

YOUNG LAWYERS ADVOCATE FOR TAMPA BAY'S HOMELESS YOUTH

Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee

Chair: Rosemary Armstrong - Crossroads for Florida Kids



In May, hundreds of young lawyers from across the country descended upon the Tampa Bay area for the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division's Annual Spring Conference. As part of the conference, many of those attorneys planned and implemented an outreach project that left a lasting impact on the Tampa Bay community. Homeless and transitional youth benefitted from two free legal clinics through Project Street Youth — one at Metropolitan Ministries and the other at Seminole Heights Charter School.

Homelessness affects more than 1.7 million youth in the United States, and that number is growing with each passing year. Almost 40 percent of the homeless population in the United States is younger than 18. Project Street Youth is a project of the ABA YLD's Public Service Team in partnership with the Center on Children and the Law and the Commission on Homelessness and Poverty. The program's goal is to provide access to justice for homeless and transitional youth by educating and raising awareness of the issue, promoting effective legislation, and providing free legal clinics.

At the clinics here in the Tampa Bay area, more than 15 young lawyers volunteered and provided



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free legal advice to approximately 45 homeless and transitional youth, helping them with a range of challenges. Clinic volunteers addressed issues including questions about public assistance and government benefits, landlord and tenant issues, credit questions, domestic violence, custody matters, education concerns, expungement of criminal records, taxes, small business loans, employment discrimination, labor violations, personal injury claims, and emancipation — just to name a few! Each of the homeless or transitional youths was also given a backpack with necessities such as toiletries and other personal items.

Bobby Smith, principal of Seminole Heights Charter School, reported that “our students greatly enjoyed and certainly benefitted from the legal clinic.” We could not have held one clinic — much less two — without the amazing support of the ABA YLD Tampa Bay Host Committee and the Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division, which donated \$1,000 to the clinics.

In conjunction with the Project Street Youth clinics, the ABA YLD

conference held a luncheon program, “The Faces of Homeless and Transitional Youth: A Call to Action,” which opened with the screening of a short documentary featuring homeless and transitional youth followed by a panel discussion led by advocates for homeless youth who shared their experiences and described some of the many ways young lawyers can take action to help.

For those interested in learning more, visit: www.ambar.org/projectstreetyouth.

For information on ways you can get involved with Tampa Bay pro bono opportunities, contact Rosemary Armstrong, chair of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Pro Bono Committee, at rosemary@crossroadsfloridakids.org, or visit www.hillsbar.com/?page=ProBono

for more information on volunteer legal organizations.

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