



LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Office of Program Performance

Final Report

of the

Program Quality Visit

to

Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.

Recipient No. 514076

October 7 - 11, 2013

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Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.
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INTRODUCTION

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a Program Quality Visit (PQV) to Prairie State Legal Services, Inc. (PSLS) on October 7 - 11, 2013. The team included Mary-Christy Fisher, a LSC Temporary Employee who acted as team leader, Althea Hayward, OPP Program Analyst, and Mytrang Nguyen, OPP Program Counsel, as well as Patrick ("Mac") McIntyre, Andrew Scherer, Maureen Syracuse, and Carolyn Worrell, who served as LSC Temporary Employees.

Program Quality Visits are designed to evaluate whether LSC grantees are providing the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment of PSLS, the PQV team reviewed documents LSC received from the program, including its most recent LSC grant application, its Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) and technology plans, as well as workforce analysis data, case service reports, and other service reports. The team also examined the materials OPP requested from PSLS in advance of the visit, including documents relating to the program's strategic planning, intake system, language access, *pro bono* program, legal work management, board governance, resource development, and other administrative responsibilities, as well as advocates' written work and the results of a confidential on-line staff survey completed by nearly the entire staff. While on site, the team visited eight of PSLS' regional offices and spoke, either in person or by telephone, with almost three-quarters of the program's current staff. The team also met with, or talked to, a number of PSLS' board members, members of the judiciary, and a variety of community service providers, consultants, and funders from throughout the service area.

In conducting the PQV, OPP relied on the LSC Act and regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. The evaluation and this report are organized according to the four LSC performance areas that cover: 1) legal needs assessment and priority setting; 2) engagement with the low income community; 3) the quality and management of legal work, including private attorney involvement; and 4) organizational leadership and program management, including board governance, administration, resource development, and involvement with the statewide delivery system.

Following the visit, OPP sent a draft of this report to the program. PSLS responded with a letter dated February 11, 2014, which is attached. Some of the program's comments were incorporated in the Final Report.

PROGRAM AND SERVICE AREA OVERVIEW

Prairie State Legal Services, Inc., (IL-7), was formed in 1977 as a 15-attorney entity serving five counties. It has grown through the consolidation of a number of existing legal services programs in central and northern Illinois to cover 22,251 square miles in 36 counties stretching west from the "collar counties" ringing Chicago to Iowa, and north from mid-Illinois to Wisconsin.¹ At the time of the October 2013 PQV, the program had eleven regional offices located in Bloomington, Joliet, Kankakee, McHenry, Ottawa, Peoria, Rock Island, Rockford, St. Charles, Waukegan, and Wheaton, and a satellite office in Galesburg.

¹ PSLS' development is fully described on the program's website, <https://www.pslegal.org/history.asp>.

The region served by PSLs includes areas of significant wealth and extreme poverty. DuPage County, where the Wheaton office is located, is among the most affluent counties in the United States. It is home to Oak Brook, one of the country's wealthiest villages, and the global headquarters of McDonalds, Inc. In contrast, Rockford, the location of PSLs' administrative offices, is a formerly bustling industrial city now saddled with the highest share of upside-down mortgages in the nation.² The area served by the Kankakee office includes Pembroke, a town described as "mired in poverty."³ Some counties are densely urban and others are rural. In many of the rural counties, particularly in the southwest corner of the service area, the populace is declining. Cities elsewhere in PSLs' service area, including Aurora, the second largest city in the state, and Joliet, Illinois' fastest growing city, are expanding. The "collar counties," while growing in size, have also seen substantial increases in their low-income populations.⁴

The poverty population in PSLs' service area increased from 304,810 at the time of the 2000 Census to 654,369 in the 2010 census. The total 2010 population of the area was 5,076,719. Almost two-thirds (65.9%) of the program's eligible client population are Caucasian. African-Americans comprise close to one-fifth (17.9%) of the service area's eligible population. The service area has experienced a noticeable growth in its non-English speaking residents.

PSLS is the only provider of a full range of legal services throughout the service area. Its services are supplemented by local providers such as the DuPage Bar Legal Aid Service, operated by the DuPage County Bar Association (DCBA), which focuses on family law and Chapter 7 bankruptcy cases. Until 2010, this agency was funded, in part, by a sub-grant from PSLs. Administer Justice, a faith-based legal aid organization, operates in Kane and DuPage counties. Local residents also benefit from the Northern Illinois University (NIU) College of Law's clinical programs, which are located in Rockford and Aurora.

PSLS faced declining revenues in 2010-2011. In response, the program made a number of changes, including closing its Galesburg office, cutting the hours of its telephone intake staff, and reducing its staff by a total of 17 FTEs. The program avoided further layoffs in 2012, and, due largely to receipt of national foreclosure settlement monies, hired 20 new staff members in 2012-2013. By the end of 2012, PSLs employed 121 staff; at the time of the October 2013 PQV, the program's staff numbered close to 140 persons.

PSLS' 2012 revenue, totaling \$8,588,549, came from over 80 different sources. Its 2012, its LSC funding was \$2,615,672. PSLs also secured \$118,475 in Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) funding from LSC in 2012 to develop a data collection, mapping, and reporting system. PSLs received \$5,972,877 in non-LSC funding in 2012. This sum included \$1,700,000 from the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois (LTF). The bulk of this amount, \$1,672,500, was Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) funds; the balance was monies from other sources that LTF

² Conor Dougherty, "Welcome to Rockford, Ill., the Underwater Mortgage Capital of America," Wall Street Journal, September 8, 2013.

³ "Pembroke Township: Mired In Poverty, Now Devastated By Tornadoes, With No Help In Sight," <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/09/html>; Whet Moser, "The Ongoing Poverty of Pembroke, Illinois," Chicago Magazine, September 2011, <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/The-312/September-2011/The-Ongoing-Poverty-of-Pembroke-Illinois/>.

⁴ <http://igpa.uillinois.edu/content/census-reveals-population-change-illinois>.

administers.⁵ PSLs secured a number of federal and state grants, including the first portion of the \$4.5 million it was awarded by Illinois' Office of the Attorney General. It received \$494,692 in corporate and individual contributions and \$13,272 in *cypres* funds. The program's total revenue for 2013 was \$8,773,471; \$2,800,594 of this amount was basic field funding from LSC.

After enacting the Illinois Equal Justice Act in 1999, Illinois established a state appropriation for civil legal aid and formed the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) to annually distribute the monies. PSLs received \$290,400 from IEJF in 2012. The Illinois Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission was formed in June 2012 under the guidance of then Chief Justice Thomas Kilbride, a former member of PSLs' staff. PSLs' first director, Joseph Dailing, volunteered his services as the commission's initial director. In 2013, Illinois passed the "Access to Justice Act," pursuant to which, the state's Access to Justice Commission will focus on language access, standardized forms, and medical-legal partnerships.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

PSLS attracts highly qualified staff at all levels and in all locations. The program has a well-respected executive director, an impressive senior management cohort, a dedicated group of managing attorneys and project directors, energetic senior and mid-level staff, and new staff members who appear fully invested in the program's mission. Staffers throughout the program project a feeling of optimism. They appear infused with a sense of opportunity and growth, despite being in the midst of tough economic times. PSLs effectively integrates private attorneys, paralegals, law students, student interns, and other volunteers into its daily work.

The program has well thought-out priorities, which are framed in a strongly client-centered and holistic manner. The priorities, which directly correspond to the importance of legal assistance to the lives, health, safety, and welfare of clients and their families, are based on human need rather than particular subject areas.

In 2013, PSLs' senior management and board commenced a thoughtful strategic planning process. The program is beginning to implement the plan, which the board approved in late September 2013. The planning effort demonstrates the program's deep commitment to continually improving its effectiveness on numerous levels.

PSLS has a multi-faceted intake system. Its coordinated Telephone Counseling System (TCS) is designed to timely respond to high priority and emergency calls from throughout its service area. Individuals can also access the program through hotlines, at community sites and courthouses, through referrals, or by calling or walking into a local office. In addition, PSLs is part of the new statewide online access system overseen by the LSC-funded Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation (LOLLAF).

In order to serve the growing number of clients who speak a language other than English as their primary language, the program has hired a sufficient number of staff fluent in Spanish and uses *LanguageLine* to respond to other language requests. The program recently updated its

⁵ PSLs and other Illinois civil legal services providers will ultimately benefit from a 2012 increase (from \$289 to \$342) in the state's annual attorney license registration fee. Monies from this increase will be dispersed by the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois.

limited English proficiency (LEP) procedures to ensure the quality of its language services. PSLS must now take additional steps to bring the revised plan to fruition.

Under the leadership of its director of advocacy and training, PSLS offers an impressive training and orientation process. The training is proactive and customized for the various groups working at PSLS, whether they are new or longer-term staff, volunteers, VISTAs, or private attorneys.

PSLS' PAI program, previously handled locally, will now be overseen by a management level attorney. This will give PSLS the opportunity to coordinate all its *pro bono* efforts, to expand its outreach to local attorneys and bar associations, to develop partnerships with additional corporations and other entities in the service area, and to add a strategic element to the volunteer lawyer component of PSLS' work.

PSLS' 21-member board is, for the most part, highly engaged in the work of the program. It has an effective committee structure. The board was particularly responsive as PSLS confronted funding changes and engaged in strategic planning. It should take steps to promote fuller and even more effective board member engagement.

PSLS continues to develop its funding sources. It receives grants from numerous local, state, and national sources. The program's Campaign for Legal Services is well-supported by local volunteer campaign committees composed of attorneys and business leaders; some of these volunteers later go on to serve on its board. Notwithstanding PSLS' growth in both size and revenue, it does not have the database needed to efficiently maintain its resource development efforts. PSLS must take steps to facilitate the capable administration of this essential component of its program.

PSLS enjoys deep ties throughout its service area. Many advocates and staff are active in the communities they serve. PSLS collaborates with numerous local, state, and national organizations to address the low-income community's most pressing legal needs.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PERFORMANCE AREA ONE. Effectiveness in identifying the most pressing civil legal needs of low-income people in the service area and targeting resources to address those needs.

Criterion 1. Periodic comprehensive assessment and ongoing consideration of legal needs.

Finding 1. PSLS conducts regular assessments of the legal needs of its constituents.

