project 1: The Pro Se Clinic

An uncontested divorce can cost as much as one month's income, which leaves many low-income Kentuckians unable to dissolve their marriages with their estranged spouses. Through the *Pro Se* Clinic, Northeastern Kentuckian couples are able to file for divorce *pro se* ("for oneself") when they do not have the resources to afford to hire an attorney. The clinic, which was originally operated by Legal Aid of the Bluegrass (LABG), helps participants to complete the necessary paperwork and file the paperwork with the Circuit Judge for a dissolution of marriage. Funding cuts forced LABG to abandon the program. In order to continue serving the community, Morehead State University Legal Studies' students and faculty adopted the program with the aid of LABG.

	Monthly Income	Source of Income	Time Separated	% of Income Cost for divorce
Client 1	\$720	Social Security	> 2 years	97.22%
Client 2	\$519	SSI	5 years	134.87%
Client 3	\$718	SSI	1 year	97.49%
Client 4	\$1195	Social Security	4 years	58.58%
Client 5	\$978	Part-Time Employment at Service Station	3 months	71.57%

The average monthly salary of the sample is \$826. The percentage of monthly income the typical divorce would cost is a staggering 87.75%. While struggling to meet monthly expenses, the added expenditure of a divorce would overextend one's budget to an unrecoverable degree

Average Monthly Income in Comparison to Divorce Cost



Sources

- Deaton, Sandra, and Audrey Carr. *Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky*. Frankfort, KY: Legislative Research Commission, 2000. Print.
- "About Us." *Legal Aid of the Bluegrass*. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.



Partnership Project 2: The Ombudsman Ranking System

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCO) advocates for the elderly residents in the various nursing facilities in LABG's service areas, who often have no voice. Certified Ombudsman travel to the numerous nursing homes in LABG's service areas to evaluate and cite them for any violations they have committed against federal and state regulations. LABG ombudsman saw a rising need for a program to assist and further evaluate high risk nursing homes (nursing homes with a high number of reoccurring violations). This program includes the creation of a complex ranking system with each violation being assigned a value. Homes whose violations totaled up to a certain range would be labeled "at risk." Due to their pre-existing relationship with Morehead State University, the LABG Ombudsmen sought out the aid of a Legal Studies student with legal and mathematical experience to assist them in developing this analytical program, as well as to assist them in analyzing the data itself.

Outcomes of Student Service

The *Pro Se* Clinic has been able to successfully serve a large number of low-income individuals through the partnership of Morehead State University Legal Studies students and Legal Aid of the Bluegrass. This relationship allows for students to gain invaluable experience to prepare them for their careers, while instilling in them a desire to serve the community.

The Ombudsman Ranking System and the analysis of the data will help ensure that the vulnerable and elderly receive the degree of service they deserve from their care facility. The relationship between LABG and Morehead State University allowed LABG to seek out assistance from the University, which allowed a student to serve the community, while gaining experience in both of his interested fields.

Expanding Student Service

The relationship between Legal Aid of the Bluegrass and the Morehead State University Legal Studies Program allows for low-income and at risk individuals to receive the service they need in a timely manner. The faculty of the Morehead State University Legal Studies Program plan to partner with the local court system to create another clinic to further serve the low-income members of the community by assisting with probate of small estates. Currently, faculty and students are researching grants to find funding for this new project as well as funding to expand the *Pro Se* clinic to include low-income couples with children, who currently cannot be served through the clinic.