

Measuring Impact - A Truly Innovative Idea

THE CHALLENGE

In my role as president of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation, I am often asked to describe the impact of our work. Not just “What do you do?” but also “What is achieved?”

I know that I am impacted on a personal level when I hear of the successful outcomes obtained for the disadvantaged through the hard work of legal aid and pro bono advocates supported by the Foundation. It is rewarding and inspiring when I hear of how children with disabilities are helped by legal aid lawyers to receive the instruction needed to succeed in school. It is remarkable to learn of families who are confronted with the possibility of being evicted from their homes and forced to live on the street who are then helped by pro bono attorneys to obtain or maintain safe and stable housing.

These amazing efforts deliver justice, opportunity and hope for people in Philadelphia struggling with poverty, abuse and discrimination. Their examples strengthen my desire to sustain and expand the access to justice programs in our community. We should all be highly driven to ensure that the full range of nonprofit legal aid organizations are available for people in need. But currently only one in five low-income individuals and families receive the civil legal assistance essential to address crucial problems affecting their lives.

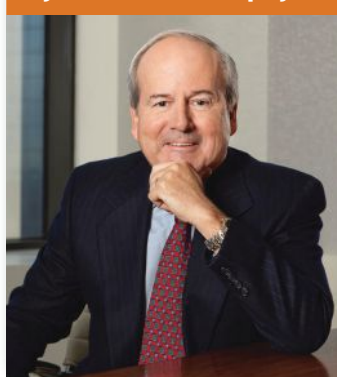
To be able to generate greater support for the legal services sector, the Foundation is committed to more fully explaining the powerful impact of legal aid and pro bono work. To go beyond success stories, we need to improve our ability to describe the scope of this work, the depth of its impact, and the measurable benefits achieved for clients and the broader community.

THE ANSWER

For these reasons, the Foundation has embarked on a truly innovative project called the “Economic Benefits Calculator” (patent pending). We are working to develop the EBC with leading university researchers and information technology experts. This project will allow us to produce more thorough answers and detailed calculations in response to fair questions such as “What is the real impact of legal aid?” or “Can you quantify the benefits of this work in different scenarios?”

Here is how the EBC will work – The benefits of legal services can be quanti-

By Thomas A. Brophy



fied and calculated through the use of mathematical formulas designed after peer-reviewed and published research. When legal aid or pro bono clients achieve a successful result, the affected individuals and families improve their life circumstances and avoid harmful outcomes. This positive social and economic impact multiplies as the benefits received directly by the clients ripple through the community in both the short and long terms. Research throughout the country in recent years has produced formulas to show the dollar value of these client outcomes in cases involving education, family violence, housing, immigration and in many more areas.

For example, when a legal problem is successfully addressed, both the client and the whole community benefit from the resulting improvement in family stability, safe housing, increased income for food and clothing, and more. These factors can be quantified and incorporated into impact formulas. It is noteworthy that a legal aid case on one issue, such as domestic violence, often has wide ranging benefits for multiple aspects of the lives of the people involved, including the health

of all family members, the education of their children, and the ability of the parents to maintain employment. Calculations for the impact of legal services take these various factors into consideration, to the extent supported by credible research and available data.

THE DETAILS

As being developed by the Foundation, the EBC will be an easy-to use, self-help website for nonprofits, foundations, law firms, government agencies and other businesses. We are developing this truly innovative tool to make it available without charge to nonprofit organizations. The EBC will initially focus on calculating the impact of legal aid and pro bono efforts, but will have extensive applications over time.

The EBC will automatically translate statistics about client outcomes into data analysis, graphs, charts and narrative summaries on the impact of these services. The EBC is based on published, up-to-date, and verified research, so the results are accurate and reliable. An organization will be able to enter its own service data into the EBC website and download the economic benefit calculations for its work. Each nonprofit can then use this information in grant proposals and reports, press releases, advocacy materials, testimony, board reports and annual reports.

In this way, the EBC will help the Foundation and its donors to better understand the long-term results of their investments. The EBC will also help individual nonprofits to more effectively demonstrate their outcomes, develop their programs, manage their staffs, raise funds, perform advocacy and communicate about their work. The EBC will

encourage nonprofits and funders to work together to better understand how organizational impact can be further increased by expanding productive programs and replicating successful staff efforts. In addition to being a practical tool, the EBC will spur new academic studies on these issues.

THE INITIAL TEST

The Foundation has tested the first limited model of the EBC, as part of our proposal to the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia for constructing an Equal Justice Center – another innovative project of which I am quite proud. Overall, the legal aid nonprofits that would be co-located in the Equal Justice Center have an annual social and economic impact totaling at least \$200 million. This represents the annual individual and community benefits resulting from legal services to clients who would be served through organizations operating in the building. You can read our “Social Impact” document here – www.PhilaBarFoundation.org/EJCImpact.

Thank you for supporting the only foundation in Philadelphia solely dedicated to our city’s legal services community. Please let me know if you are interested in participating in the EBC’s Advisory Group. Check out all of our various programs at www.PhilaBarFoundation.org.

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