PSLS has sought to maintain an effective presence throughout its service area. Its staff and board extensively survey low-income persons and key community personnel every three years to ascertain the community's needs for legal services. The program's most recent assessment was conducted in 2010-11. PSLS made efforts to reach Spanish-speaking and rural clients, as well as residents of homeless shelters, veterans, and other under-served groups. PSLS canvassed providers who would be aware of the legal and other needs of those facing special access issues. The program intends to conduct another assessment in 2014.

In the interim, program staff regularly participates in numerous community groups such as multidisciplinary elder abuse teams, Continuums of Care, and domestic violence coordinating councils to stay informed of the changing needs of its client population.

PSLS is leading a statewide TIG-funded project, begun in January 2013, to create an aggregated data collection, mapping, and reporting system that will better measure the effectiveness of Illinois' legal services programs and inform the strategies they use to meet clients' legal needs. This system will enable PSLs to analyze the client service data from its database as well as from the databases of LOLLAF and the Chicago-based LAF, Illinois' two other LSC-funded programs, and from external sources such as Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO) and self-help desks to determine how clients are being served.

Criterion 2. Setting goals and objectives, developing strategies and allocating resources.

Finding 2. PSLs engages in regular priority setting, which has framed the program's priorities in a client-centered and holistic manner.

Based on its needs assessment, PSLs established well thought-out priorities in late 2011, which were re-adopted by the program's board in late 2012. The program framed its priorities in a manner that is strongly client-centered and holistic. They are based on human need rather than particular subject areas, and directly correspond to the impact of legal proceedings on the lives, health, safety, and welfare of clients and their families.

PSLS gives first priority to protecting eligible persons from serious risk to health or safety in situations where there is a legal remedy, such as certain abuse cases, utility shut-offs, and denials of essential medical care. The program's next priority, ensuring basic human needs, covers access to needs-based government benefits and necessary medical care, as well as securing affordable housing and the safety of children. PSLs clearly states its case acceptance guidelines and notes how they are impacted by the priorities it has set.

Finding 3. The program has a strategic plan that should assist it in fulfilling its mission and meeting client, staff, and board needs for the near future.

PSLS' mission is "to provide or coordinate the delivery of high quality legal services to low income individuals, families and groups." It aims to deliver legal services that are "directed to protecting the client's basic human needs, including income, shelter and physical safety, enhancing the client's independence, and resolving related legal problems."

To fulfill its mission, the program commenced a thoughtful strategic planning process in late 2012. It last engaged in such planning in 2007. Working with a Chicago-based consulting firm, the program spent the first three-quarters of the year engaging in a series of conversations. In early 2013, the consultant held a full-day meeting of the managing attorneys; she next met with the board. A committee composed of board and management members then engaged in strategic visioning and drafted a plan. The strategic plan identifies how PSLs can strengthen its effectiveness on behalf of the client community and improve its internal operations.

PSLS' board approved this plan during its September 27-28, 2013 retreat, shortly before the PQV took place. The board also determined that, during 2013-14, the program should pursue

five strategic goals and achieve seven different outcome measures. The plan was presented to PSLS' full staff at the program's annual retreat in early November 2013. Until the retreat, most of the program's staff had not participated in this process.

Recommendation I.2.3.1*:⁶

PSLS should now involve interested staff from throughout the program in the implementation committee(s) it establishes, to ensure the successful enactment of the strategic plan.

Recommendation I.2.3.2*:

Program leadership should be strategic about the goals it aims to achieve first and should develop a logical timeline for implementation of its strategic plan.

Criterion 3. Implementation.

Finding 4. PSLS makes programmatic changes in response to its timely assessment of client needs.

The program regularly takes steps to remain responsive to emerging client needs. For example, before PSLS received national foreclosure settlement monies, it formed a team of staff attorneys to develop foreclosure expertise, and arranged for them to receive training. In one county, the program collaborated with the court and the local bar association to create an advice desk where private attorneys provided advice on foreclosure cases.

PSLS is also addressing the impact on low-income persons of changes in Illinois' Medicaid budget and the roll-out of the state's health care exchange. After identifying serious problems in Illinois' administration of its Home-Based Services Program, it negotiated a larger grant to cover such cases and conducted additional staff training. Given the growth in the number of tax cases it handles, PSLS added staff and expanded its Low Income Tax Clinic (LITC). The program has increasingly engaged in work related to veterans' issues. In addition to representing individual veterans in a variety of cases, PSLS has conducted VISTA-funded outreach and education aimed at veterans since 2011. Begun in Rockford, this effort expanded to cover much of the northern part of PSLS' service area. PSLS will be opening a veterans' legal clinic in the Waukegan area.

Criterion 4. Evaluation and adjustment.

Finding 5. PSLS takes a number of steps to measure the effectiveness of its work.

PSLS created a common client satisfaction survey for its telephone advice services and developed a module to enter the results in *LegalServer*. Every month, it sends regular intake

⁶ Recommendations in this report will have a Roman Numeral to identify the Performance Area, followed by three numbers identifying, respectively, the Criterion addressed by the recommendation, the number of the finding and a number designating whether it is the first, second, third, etc., recommendation under that finding. For example, III.2.14.3 designates Performance Area III, Criterion 2, finding 14, and the third recommendation under finding 14. There are two levels of recommendations in this report: Tier One and Tier Two. Recommendations that are indicated with an asterisk are Tier One recommendations and are seen as having a greater impact on program quality and/or program performance. In its next Application or Renewal, the program will be asked to report on its implementation of Tier One recommendations.

counseling surveys to a random selection of clients who received advice. The program attempts to survey all seniors and Spanish-speaking clients at the close of an advice case. Satisfaction surveys are also sent to a random sample of the program's foreclosure clients.

The program is reflective about the nature of its work. For example, the managing attorney and a litigation director are in the process of determining how to diversify the legal work in one office, which is heavily weighted toward family law matters.

PSLS' efforts are periodically evaluated by a number of its funders. United Way and other local grantors make regular visits, HUD has conducted a number of program reviews, and the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation made a site visit in late October 2013.

PSLS also looks outside the program to assess the services it provides. It was one of seven Illinois programs that participated in a 2010-12 study sponsored by the Chicago Bar Foundation, the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, the Illinois Bar Foundation, the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, and the Polk Bros. Foundation. The study examined the results of slightly more than 8,000 civil cases closed in 2010 and measured the economic outcomes that were realized. The results demonstrated that "[i]n the course of achieving these outcomes, legal aid also provides clients and other Illinoisans with tangible economic benefits. These include monetary awards that help low-income clients meet their financial obligations; increased demand for goods and services, household income, and employment from federal benefits cases; and costs of harm avoided from homelessness and domestic violence."⁷

PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. Effectiveness in engaging and serving the low-income population throughout the service area.

Criterion 1. Dignity and sensitivity.

Finding 6. The program's offices, which are strategically located throughout its service area, maintain office hours and procedures designed to promote access. The program is sensitive to the needs of its clients.

PSLS' sensitivity to the needs of its client population is reflected in its maintenance of offices and other intake and access sites throughout its extensive service area. All eleven of its offices are open daily from 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM. Some individual offices remain open to receive telephone calls during the lunch hour; callers to the offices that are closed during the lunch hour are able to leave a voice mail message.

The PQV team visited the program's offices located in Bloomington, McHenry, Ottawa, Peoria, Rockford, St. Charles, Waukegan, and Wheaton. These offices are centrally located, and close to courthouses and other agency sites, as well as to sources of transportation. The program aims to ensure that its offices are easily accessible to clients and others with mobility issues. The Wheaton office, which lacks an elevator, had accessible space on its first floor for meeting with clients. In addition, advocates regularly conduct intake and interviews at homeless shelters and senior centers, and make home, hospital, or nursing home visits to accommodate individual

⁷ Kushner, J., "Legal Aid in Illinois: Selected Social and Economic Benefits," Chicago: Social IMPACT Research Center (May 2012) at 1.

clients. The team learned the signage for the Rock Island office is not obvious from the street, although it appears that the location of the office is well known to the client community.

The program's Access Committee, which first concentrated on intake-related issues, now focuses on ensuring that clients do not confront barriers when seeking service. In its *Professional Standards and Developmental Guidelines for Staff Attorneys*, PSLS established clear guidelines for how staff should deal on a professional basis with clients as well as colleagues.

Recommendation II.1.6.1:

PSLS should take all possible steps to ensure that its offices are clearly marked for clients.

Finding 7. The program has a multi-faceted intake system designed to meet client needs throughout the service area.

PSLS offers several program-wide intake systems, some of which are aimed at particular client groups, as well as an array of local intake options, such as walk-ins, off-site intake, and referrals from various organizations and social service agencies. Its multi-faceted system is designed to make it easy for individuals to contact PSLS when they have a legal problem.

More than three-quarters (77%) of PSLS' intake is conducted over the telephone. In addition to the Telephone Counseling Service's toll-free number, all 11 offices have local and toll-free numbers. PSLS' Access Committee tested strategies to ease access problems. PSLS instituted a TCS telephone tree, which enabled more high priority callers to get through to staff. PSLS also changed its intake messaging to reduce call volume, particularly related to family calls. By providing such calling options, PSLS reduced the length of wait times and lowered the number of dropped calls.

Telephone Counseling Service - The service is a coordinated telephone intake system designed for callers with general legal problems. The TCS, located in the Wheaton and Waukegan offices, is overseen by a managing attorney in the Waukegan office and a supervising attorney in the Wheaton office. It is staffed by four intake specialists and nine telephone counselors. Intake specialists are non-attorneys who assess client eligibility and legal issues. One bilingual intake specialist fields all the calls from Spanish-speaking applicants. These calls are then referred to a Spanish-speaking telephone counselor, who works until 6:00 PM once a week in order to reach people who may be available later in the day. The telephone counselors are experienced attorneys who either provide legal advice to persons receiving limited service or transfer cases to local offices for extended representation.

The TCS accepts calls from throughout PSLS' service area, offering equal access to rural and urban clients. The TCS is open Monday through Thursday from 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM; starting in late 2011, it closed on Fridays. Although most TCS employees now work on a part-time basis, all of them are available when the system is open. They continue working until 2:00 PM to finish calls, complete notes, and prepare advice letters for limited service clients. According to the unit's managing attorney, the TCS averages 86 calls per day with each counselor handling an average of six to seven calls during each four hour shift.

Although the TCS can be called directly, the program made a conscious decision not to advertise the TCS' toll-free telephone number. It does appear on some informational materials,

and callers may obtain the number if they are referred to PSLs by another provider. Also, PSLs' website directs Spanish-speaking applicants to the TCS. For the most part, callers are directed to the regional offices to initiate their applications for assistance. In some cases, the local office staff takes the application; other callers are seamlessly transferred to TCS.

