

SERVING AT A GOSPEL JUSTICE CENTER

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 34:18

Serving at an Administer Justice Gospel Justice Center will be different than your day-to-day practice where your job is to handle a legal issue for the client, and so it may feel uncomfortable at first or that you are doing too little. Rest assured that even basic advice is extremely helpful for someone with no legal training.

There will be times when you will see a client at the center that has a legal issue in an area that you do not have practice experience. Remember that you do not need to have all the answers; you can provide good practical next steps guidance. You are able to help the client because you are only providing *brief advice and referral, not full representation*.

Most Administer Justice’s clients report they were helped with their legal problem. You are having a huge impact on people’s lives by serving, and we pray that God also moves in your life through your serving experience!

Spending time in prayer

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

Proverbs 3:5-6

Before each clinic, spend time in prayer. Thank God for your ability to serve the client and ask him to work through you. By spending time with God in prayer, the pressure is off you. Prayer reminds you that you do not need to save the day or meet all the clients’ needs. Prayer places the focus on God, not you.

Administer Justice’s CEO reminds us that this is a divine appointment and Jesus is present. He is their advocate – not you. You are his agent seeking to provide guidance in a brief advice and referral context. You can trust God – and so can they.

Sharing the love of Jesus Christ

“A new commandment I give to you: love one another. Just as I loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

An Administer Justice Gospel Justice Center is different than a pro bono legal clinic because you share the hope of God’s love with clients. You can demonstrate the Gospel in action. By guiding a client through their legal problem, you reflect Jesus. You have an opportunity to pray for and with clients and share Scripture.

Seeing and listening to a client

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her. “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”

Genesis 16:13

The most important service you can provide is listening and demonstrating compassion for the client’s situation. Encourage the client, think of this as talking to a friend at a coffee shop. For someone in a difficult situation, simply hearing someone acknowledge that they are going through something difficult and that they are doing the right thing by reaching out for help can be enormously helpful. After someone shares their story with you, the first thing you should do is thank them for sharing it and coming for help. Assure them you will do your best to help them. Seeing and listening to a client is an important step in restoring their dignity.

Clients may become emotional when sharing what brought them to the Gospel Justice Center. Give them the space to share those emotions. It is always helpful to have a box of tissues available.

Checking on pending case actions

Determine if there is an active case against the client.

- > *Client has a pending court date.* If the client has a court date, emphasize that it is usually a good idea to attend a court appearance even if they do not feel prepared. To help them prepare, explain to them how the hearing will proceed, what they should wear to court, and that they should ask the judge for a continuance because they are in the process of obtaining pro bono or low-cost legal representation.
- > *Client needs to respond to a pleading.* Review the document, explain to the client the meaning of the document, emphasize the response date, discuss how they may want to respond, and provide web links and phone numbers to the court where the response is due. (Note that many courts have forms for pleadings and responses online and the court clerks can help with filing the response.)

Ensuring the client is safe

Determine if the client is experiencing an unsafe/domestic violence situation. The most important issue is providing the client with resources to find a safe environment. A web search will identify domestic violence hotlines or shelters in your area. Provide this information to the client so the client can contact the shelter.

Providing “Next Steps” for the client

You do not need to have all the answers. You can help the client by determining the basic steps they need to take to resolve the issue. Your advice may be links to websites that will have additional information and forms, or referral to a federal or state agency. Your advice may be a high-level overview of the legal process and what is the first step the client needs to take towards resolving the issue. If appropriate, you may coach the client on how to talk with the adverse party. Keep in mind you are only providing *brief advice and referral, not full representation*. You do not need to provide the client with a complete legal strategy.

It is okay to tell a client that you need to check on some points of law and that you will email them with a response. Let the client know how soon they can expect to hear from you, and try to email the client within a week after the clinic. You may want to use the email address provided by Administer Justice so clinic clients do not contact your office or personal email.

There may be some clients that will need legal representation to resolve their issues. Administer Justice maintains a referral list for attorneys licensed in Illinois. The lawyers on the list are periodically vetted by Administer Justice. The referral list can be found at the Volunteer Hub at

www.administerjustice.org/volunteerhub/.

The password is **AJ_Volunteer**.

Remind the client that if they have additional questions as they work through the Next Steps plan, they can make another appointment at the center. It is best for the client to schedule a follow-up appointment the same day before they leave.

Entering case notes and actions in LegalServer

After you have seen a client, remember to enter your client notes and actions into LegalServer. This is necessary so you are covered under Administer Justice’s malpractice insurance. A complete record of the client’s visit and the recommended actions is also important for any follow-up appointments. It is best to enter case notes and actions in LegalServer as soon as possible after meeting with the client.

If you have misplaced your log-in credentials for Acuity and LegalServer, contact hope@administerjustice.org. Tutorials on LegalServer and Acuity can be found at the [Volunteer Hub](#).