The program created sophisticated telephone trees so that callers can better self-identify whether PSLs can assist them. TCS has a high-priority queue, designed for callers with issues such as evictions, lockouts, utility shut-offs, domestic violence, and benefit terminations. Almost all of the callers who enter this queue talk with someone fairly quickly. The second queue is for lower priority calls. TCS' supervisors keep tabs on the system and periodically instruct staff to log into the low-priority queue. PSLs also added a call-back feature. TCS staff tries to reach such callers three times over the course of two days. PSLs ensures that it maintains the confidential nature of these calls; the program's number does not show up on Caller ID and its recorded message advises callers to indicate whether or not PSLs should leave a message.

In most instances, the telephone counselors provide callers with advice. They generally conclude such calls by sending the client a letter detailing the advice and including supportive brochures or other materials. Based on its surveys, PSLs determined that a majority of its clients have email. In such instances, TCS emails the letter and satisfaction survey and includes additional resource information along with links to websites that might provide additional help.

Telephone counselors refer cases for extended representation based on each regional office's current case acceptance guidelines, which are continuously revised depending on changes in an office's funding and staff. Those applications are transferred through the *LegalServer* case management system. The clients are informed that their application is being transferred; they are given the office's phone number, and advised they should contact the office if they do not hear back within two days. If the call involves an emergency, the telephone counselor will call the local office and give them the caller's name and the case number. All of the offices have an "on-call" person who is prepared to handle emergencies on a daily basis.

Due largely to PSLs' limited office space, the telephone counselors are eligible to telecommute from home for half of the work week after they have worked at the program for one full year. PSLs provides telecommuters with an impressive array of tools to ensure that they can properly do their jobs remotely. In its final TIG report, PSLs noted that its telework policy had a positive impact on TCS' staff morale. Despite alternating between working from home and in the office, telephone counselors appear to stay well-connected to their colleagues and supervisors.

The two supervisors review all files that are closed on a daily basis, both to check for compliance issues and ensure that all legal issues are addressed. If something is overlooked, the counselor will call the person back. Two or three times a year, TCS' entire staff, including those who handle the seniors' hotline, meets as a group in either the Wheaton or Waukegan office to review procedures and discuss TCS-specific issues. Other staff attorneys are sometimes invited to join the discussion.

All TCS' staff receives basic training regarding the operation of the telephone system and *LegalServer*, and relating to substantive legal issues. *LegalServer* contains a library of stored questions that previous callers have posed along with the answers PSLs provided them. The staff has access to the ISBA Journal and additional resources, including substantive trainings prepared

by PSLS and other entities that are available through GoToMeeting and webinars. The supervisors also regularly forward updates and articles by email.

Older Adults Legal Helpline - This helpline, which operates within the TCS, was established with Retirement Research Foundation funding that PSLS first received in July 2011. TCS' basic telephone message diverts callers 60 years old and older to a dedicated phone line staffed by a part-time intake specialist and part-time telephone counselor. The helpline has slightly expanded intake hours, from 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM to increase access and decrease the time callers are on hold. When the senior helpline queue is crowded, TCS' intake specialists will assist in answering calls. The helpline receives calls concerning debt and collection issues, estate issues, wills, powers of attorney, nursing home issues, and questions involving Medicaid and Medicare.

Legal Help for Homeowner's Project - PSLS used its foreclosure monies to set up a separate telephone hotline with a dedicated toll-free number for homeowners and tenants confronting foreclosures. Incoming calls are accepted five days a week, from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM. Applicants who come into an office are given either the project's number or the opportunity to call from the local office. The project's intake staff, composed of two attorneys and one non-attorney, conducts all of the screenings, as the eligibility thresholds are different. They use a specific questionnaire to assist them in making decisions about how to respond to individual applications. After the screening is completed, the project's supervisors make an initial determination about how to proceed.

Special Projects - PSLS has direct lines for its Low Income Tax Clinic (LITC) and its Fair Housing Education and Outreach Initiatives Program. Callers to the LITC reach a voice mail message asking them to leave a message and informing them that an advocate will call back within seven business days. This message is not in Spanish. The LITC receives about 30 calls a month. Staff distributes the telephone number when they participate in community outreach and education events. The fair housing project had two separate numbers⁸ which are not listed on PSLS' website page for special projects. Despite being active in two different regional offices, the project's telephone number is only available through the Waukegan office's webpage.

Local Offices - Applicants can directly apply for services at the regional offices, using either the office's local or toll free numbers. Callers whose problems fall outside that office's acceptance guidelines for extended representation are transferred to the TCS. Some of the offices designate walk-in hours on specific days each week; 8% of the program's intake occurs in this manner.

Out-of-Office Intake - PSLS provides numerous opportunities for individuals to apply for assistance at community agencies, homeless shelters, and courthouse-based projects. Fifteen years ago, PSLS partnered with the court and local shelters in St. Charles and started a courthouse project to address domestic violence issues. PSLS has an office in the courthouse to conduct intake; staff use laptops to remotely determine income eligibility and check for conflicts.

Referrals - PSLS also encourages referrals by other service providers. It has a page on its website that informs such providers how to best contact the program. Clients are regularly

⁸ As of January 1, 2014, PSLS expanded its fair housing project to the Peoria region and installed a new, program-wide toll-free number for the entire project. The voice mail message on the new hotline is only in English.

referred by entities such as domestic violence shelters. At one office, the shelter emails an attorney so that the office can directly contact the potential client and set up an appointment.

Online Access - PSLS is taking part in the development and implementation of a statewide online and triage access system. Using ILAO as the intake portal, individuals with certain types of problems will be encouraged to complete the online assistance process. People who, given the nature of their problem, are not likely to receive assistance will be directed to other, more appropriate, agencies. When the PQV took place, PSLS was not yet utilizing this method.

PSLS' wide array of access points is impressive, and likely benefits many clients. However, there is no program-wide coordination of all the staff members involved in PSLS' various intake components. The local administrative staffers who conduct intake do not take part in intake meetings or trainings. Intake specialists expressed an interest in receiving additional training to enhance their customer service skills, expand their knowledge of the Illinois judicial system, and expose them to the basics in the substantive areas of law related to PSLS' practice.

Recommendation II.1.7.1:

When it is financially feasible, PSLS should explore expanding the TCS' intake schedule to include more flexible hours to accommodate as many potential clients as possible.

Recommendation II.1.7.2*:

PSLS should translate the telephone messages for the Low Income Tax Clinic's and fair housing project's intake lines into Spanish.

Recommendation II.1.7.3*:

When PSLS posts its new website, it should ensure that the telephone numbers for its special projects, such as its fair housing enforcement efforts, are featured more prominently.

Recommendation II.1.7.4*:

PSLS should consider ways for intake specialists and telephone counselors from the TCS and the Older Adult Legal Helpline to meet with the foreclosure hotline's intake staffers on a periodic basis so they can discuss common issues and concerns, and share ideas and best practices. PSLS should determine how to effectively include the local administrative staff who conduct intake in the intake meetings, trainings, and other discussions.

Recommendation II.1.7.5:

PSLS should develop additional training for its intake specialists and the other administrative staff who regularly conduct intake.

Finding 8. PSLS, which has a growing non-English speaking client population in its service area, has undertaken a number of efforts to meet this population's needs.

There has been an increase in the number of residents with limited English speaking proficiency living in PSLS' service area. While linguistically-isolated households total only 3.8% of all households in the service area, there has been a significant growth in such households since 2000. PSLS' service area experienced a 12% increase in total households from 2000 to

2012; during that same time period, the linguistically isolated households increased by 44%.⁹ The percentages in some parts of the region are now substantial; in Kane County, 10% of the total households are now linguistically isolated. Census data shows that the number of Spanish-speaking linguistically isolated households living in Boone County near the program's Rockford office experienced a 50% increase.

The program's Spanish language capacity has been bolstered by the employment of several persons who are bilingual in Spanish and the designation of an LEP coordinator. In the PSLs offices without such capability, bilingual staff from other offices and from the TCS provides necessary translation services. The program also continues to recruit Spanish-speaking staff and has supported staff taking Spanish language classes. PSLs uses *LanguageLine* to address the language needs of other populations with limited English proficiency. One of its newest staff attorneys speaks Arabic.

PSLS' LEP coordinator, who is an attorney for the TCS, has formal responsibility for language access at the program. Her duties include developing organizational policy, assisting in the hiring process for Spanish-speaking staff, and ensuring that new staff are trained about the resources available to clients who are limited-English proficient. With her pending retirement in 2014, the program should consider the best ways to continue its language access progress.

The program's 2012 LEP plan, developed by its LEP coordinator, along with members of the program's administration, incorporates current policies and effective practices on language access. However, PSLs did not involve a broader cross section of staff, including bilingual staff and managing attorneys, in the plan's development. Greater staff involvement is essential for successful implementation of the LEP plan, particularly given the distinctive demographic differences of each office's service area.

Interviews with program staff indicated that they were knowledgeable of PSLs' LEP policies and their responsibilities to ensure access to services for persons with language barriers. Some staff conveyed that using *LanguageLine* "takes double the time," a sentiment acknowledged by the LEP coordinator. Other legal aid programs facing similar issues have provided ongoing trainings and implemented process improvements to improve seamless and prompt access interpretation services. Some PSLs staff also acknowledged that additional outreach to LEP communities would help address cultural barriers and establish stronger community ties to the program. Training on the LEP plan's elements and on cultural competency should be provided to all staff.

Some of PSLs' offices have translated many critical program forms and documents into Spanish; others have not done so. The LEP plan defers determination of whether a document is "vital" for purposes of translation to individual offices and to the LEP coordinator. Best practices in other legal aid organizations encourages program-wide uniformity in defining vital documents which include, at a minimum, retainer agreements, release forms, opening and closing letters. PSLs' website, www.pslegal.org, is currently largely available in English only. One of its pages contains a basic invitation to contact the program in Croatian, Filipino, Haitian Creole, Polish, and Swahili, as well as Spanish. At the time of the PQV, there were no references on the

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates (2008-2012), Table B16002; and 2000 Decennial Census, Table P020.

program's home page to any of these languages. PSLS is in the process of implementing improved online translation tools for potential clients; this will eventually permit users to view the website in the five most prevalent languages in its service area.

Recommendation II.1.8.1*:

PSLS should establish program-wide standards for identifying and translating vital documents into the primary language(s) spoken by limited-English proficient persons, particularly Spanish.

Recommendation II.1.8.2*:

PSLS should convene a standing language access committee charged to support the LEP coordinator in the effective, ongoing implementation of the LEP plan. This committee can also develop strategies for effective community outreach, identify appropriate training for staff, and ensure the most streamlined process for accessing interpretation services. Its efforts would dovetail with the statewide work of Illinois' Access to Justice Commission.

Recommendation II.1.8.3:

PSLS should ensure that its bilingual staff has the supports necessary to effectively provide high-quality client services. Supports should include effective assessment of staff language capability and the additional training, workload adjustments, and/or compensation for staff members who are expected to provide interpretation services for PSLS.

Criteria 2. & 3. Engagement with the low-income population/Access and utilization by the low-income population.

Finding 9. PSLS conducts numerous outreach efforts, aimed at both potential clients and the lay advocates that assist them, and is actively engaged with the client community.

PSLS' staffers are active in the communities where they work; their involvement is encouraged by the program. Some serve on the boards of local groups, such as the Continuums of Care and county homeless coalitions. Others collaborate with providers addressing issues relating to seniors, hunger, and domestic violence. Many of PSLS' staffers conduct outreach at community health centers, shelters, and transitional housing for persons with HIV/AIDS. Foreclosure attorneys interact with homeowners associations, the NAACP, and housing counselors. Advocates in Waukegan and Rockford are reaching out to veterans.

Advocates make presentations on a wide range of topics to groups including tenants, grandparents, and seniors, and associated lay advocates. One attorney trained the local police and sheriff's departments about domestic violence-related issues. Another attorney composes radio spots on housing issues. PSLS has made effective use of technology in presenting webinars to individuals who are unable to attend "live" sessions and groups of social services providers and community organizations. PSLS has held webinars on changes in Illinois' Medicaid system and issues faced by distressed homeowners. A recent webinar was interactive.

PSLS' strategic plan recognizes a need for deeper involvement and more regular collaboration with local organizations regarding advocacy on issues of community concern. Its fair housing outreach efforts are a good example of its current collaboration with organizations concerned with issues of discrimination such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Voz Latina, and League of United Latin American Citizens

(LULAC). Another example is PSLs' ongoing partnership with the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law (Shriver Center) on advocacy concerning the demolition of Rockford's public housing¹⁰ and the city's mandated provision of new affordable housing options.

PERFORMANCE AREA THREE. Effectiveness of legal representation and other program activities intended to benefit the low-income population in its service area.

Criterion 1. Legal Representation.

Finding 10. The program has a solid system for the management and supervision of its legal work.

PSLS has made significant efforts, including the development and implementation of excellent performance standards, to ensure the thorough management and supervision of its legal work. Its *Professional Standards and Developmental Guidelines for Staff Attorneys* includes sections on case handling and supervision procedures; consistent use of *LegalServer*, including case notes and documents uploaded to client files; confirmation of advice, in writing, as appropriate; and preparation of case plans outlining the issues, strategy, and next steps.

New attorneys are closely supervised and mentored for the initial months of their employment. This supervision extends to the work of all advocates. After cases are assigned at case acceptance meetings, which occur weekly in almost all of the regional offices, managing attorneys stay on top of individual advocates' open cases. There are regular open case reviews, and every case is reviewed by a supervisor before it is closed. Managing attorneys utilize *LegalServer* to review cases and send messages within the electronic case. Legal work to be filed in court is reviewed by a senior staff member before it is submitted. Advocates are in regular contact with extended representation clients, and provide letters explaining advice provided. Paralegals attend case acceptance meetings, trainings, and task forces, and have their work reviewed by supervising attorneys.

For some of PSLs' special projects, the advocate's work is supervised by the project's director as well as by PSLs' associate director. Some projects hold separate case acceptance meetings by telephone with the participating staff spread among the offices. The foreclosure unit has successfully used video conferencing and Google Hangouts for its case assignment meetings. The LITC takes part in monthly conference calls with all of the other IRS-funded low income taxpayer clinics in Illinois.

The managing attorneys' case work is reviewed by the associate director, the litigation directors, or the director of advocacy and training. The program aims to have these reviews occur twice yearly, but they more frequently happen once a year and do not follow clearly defined protocols.

The staff holds the directors of litigation and the director of advocacy and training in very high regard, not only for their substantive knowledge and expertise but also because of their availability, patience, and supportive approach to attorneys' questions and requests for help. In

¹⁰ The programs entered a consent decree on behalf of their clients, who were residents of Jane Addams Village, a federally-funded housing project. *Jones v. HUD*, No. 07 C 50142 (N.D. Ill. Jan. 24, 2008)

addition, PSLs has a rich culture of informal supervision. Supervisors have “open door” policies, and case discussions and informal mentoring take place among colleagues.

PSLS makes good use of central calendars for each office that allow staff to coordinate work such as submitting filings and picking up documents in the distant counties. In 2013, PSLs received LTF funding which enabled it to hire litigation clerks to handle court documents in Waukegan and Rockford. There is consistent use of tickler systems in all offices.

PSLS has substantive law task forces, overseen by the litigation directors, which cover public benefits, family, housing, consumer, and elder law, as well as *pro bono*. The program also has committees that focus on foreclosure, SSI/SSD, home-based services, and access. These groups meet several times a year, although some groups meet less frequently. Between meetings, groups may conduct telephone discussions. Task force leaders keep group members up-to-date by maintaining internal listservs to share information on changes in the law, expertise, and strategies, and to provide assistance on difficult cases. Many staff members sign up for listservs even if they are not part of a specific task force, as a means of staying on top of various legal developments.

Despite its existing systems, the program lacks a well-organized knowledge management structure. The listservs do not appear to be used to full advantage. Task force leaders do not consistently post materials on the intranet, and PSLs has no shared network of pleadings or other court documents. (PSLS has since purchased brief bank capability accessible through Westlaw.) By sharing pleadings and other templates, PSLs could highlight the program’s best work and improve the quality of the entire agency’s efforts. Task forces do not maintain electronic folders of stored communications and related materials. Although senior attorneys appear to know where to look for documents and other materials, it is crucial that a program with so many new staff maintain a well-organized, user-friendly system.

Advocates have access to a wide variety of external supports for their legal work, including statewide and national substantive listservs; national support centers and organizations such as the National Consumer Law Center and Management Information Exchange (MIE); and extensive online resources such as WestlawNext and Illinois Bar practice materials. The ILAO’s statewide website provides access to a wide range of materials, including Illinois’ Institute of Continuing Legal Education’s online Smart Books and HotDocs pleadings.

Recommendation III.1.10.1*:

PSLS should design a system to provide for the regular review of the cases being handled by its managing attorneys. This could include peer reviews.

Recommendation III.1.10.2:

Given the essential role of the task forces and the influx of so many new employees, PSLs should encourage the task forces to meet more regularly. As part of this effort, PSLs should expand its use of video conferencing.

Recommendation III.1.10.3*:

PSLS should establish an accessible knowledge management system that will serve as the internal clearinghouse for substantive legal resources throughout the program. In the process, PSLs should promptly complete the implementation of its brief bank.

Finding 11. PSLS’ training mechanisms are well-developed and fully support the legal work of the program, including those who serve in a volunteer capacity.

PSLS’ director of advocacy and training actively oversees the training needs of the program’s entire staff as well as its volunteers. PSLS makes ongoing training a priority, and all PSLS staff has ample access to training opportunities. The director developed an orientation and basic lawyer training protocol for new employees, which includes multiple webinars on office systems (*LegalServer*, LSC compliance, grant reporting, etc.) as well as substantive and skills-related sessions. The protocol is strictly adhered to and is accompanied by close supervision and mentoring during the first months of a new employee’s tenure.

PSLS provides ongoing skills training and regular opportunities to attend program and statewide conferences, as well as webinars. Training is often a component of the program-wide task force meetings as well as of the annual retreat. The program takes advantage of its internal talent for training presentations. For example, one of the program’s staff attorneys conducted a bankruptcy presentation for the family law task force. The training director continually looks for specific training opportunities for individual attorneys to enhance both their substantive knowledge and advocacy skills. Periodically, the staff is surveyed regarding training needs. At the time of the PQV, PSLS was expanding its Rockford office to include a spacious training room. PSLS will be able to record trainings that are conducted there and make them available to staff throughout the program.

All full-time attorneys are offered access to ISBA trainings. The Chicago Bar Foundation sponsors the membership of all PSLS attorneys in the Practicing Law Institute; this enables them to attend trainings, including those online. Advocates may all take part in the two-day Illinois Legal Aid Advocates Conference training – offered by the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, the Chicago Bar Foundation, and the Illinois Bar Foundation – that includes sessions on a wide range of substantive areas and advocacy skills.

PSLS conducts a basic *pro bono* training in conjunction with LOLLAF and ISBA’s Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services. PSLS’ board president, the committee’s CLE Coordinator, is one of the event’s coordinators. Attendees who commit to handle one *pro bono* case receive free training as well as MCLE credit.

PSLS developed extensive orientation materials for its VISTAs, volunteers, law students, and other interns related to the history and structure of PSLS, its service and mission, and the resources that are available to them. PSLS also provides a suggested reading list and a “to do” list to help new volunteers get an effective start.

Finding 12. PSLS has a highly qualified advocacy staff that utilizes the full range of advocacy tools to meet their clients’ needs.

PSLS’ highly qualified advocacy staff exhibits positive energy and appears to work hard on behalf of their clients, achieving many positive outcomes. The program enjoys a healthy mix of experienced and newer advocates. Almost half of PSLS’ attorneys have at least ten years of legal experience. PSLS’ associate director, two directors of litigation, and director of advocacy

and training, all have a minimum of 30 years of legal experience.¹¹ Of PSLs' managing attorneys,¹² eight have at least 15 years of legal services experience.

The program's advocates engage in work ranging from advice and negotiation to aggressive representation and appellate work in state and federal courts. Four-fifths (80.9.7%) of the cases PSLs closed in 2012 were limited service cases, slightly more than the national average of 77.4%. PSLs aims to expand its extended client representation.

Although many of PSLs' staff attorneys have a specialty, a large number of advocates, particularly those in the program's smaller offices, are generalists representing clients across the spectrum. Even those assisting specialized client populations often represent clients in a wide variety of matters. Attorneys working with seniors have caseloads that include powers of attorney, credit card debt issues, foreclosures, and other housing issues. Attorneys assisting homeless clients confront issues relating to Social Security disability, family cases involving spousal maintenance, bankruptcies, and Section 8 terminations.

One notable case evolved from PSLs' work with local homeless shelters. PSLs became aware that some nursing homes "dumped" some disabled residents in homeless shelters. After a nursing home "dumped" a resident who is an amputee at a homeless shelter, PSLs filed suit seeking damages for its client as well as attorneys' fees. PSLs obtained an injunction requiring the nursing home to reinstate the prior resident. The results of this case are likely to resonate beyond the individual case.

PSLS administers several court-based projects. Through access to the computer system managed by the court clerk's office in St. Charles, PSLs is able to prepare orders of protection and transmit them electronically to the sheriff's office for service after they have been signed. It also has a number of eviction-focused projects. In DuPage County, PSLs' administers a courthouse project funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding that accounts for almost all of the office's eviction cases. In Rock Island, PSLs developed its project with the assistance of the Public Interest Law Initiative and the Civil Division's Arbitration Supervising Judge. PSLs assists local tenants with the help of volunteers, some of whom are from Deere & Company.

The writing samples reviewed were generally good. They demonstrated a solid command of the law and typically made concise yet persuasive arguments on behalf of clients. The polished quality of the writing can be attributed in no small measure to PSLs' standard that court filings require supervisory review.

Although PSLs has historically engaged in systemic advocacy, and some is currently taking place, the program acknowledges that it does not emphasize such work. Some attorneys reported that they did not see PSLs as expecting them to undertake such advocacy. In other instances, advocates must balance between their need to perform specific work that satisfies

¹¹ Bernard H. Shapiro, one of PSLs' directors of litigation, received the Joseph R. Bartylak Memorial Legal Services Award from the Illinois State Bar Association in June 2013.

¹² At the time of the PQV, the program was in the midst of making a number of management changes. Some existing staff members were about to assume or increase their managerial responsibilities, and PSLs had just hired an external attorney with eight years of legal services experience to head its Joliet office.

grant requirements and their pursuit of broader efforts. Some attorneys have achieved good results by addressing larger issues on a case-by-case basis, such as the arbitrary reductions in home-based support services. And, PSLs' benefits task force is working with other Illinois providers, including LAF and LOLLAF, to address the state's efforts to reduce home health and community-based services. Along with other legal services agencies, PSLs was a party to an amicus brief to the Illinois Supreme Court in a case responding to one of these changes.¹³ The program submitted comments to Illinois' Department of Human Services' (DHS) regarding proposed regulatory changes that would limit services to disabled persons living at home. Many of the writing samples reviewed by the team indicated that advocates are pursuing matters that will have an impact on more than the individual client. As noted, below, the foreclosure project is pursuing banks for not following the law. Housing attorneys have challenged housing authorities for not providing due process in both evictions and denial or termination of Section 8 benefits. Tax attorneys are encouraged to take cases to court when they do not obtain a favorable outcome from the IRS.

PSLS encourages staff to assume leadership roles in solving community problems, and its strategic plan sets forth a number of concrete steps it can take to achieve this goal. The plan calls for each regional office to revive PSLs' tradition of conducting an annual day-long planning session to assess the issues confronted by local clients and make plans for how PSLs can assist in resolving them. Although much of this effort would likely be overseen by managing attorneys at the local office level, PSLs' top leadership should also take a strong, engaged, and supportive role to accomplish these advocacy goals.

Recommendation III.1.12.1*:

Each regional office should engage in an annual planning session. As PSLs' staff makes concrete plans for how to address the issues confronting the low-income population in their communities, they should consult with community groups, including those with which they are already engaged, to ensure they are aware of the most critical legal needs of the low-income community and allocate their energies, and resources, accordingly.

Finding 13. The program is engaged in a number of special projects that are achieving significant results for clients.

Low Income Tax Clinic - PSLs' highly successful Low Income Tax Clinic (LITC) was started in 2009. The clinic, which has two attorneys, provides advice and direct representation before the IRS, the Illinois Department of Revenue, and the tax court on a wide variety of tax issues. They review exams and audits, handle administrative hearings, provide advice regarding collection alternatives, work out compromises, correct returns, and secure proper Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC).

In addition to helping clients recover monies and reduce their total tax liabilities, LITC's advocates hold educational sessions for clients, human services groups, bar associations, and other staff attorneys. They have also attempted to address systemic issues. The project's director

¹³ Julie Q. v. Department of Children & Family Services, 2013 IL 113783.

was one of the authors of comments the ABA Section of Taxation submitted to the IRS' Acting Commissioner in October 2013. The clinic is also aiming to expand its *pro bono* component.¹⁴

Fair Housing Enforcement Project – PSLS, which has been conducting fair housing education and outreach for almost a decade, received enforcement funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the first-time in 2012. These funds allowed PSLS to build the project's staff capacity; it now has attorneys, fair housing coordinators, testers, and outreach workers, some of whom are bilingual. Initially operating in Rockford and Waukegan, the project recently expanded into Peoria.

PSLS is moving into the testing arena and becoming a viable fair housing enforcement organization. It is handling both complaint-based and audit-based testing; the audits are based on evidence of housing provider discrimination collected by the testers. It has submitted several administrative complaints and filed its first court case, challenging the eviction of a blind tenant. The project continues making community presentations and working with area organizations.

The project's efforts have enhanced PSLS' long-time use of reasonable accommodation claims on behalf of clients with disabilities, particularly in public housing cases. Information gathered by the project has also contributed to PSLS' increased ability to use discrimination as a defense in eviction cases.

Legal Help for Homeowners - PSLS created this unit, which assists clients throughout the service area, after receiving its initial funding from the Illinois Attorney General's office in 2012. PSLS previously handled foreclosures, but the service was not uniform across the program. The unit has enabled PSLS to expand the services it provides. Advocates assist homeowners and tenants save their homes through a combination of legal strategies. The unit's highly qualified paralegal is able to conduct real estate evaluations, examine land records for liens, and assist in informing clients about the consequences of filing for bankruptcy. Attorneys work with lenders to secure loan modifications, pursue foreclosure defenses in court, and file for Chapter 13 bankruptcy. PSLS has aggressively and successfully litigated against lenders that, in many cases, have continued to disregard the legal requirements for foreclosures.

In its first grant year, PSLS opened 1,900 foreclosure-related cases and closed 1,700 of them. The remaining cases are still in litigation. The unit has filed slightly more than a dozen Chapter 13 cases. As of the date of the PQV, PSLS had saved approximately fifty homes.

The three projects described above are only part of PSLS' program-wide advocacy. Its grant-funded HIV/AIDS project, in existence since 1995, handles a wide variety of issues, including public benefits, housing, and home health care cases; education matters; orders of protection; and bankruptcies. PSLS may take on expungements for this target population. The unit, which conducts a fair amount of outreach, also sees clients in hospitals or other facilities.

¹⁴ Andrew J. VanSingel, "VITA—A Great Program to Think About During Tax Season," *The Affiliate*, Volume 38, Number 2, November-December 2012, at 1.

PSLS has a contract with Illinois' Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services that funds its representation of clients facing problems with home-based assistance and vocational rehabilitation services. PSLS is referred cases involving complex complaints under the Home-Based Support Services Program, which was created to enable adults with mental or developmental disabilities to remain in their own homes and avoid institutional care. PSLS has seen an explosion of activity in this area, due to changes in the law and regulations. A recent case successfully challenged the attempted termination of home-based services to a couple caring for their traumatically brain-injured grandson.

For almost 20 years, PSLS has represented wards of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in special education and school discipline cases. Under a subcontract with LAF, clients from throughout the service area are referred to PSLS by a local DCFS office, a DCFS-designated agency, or a foster parent. The cases typically raise concerns about the child's educational environment or placement. Many of these cases are resolved through negotiation; others are addressed through administrative hearings.

PSLS is continuing to develop medical-legal partnerships. The Wheaton office partnered with a community medical clinic. The Peoria office, supported by its local United Way, has a paralegal who is currently building on previous staff efforts and coordinating PSLS' collaboration with the Heartland Community Health Clinic, a Federally Qualified Health Center. As PSLS is working to establish an on-site presence, the paralegal is assisting attorneys with an array of public benefits matters. She is also conducting outreach and will serve as PSLS' representative on the Access to Justice Commission's medical-legal partnership task force.

Finding 14. PSLS' case statistics indicate that the program remains productive.

PSLS' case closing numbers indicate a continuing drop in cases over the past several years. During 2012, PSLS closed 12,452 cases; this was almost 3,000 cases less than the 15,201 cases the program closed in 2011 and was the fewest cases closed by the program in the previous six years. The drop was likely due to PSLS' reduction in staff; its 2012 hiring should have a favorable impact on these case numbers.

Despite the drop, PSLS closed 417 cases per 10,000 poor persons in 2012, compared with a national median of 245 cases. PSLS' extended (80) and contested (48) closed cases per 10,000 poor persons were also above the national medians, which were 57 and 28 closed cases per 10,000 poor persons, respectively.

PSLS calculated that it served a total of 27,655 individuals in 2012. Of the cases it closed in 2012, 35% were housing, 30% were family, 10.9% were consumer, 9.3% were income maintenance, and 4% were health. Another 5.9% of the cases were categorized as miscellaneous.

Criterion 2. Private Attorney Involvement (PAI).

Finding 15. PSLS is poised to make significant changes in its PAI program which will strengthen its existing *pro bono* work.

PSLS' PAI program was largely developed at the local office level; as a result, it varies greatly from office to office. The counties in PSLS' service area have a wide range in the size of

the potential pool of volunteer lawyers, and the employment settings of those potential volunteers (large or mid-size law firms, corporate law departments, or primarily solo and small firm practitioners). The possibility of developing an effective partnership with a local bar association also differs from area to area. Although the service area includes a number of very active bar associations that are critical partners in promoting *pro bono* efforts, there are also many rural counties where the local bar associations are not active or the local bar's *pro bono* activities are limited due to lack of staffing, small numbers of active attorneys, or attorneys struggling with rural practices. The support of the judiciary also varies and, in counties with a small legal community and no active bar association, the support of the judiciary is essential.

Historically, most of the staff handling PAI has extensive experience with the program, in a number of different roles. Some offices have full-time *pro bono* coordinators, others are part-time, or carry additional duties. In some offices, the function formally rests with the managing attorney and is staffed by an executive secretary. Although the *pro bono* coordinators take part in case intake meetings and are in direct contact with some local providers, there is a feeling among some staff that the program's *pro bono* efforts are isolated from the main work of the program.

While the PAI program benefits from strong local ties and effective relationships developed by the PAI coordinators and managing attorneys, the overall effort suffers from a lack of collaboration and strategic direction. For example, the PAI function is not always directed to the client needs identified as priorities for the overall organization or even the individual office. As a result, the types of cases handled by *pro bono* attorneys vary greatly among offices, and in some cases are limited to family law, especially the provision of advice and uncontested divorce representation. Each office offers volunteer attorneys a different menu of options. One office uses *pro bono* lawyers only for advice services. Other offices have developed clinics and special projects. Some offices already enjoy very strong partnerships with local bar associations or other elements of the legal community, especially in-house law departments; other offices that are working on developing similar partnerships are largely doing so independently. Although client needs do vary from office to office, this lack of collaboration means PSLs loses the benefits of economies of scale or learning from experience.

Internally, PSLs has tried to improve the program-wide coordination of its *pro bono* projects in order to share ideas, develop new approaches, and eliminate duplication of work in the local offices. The *pro bono* coordinators and administrative office staff have begun holding periodic conference calls to share ideas and work together on projects. Effective October 1, 2013, PSLs created a new program-wide position of director of the Volunteer Lawyer Project (VLP). The incumbent, the former managing attorney of the Kankakee office, will report directly to PSLs' executive director. The executive director recently convened a meeting to introduce the new VLP director to the local PAI coordinators and to describe the goals for the new position. There is still some uncertainty about how this change will play out and how existing roles will be affected. PSLs must remain attentive to these responses to build on its current successes and achieve the desired results.

The VLP director, who was just transitioning to the new position at the time of the PQV, will initially focus on four elements: establishing more regular communication among the PAI-responsible people in the various offices; reviewing what each office is already doing, and looking for opportunities to expand existing activities; growing PSLs' overall *pro bono work*, and, in particular, increasing the extended representation being provided; and focusing on the

“collar counties” where there are the most lawyers. In the process, the director will engage with the program’s special projects as well as PSLS’ existing in-house and VISTA volunteers to look for additional opportunities to involve *pro bono* lawyers.

Although PSLS partners with local bar associations throughout the service area to promote its *pro bono* efforts, the Wheaton office, serving DuPage County, does not have a PAI program. This is due to a historical agreement between PSLS and the DuPage bar association. DCBA’s Legal Aid Service, which provides some direct legal representation, takes sole responsibility for *pro bono* engagement in the county. By not recruiting in DuPage County, the wealthiest county in its service area, PSLS loses out on the potential support and involvement of the many attorneys who live and work in that county.

The PAI staff does not appear to use technology to its fullest extent. Some offices mail notices to participating attorneys when new cases are distributed or reports are requested. In contrast, the McHenry office is working with the local bar association to send monthly blast emails to private attorneys in its area; in Bloomington, the office submits case write-ups for inclusion in a weekly e-newsletter prepared by a local attorney. These systems permit local attorneys to review information about the cases that require representation and determine which ones best suits their capabilities before making a decision about accepting a referral.

PSLS’ work is enhanced by the contributions of a variety of volunteers. A number of volunteer attorneys have regular office schedules; they take part in case acceptance meetings and other office events, and provide services in high priority cases requiring prompt legal action. In one office, a retired judge recruits private attorneys to accept *pro bono* cases. A DuPage Community College paralegal assists the TCS. PSLS also makes significant use of the talents of local law students, undergraduates, and paralegal students.

PSLS benefits from the support of a number of corporations situated within its service area. Changes in the Illinois Supreme Court rules facilitated increased *pro bono* work by corporate law departments at Caterpillar, Deere & Company, and State Farm Insurance. All three corporations provide financial support and also encourage individual giving. Abbot Laboratories, although headquartered outside PSLS’ service area, has donated monies to the program. McDonald’s Corporation, which received the ISBA’s John C. McAndrews *Pro Bono* Service Award in June 2013, has not yet performed any *pro bono* activities for PSLS.

Recommendation III.2.15.1*:

The VLP director should develop a work plan describing how PSLS will build on its existing PAI efforts. The plan, which should focus on the program’s current projects and partnerships, will create a process for PSLS to look at the results now being achieved and determine the potential for expansion to or adaptation by other offices, thus generating opportunities for collaboration. In establishing the plan, it would be beneficial for the VLP director to individually visit all the area’s local bar associations, determine the legal makeup of each region, and discern the nature of the work a region requires.

Recommendation III.2.15.2*:

The VLP director should engage with the managing attorneys and project leaders, to encourage the increased integration of *pro bono* work into the larger work of the program.

Recommendation III.2.15.3*:

The VLP director should take responsibility for conducting the meetings and conference calls held by the existing PAI staff. She will be able to regularize their occurrence, shape the agenda, and provide some ongoing structure to the group's conversations. Her involvement will promote the group's development of a more focused approach.

Recommendation III.2.15.4:

The VLP director should examine the types of cases PSLs' attorneys are closing with advice only, and why, to see if there are categories of cases that could be referred to *pro bono* attorneys.

Recommendation III.2.15.5*:

As PSLs reviews its updated assessment of client needs, and implements its strategic plan, those efforts should also drive its PAI work and result in a diversification of the types of cases being handled. This will enable PSLs to expand its *pro bono* efforts beyond family law cases.

Recommendation III.2.15.6:

The VLP director should initially work with the offices that have the potential to significantly increase the volume and scope of *pro bono* work. In addition, PSLs is encouraged to reach out to the DuPage County Bar Association and DCBA's Legal Aid Service to achieve greater collaboration and expand the amount of *pro bono* work that is done in the county and, thereby, provide greater benefits to clients.

Recommendation III.2.15.7*:

The VLP director should serve as the program's point person on PAI matters, and bring it the latest information about innovations and successful strategies for engaging *pro bono* lawyers that can be adapted to PSLs' priority needs. The director should be encouraged to develop contacts and engage with other national and statewide resources to support *pro bono* programs.

Recommendation III.2.15.8*:

PSLS should evaluate the value of increasing its use of technology, such as blast emails and electronic newsletters, to expand the reach and efficiency of its PAI programs.

Finding 16. PSLs' current *pro bono* activities compare favorably with national medians.

In calendar 2012, PSLs closed a total of 839 PAI cases. PSLs closed 38 PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons in 2012, compared with a national median of 22. The closed cases were predominantly family law (67%) cases, of which the highest proportion was divorces. Another 11.2% were consumer cases, of which the greatest proportion was bankruptcy, and 3.3% were housing cases; 14.9% of the closed PAI cases were categorized as miscellaneous (mostly wills and advance directives or power of attorney).

Of all the PAI cases that PSLs closed in 2012, 433 (51.6%) were extended representation cases and 406 (48.4%) were contested cases. It closed 14 extended PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons for 2012, compared with a national median of eight; its actual contested PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons was five compared with a national median of three.

Criteria 3. & 4. Other program services to the eligible client population/Other program activities on behalf of the eligible client population.

Finding 17. PSLS enjoys solid relationships with other members of the legal community and collaborates with many of them to provide services that meet client needs.

PSLS staff is actively involved in the legal community. Many advocates are members of the local bar associations. Attorneys serve on many different committees of their local bars and regularly attend the meetings; some are part of the local legal aid committees. A group sponsors a “Meet Prairie State Evening” to help recruit volunteers. The program works with the legal clinics of the Northern Illinois University College of Law. NIU, which has its Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic in Rockford, recently opened the Hesed House Community Law Center, a clinic affiliated with a homeless shelter in Aurora.

PSLS has worked with the judges in a number of local counties to establish a foreclosure mediation program and develop foreclosure mediation rules. In one county, a judge has organized a monthly meeting of all the domestic violence stakeholders. PSLS worked with one local courthouse to create a self-help desk for individuals dealing with foreclosures; PSLS hopes to replicate this project in other jurisdictions.

PSLS’ staff members are also involved in statewide efforts. They worked with other Illinois providers to secure changes in the state’s limited representation rules. PSLS assisted the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice in establishing self-help centers throughout its service area.

PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. Effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.

Criterion 1. Board Governance.

Finding 18. PSLS’ board, overall, fully understands and is diligently carrying out its oversight responsibilities.

PSLS’ board consists of 21 members; of these, 14 are attorney members and seven are client board members. Board members can serve for two three-year terms. Although two of the attorney seats are currently vacant, the program has worked hard during the past few years to build up the board. The diversity of PSLS’ board is reflective of the larger population.

The executive director meets personally with each incoming board member to inform them about PSLS, its history, funding, and challenges as well as the role of the board in guiding the organization. Members are provided materials to give them an overview of the program, such as PSLS’ current budget, a map of the service area, the current priorities, and the LSC regulations. Appropriate and well-organized materials are developed for and used at regular board meetings. Individual staff members periodically make presentations at board meetings; although this does not occur at every meeting. The program aims to hold a two-day board retreat every September; some of the retreats include formal board training.

PSLS endeavors to encourage attendance at the quarterly board meetings, and pays for the travel costs of all board members. Board members can attend meetings remotely. There is

reasonably good and consistent attendance at both board and committee meetings. The board recently created a nominating committee that is charged with recruiting new members who will bring resources, skills, and fresh perspectives to the board. In December 2012, some of PSLs' management and board members attended a full-day session regarding board development, using materials provided by the Shriver Center.

PSLS' board actively performs its oversight role and does not operate as merely a rubber stamp upon the major policy decisions of the executive director and/or the management team. A review of board records, supplemented by interviews with key officers and committee chairs, establishes that board members regularly receive timely, accurate information; that most are fully engaged and understand, embrace, and are deeply committed to the program's mission; and that the members would not hesitate, if necessary, to exercise independent judgment in holding the management team fully accountable for pursuing the accomplishment of the program's mission. Nonetheless, there are a few board members, mostly client members, who do not actively participate in board meetings or other program efforts. Some board members are not sufficiently familiar with the work of the program or its staff, including the work being conducted by advocates in the offices located nearest to them.

PSLS has appropriate board committees that meet regularly and are thoughtfully staffed. Its finance committee reviews financial statements every month; these reports include explanatory notes on variances. The monthly financial reports are also circulated to the senior management team and to the managing attorneys. When the full board meets, the finance director presents an overview. During the course of the year, the program prepares two budgets. In October or November, the board is presented with and conditionally adopts a working budget. The following May, the finance committee and, then, the whole board reviews PSLs' projected receipts and expenditures to determine whether changes are in order. PSLs also has an audit committee, which includes some board members with financial backgrounds. It is coordinated by the finance director, who schedules the meetings. The group meets by conference call to review the auditor's report and to choose auditors.

PSLS created a board committee to help it respond to the large revenue reductions it experienced in 2011. The board was similarly active in 2012, when PSLs anticipated revenue shortages before it received its foreclosure funding. Throughout 2013, members of the board were involved in the program's strategic planning process. Now that the plan has been adopted, the board will likely be an important engine in maintaining the momentum created by the strategic planning process.

The board strongly supports fundraising activities throughout PSLs' service area. The attorney board members, who almost unanimously participate in PSLs' PAI program, also serve in a leadership capacity in the program's fundraising efforts and many make direct contributions to PSLs. Increasingly, board members have been drawn from the program's local volunteer campaign committees. They undertake their board responsibilities with a clear sense of the fundraising that will be involved. Many of them serve on the board's development committee.

PSLS' board engages in a thoughtful and regularized review of the executive director's performance. It completed its most recent evaluation of the director in May 2013. The evaluation process, which was substantially revised in 2012, includes an extensive questionnaire for all staff and board members, and a self-evaluation for the executive director. The combined materials

were reviewed by a board committee, and ultimately presented to the full board for discussion. Feedback was then provided to the executive director.

The program does not have a specific written succession plan for the executive director or any of the other senior leadership positions.

Recommendation IV.1.18.1:

PSLS should review its process for orienting and working with board members, particularly its client board members, to promote fuller and even more effective board member engagement.

Recommendation IV.1.18.2:

PSLS should take steps to more fully inform individual board members of its work, particularly the work and staff of the office in the region where they live or work. The board could consider establishing liaisons with the local offices. This would provide a channel of communication from those offices to the board around matters of local concern and better inform board members of the daily challenges facing PSLS' staff.

Recommendation IV.1.18.3:

PSLS should regularize its practice of having staff make presentations at board meetings. Not only will this keep the entire board fully apprised of the nature of the program's legal work but it will also give staff a greater appreciation of the board's commitment to the program.

Recommendation IV.1.18.4*:

PSLS should develop a written succession plan for executive leadership positions that provides for the appointment of interim leadership as well as a search committee. Such a plan should identify the composition (board members, management, staff, and other constituencies) of PSLS' search committee and delineate a timeline for its succession process.

Criterion 2. Leadership.

Finding 19. PSLS is capably managed by a committed executive director who actively promotes the program and its high quality legal work.

The executive director, a member of the staff since 1989, has led the program since 2006. Only PSLS' second director, he has spent his entire legal career at the program. The executive director possesses a warm and engaging manner that appeals to staff. He is described as open, interested, and responsive, and is well-respected throughout the program. Staff appreciates the executive director's easy availability, as well as the annual conversations he has with every staff member as part of their evaluations. People enjoy these meetings not only as opportunities to receive an assessment of their efforts but also as chances to privately discuss issues of concern.

The executive director is also active throughout the region. He recently completed a two-year term as president of the Midwest Project Directors Group, and is currently the Vice-Chair of the ISBA's Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services.

The executive director has worked hard, along with the other members of the program's management team, to establish and maintain a shared sense of vision and mission, and emphasize the need for high quality performances in accomplishing PSLS' clearly articulated and broadly

shared goals. The PQV team observed that, due to their efforts, the levels of trust, confidence, personal integrity, and loyalty appeared to be extremely high throughout the program.

Despite being fully supported by his management team, the executive director has taken on a great deal of managerial duties that may be delegable to other of his top management colleagues. For instance, all of the members of the central management team report to him as do all of the managing attorneys for the local offices. He also has responsibility for the initial steps in attorney hiring. Fulfilling these responsibilities necessarily takes time away from other executive tasks, which will now include PSLS' implementation of its strategic plan, as well as essential activities outside the program.

Recommendation IV.2.19.1*:

In order to reduce the number of people directly reporting to the executive director and the number of tasks for which he is primarily responsible, PSLS should analyze the duties currently assumed by the executive director, determine whether there are other reporting lines that could better serve the program, and delegate responsibilities, as appropriate, to other members of the management team. In particular, the executive director should delegate the day-to-day supervision of managing attorneys, and assume a less central role in the early stages of the program's hiring process.

Criterion 3. Overall Management and Administration.

Finding 20. PSLS' overall management is conducted by an experienced executive team that demonstrates highly professional and effective organizational skills.

PSLS' executive director is effectively supported by a highly qualified management team, comprised of PSLS' associate director, the director of advocacy and training, the two litigation directors, the finance director, the directors of program and community development, and the director of the Volunteer Lawyer Project. Many of this corps of talented people have been at the organization for decades, and communicate a sense of history that informs the program's current efforts. This group works well together, instills confidence in the program's newer hires, and imparts a commitment to excellence throughout the program. PSLS' leadership group also conveys a sense that the organization is moving forward and in a positive direction.

Because the leadership group is located in several offices, the senior leadership team meets weekly by teleconference to discuss current developments. Several times a year, there is a meeting of all of the program's management and administrative staff.

Managing attorneys supervise all of the regional offices, the TCS, and the Legal Help for Homeowners Project. The program acknowledges that the managing attorneys are over-extended. While practices are not absolutely uniform across the program, the managing attorneys are actively involved in many facets of program administration. They effectively supervise staff, which includes conducting weekly case acceptance meetings, regular case reviews, and annual performance evaluations; and monitoring staff development and training needs and opportunities. Managing attorneys also maintain active caseloads of their own. In addition, they are responsible for the smooth operation of their respective offices and for managing support staff and other personnel. At the same time, they engage with the local community and bar

associations; this includes overseeing PAI efforts, participating in and promoting fundraising events, helping to identify grant prospects, and supervising the office's compliance with grant requirements.

Managing attorneys meet separately, in person, at least once a year, and by telephone in between those meetings. Some managing attorneys informally participate in calls when there are common issues to discuss; this has been particularly helpful for the new managing attorneys. One of the managing attorneys acts as the coordinator and sets the agenda for these calls. A number of managing attorneys have participated in management trainings. Some have attended MIE conferences; another reported attending local management trainings sponsored by entities such as the Chicago Bar Foundation.

In May 2013, the program's Waukegan office began piloting an administrative position filled by a paralegal/PAI coordinator who handles many of the day-to-day operations of the office. This includes supervising support staff, participating in outreach activities, securing grants and grant compliance, and overseeing local fundraising. Such a division of managerial responsibilities may be appropriate for other of PSLs' larger offices where the managing attorneys oversee a number of grants and other administrative responsibilities as well as the legal work.

The current management group has expanded the leadership roles available to the entire staff. Some staff attorneys chair substantive task forces; others direct projects. The program is contemplating creating "senior attorney" positions to recognize those who excel at their work. PSLs also encourages its newer advocacy staff to pursue leadership opportunities both within and outside the program.

The program's plan for the continuity of its operations satisfies all of LSC's requisite criteria. After the state experienced flooding earlier in 2013, PSLs prominently posted a link to the Illinois State Bar Association's *Disaster Legal Services Manual: A Resource for Illinoisans and Illinois Lawyers* on its webpage. The materials remained available when severe tornadoes hit the service area in mid-November 2013.

Recommendation IV.3.20.1*:

To ensure that its structure is adequate to accomplish the objectives outlined in the strategic plan, PSLs should analyze and redefine the role of managing attorneys early in the process, as a number of the plan's other goals will require the substantial involvement of the managing attorneys as the program is currently configured.

Recommendation IV.3.20.2:

PSLS should formalize the meetings and conference calls of its managing attorneys so they occur regularly and are scheduled in advance, to enable all managing attorneys to participate. This will be especially important now that PSLs has a number of new managing attorneys.

Recommendation IV.3.20.3*:

PSLS should evaluate the effectiveness of the administrative team that has been operating in the Waukegan office and determine whether such a combination should be exported to any of the program's other, larger, offices in order to lighten some of the administrative obligations the managing attorneys currently have to discharge.

Recommendation IV.3.20.4:

Although the program provides avenues for leadership development to some of its newer and mid-level staff, the program should take steps to increase and formalize these opportunities.¹⁵ This will build on the clear enthusiasm and energy staff members are bringing to the program.

Finding 21. PSLS strives to upgrade its technology to benefit both staff and clients.

PSLS has made significant strides in its use of technology. It has a systems administrator who regularly interacts with the program's staff and monitors and evaluates new technologies to insure that PSLS is making efficient use of available systems. It has another staffer who oversees the operation of the case management system. She is responsible for training staff on the use of the system, identifying potential problems, and providing support when problems arise.

The senior management team and board of directors are generally quite supportive of acquiring and maintaining high quality and relatively up-to-date technology. With TIG funding from LSC, PSLS upgraded its phone system and installed a voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) that allows for the internal transfer of calls between staff. The improvements made it easier for PSLS to direct callers to their proper destinations and eased the burden on the TCS so that more individuals can get through. However, three of PSLS' offices – Rock Island, Ottawa, and Bloomington - are not yet part of the central telephone system.

The program is in the process of making a number of changes to improve its technology infrastructure. It is transferring its email system to the Google Mail for non-profits platform, which will include group workspaces for staff, as well as workspaces and a library for PSLS' board members. The program has individual office servers that are not networked to other offices. PSLS acknowledges the limits of this current arrangement, and plans to move to a consolidated network environment that will better connect all its offices. This will improve communication between offices, as staffers will then be able to more easily share pleadings and other documents.

Numerous advocates mentioned the need for laptops to take to court or other remote sites. Currently, many advocates are paper-dependent when they are away from the office, including in the courtroom. Some staffers, in large part due to the funding sources that underwrite their work, have access to more up-to-date equipment than others.

Recommendation IV.3.21.1*:

PSLS should complete the upgrade of its telephones, so that all of its phones are updated and all of its offices are part of a single telephone system.

¹⁵ PSLS should examine the programs devised by its neighbor, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, which created positions for "senior supervisory attorneys," (at least seven years of legal experience) who are recognized as capable of performing significant administrative and supervisory functions, and "senior attorneys," (five years of experience) who are eligible to take on increased responsibilities, such as supervising new attorneys or law student(s) or managing a project. It should also examine Atlanta Legal Aid Society's leadership development and retention program, which permits attorneys with five years of legal experience to apply for its "Attorney II" designation.

Recommendation IV.3.21.2:

The program should conduct an inventory of its equipment, to ensure that it is providing all staff with the technology necessary for them to do their jobs. In particular, PSLS should expand the video conferencing that the foreclosure unit is using so successfully. The program should also try to increase the amount of mobile equipment (laptops, printers, scanners, etc.) to enhance advocates' capability when they are working away from the office.

Criterion 4. Financial Administration.¹⁶**Finding 22. PSLS has experienced financial staff responsible for managing the program's fiscal operations.**

PSLS has a capable and well-trained financial staff that functions extremely well as a unit. The highly experienced finance director is assisted by a fiscal manager, a benefits and payables administrator, and the program administrator. The systems administrator also works with the financial team. The finance director is responsible for assuring sound fiscal management and full accountability.

PSLS has suitable financial policies, procedures, and practices in place and generally conducts appropriate budget planning and oversight. The program issues useful financial information that is regularly provided to the board on a timely basis. Its written Accounting Manual was last updated in February 2013.

For planning purposes, the program currently engages in two-year budget projections. Although programs such as PSLS currently face a fair amount of financial uncertainty, there are significant benefits to be obtained in generating longer-range planning budgets that consider the likely economic climate, and possible funding opportunities and challenges.

PSLS' program audits have consistently produced "clean" opinions, and occasional management letter suggestions; these have not involved significant problems or issues and are always fully and promptly considered. No questions have ever been raised about the adequacy of the program's various internal control systems and procedures.

Recommendation IV.4.22.1:

PSLS should consider preparing longer-range budgets that project the program's finances from two to three years' into the future.

Criterion 5. Human resources administration.**Finding 23. The program currently functions without a human resources director.**

Despite its size, PSLS does not have a human resources (HR) director. These duties are performed by the executive director, with assistance from other staff members, including the finance director, who maintains all records and reports relating to employee benefits. These staff

¹⁶ This visit was conducted by the Office of Program Performance (OPP) for the purposes set forth in the Introduction. OPP findings and recommendations under this criterion are limited to staffing, organization, and general administrative functions. Assessment of fiscal operations is conducted by other offices at LSC.

members all recently participated in HR training. When PSLS prepared a comprehensive revision of its operations policies in 2012, it revised its human resource policies.

PSLS regularly reviews its salary and benefits structures. At the time of the PQV, the program's management was aiming to implement program-wide salary increases. The program does provide a reasonably generous benefits package, which includes medical, dental and vision plans, short and long term disability insurance benefits, and a defined contribution 403(b) plan.

PSLS' staff is evaluated on an annual basis, with few exceptions. In 2012, PSLS revised the evaluation standards and tools used for staff attorneys; staff described the new process as "more focused on performance." PSLS was planning to complete revising the evaluation tool for its support staff in 2013. It will next revise its evaluation tool for the remaining staff positions. As noted, the executive director participates in every evaluation discussion.

PSLS fosters a collegial atmosphere throughout the agency. It has also made a conscious effort to increase the diversity of its staff. With PSLS' recent hires, both management and staff are now more diverse. Many staff has advanced educational degrees as well as training and work experience in a wide variety of areas, from M.S.W.s and M.B.A.s to teaching and nursing. It appeared to the team that a fuller assessment of the skills that staff possesses, and greater use of those talents, would benefit the program and the clients it serves.

Recommendation IV.5.23.1*:

When resources permit, PSLS should consider hiring a human resources director to administer the program's human resources functions.

Criterion 6. Internal communication.

Finding 24. PSLS uses a number of different mechanisms to enhance its program's internal communications.

PSLS attempts to facilitate internal communications among its widely-dispersed staff. The executive director regularly sends out easily understood emails covering everything from the organization's financial health to the federal shutdown's possible impact on PSLS' operations. Program information is shared during the various offices' weekly case acceptance meetings. Most staff takes part in at least one task force meeting, either in person or through GoToMeeting, and remains connected with the task force through its listserv.

PSLS is redesigning its website. It will be utilizing an open source website product, developed through a TIG that was awarded to Idaho Legal Aid Services, to modify its website and improve its ability to manage content and quickly post information. The new website was not launched at the time of the team's October 2013 visit.

PSLS also has internal and external Facebook pages. The internal page was started as a site where current and former staff could share information; it has about 140 users, including 80 former staff members. The external page serves as a venue for posting information on PSLS' projects and topics such as post-disaster resources. PSLS also uses its external page to publicize

some of the program's accomplishments, and advertise fund-raising events. Users can link to other programs or post comments.

The program generally issues an annual report, which it distributes electronically. "Prairie Dog Home Companion" is a written staff directory which is updated four times a year; it appears to be well-used by staff, particularly so that they can stay on top of staffing changes. PSLS has not recently published *The Prairie Fire*, a docket of significant cases and activities which was previously distributed to staff, board, funders, and community stakeholders. PSLS had an internal newsletter, which it published weekly through July 2012. Staff and board members expressed a desire to have the program renew the newsletter or some other kind of regular internal communication. This is particularly important for non-advocates, for whom the annual staff retreat may be the only opportunity to see staff members from other offices.

PSLS conducts a once-a-year staff retreat; the 2013 retreat was held on November 7-8th, a month after the PQV. The program also holds an annual summer picnic.

Despite all of these instruments and events, PSLS currently lacks a singular means of routinely transmitting information to the entire program, other than email. Communication is largely from the top down, and is often responsive to issues rather than proactive. Although most staff appeared well-informed, a regular theme of interviews was the need for improved communications between the offices and throughout the program. Staff would enjoy learning about the program's administrative issues; hearing about fellow staff members, both as they join and leave the program; and being informed about PSLS' legal accomplishments as well as its new funding and projects. Staff feels that by addressing its communication challenges, the entire program would be better connected, and all the offices would remain "on the same page."

Recommendation IV.6.24.1*:

PSLS should focus on improving its program-wide internal communications. It should consider re-instituting its regular electronic newsletter. Since the program has eleven regional offices, PSLS could utilize the newsletter as a vehicle for spotlighting one office each month, with a December newsletter that could serve as a year-end review.

Criterion 7. General resource development and maintenance.

Finding 25. PSLS has concentrated on expanding its resources, both from grants and private funding sources.

PSLS has several highly qualified staff concentrating on resource development. Its efforts are two-pronged: the director of program development focuses on the agency's grant funding and the director of community support focuses on private donations. In 2012, more than two-thirds of the program's revenue came from non-LSC sources.

The director of program development has been with the program for 18 years; she possesses previous development work experience as well as 11 years of direct service experience as a PSLS paralegal. A part-time grants manager assists with grant reporting; she provides the data and demographics to support grant proposals and gathers information and compiles statistics demonstrating how PSLS satisfies its grant requirements. The grant manager's professional skills

are essential in organizing the increasingly cumbersome grant reports required by funders. The director of community support has been with the program for eight years; he previously had 15 years of not-for-profit fundraising experience. The director and associate director of community support coordinate external resource development initiatives throughout the program. The program's finance director assists in the preparation of grant proposals, budgets, and miscellaneous reports, and designs and manages PSLs' internal controls relating to grant oversight and financial stewardship.

PSLS receives grant funding from a variety of governmental and private sources, including federal and state agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, United Ways, and local communities. PSLs' revenues have also been enhanced by grants and donations from corporations and their foundations. Many local grant opportunities are brought to the program's attention by the managing attorneys as a result of their community involvement.

PSLS' strategic plan aims to build a donor-centered fundraising program that will annually raise half of what the program receives from LSC. PSLs now conducts a Campaign for Legal Services, a private fundraising effort that raises about \$500,000 annually. In most of PSLs' offices, the campaign is supported by committees of volunteer attorneys and business leaders that work with office staff to plan events. Local offices have sponsored a variety of events including a trivia night fundraiser in conjunction with Deere & Company (Rock Island); a staging of the "Hearsay Boys," a musical parody of the "Jersey Boys" (Bloomington); and an evening event at which one board member contributes the services of a jazz combo with which he plays (Peoria). The McHenry office marked *Pro Bono* Week in 2013 with a courthouse celebration where books autographed by Scott Turow, John Grisham, and a local author were raffled off. While campaign activities are tailored to the local communities, coordination between regional offices and the program's administration about how to best go about raising funds and building local visibility could be improved.

The program's successful funding efforts have also greatly increased the complexity and scope of its development functions. Even with the program's current staffing, PSLs' resource development efforts are administratively burdensome. PSLs would benefit from more effective communication between the two segments of its development unit. The entire unit requires more assistance with data input and extraction; its Raiser's Edge database is incomplete and development staff currently struggles to keep track of all the necessary information. Better coordination and communication between the development unit and the regional office staff is also necessary; this includes the managing attorneys who oversee the grants and plan the local functions as well as the advocacy staff whose actual legal work fulfills the grant requirements. Although record keeping, reporting, and compliance expectations are usually made clear from the outset, and advocates are supportive in spite of the demands associated with grant and regulatory compliance, there have been instances where local staff was not promptly informed regarding grant requirements. This lack of communication interferes with their ability to plan and perform the work that satisfies the grant in a timely fashion, along with their other commitments. PSLs acknowledges these deficits, and is aware that its existing systems are not sufficient to effectively coordinate its resource development efforts.

Recommendation IV.7.25.1*:

The program should evaluate the composition and responsibilities of its development staff. In doing so, it should consider whether it would benefit from having a single director responsible for overseeing the program's entire resource development function. The program should also determine whether there are other staffing positions that would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the program's development efforts.

Recommendation IV.7.25.2*:

PSLS should complete the consolidation of its financial information in a single database, so that all of its resource development-related material is up-to-date and easily accessible to the entire development staff.

Recommendation IV.7.25.3:

PSLS should build on its existing expertise, and the enthusiasm of the local volunteer campaign committees, to start planning for a celebration of its 40th anniversary; this will allow PSLS sufficient time to maximize the fundraising possibilities this event presents.

Criteria 8. & 9. Coherent and comprehensive delivery structure/Participation in an integrated legal services delivery system.

Finding 26. PSLS is an active member of Illinois' statewide legal services delivery system.

PSLS, the primary legal aid provider in its service area, collaborates with local, regional, and statewide advocates on behalf of its clients. It takes part in a number of statewide efforts and works with other Illinois legal services providers to address emerging issues. Program staff participates in ISBA's Delivery of Legal Services Committee and the state's new Access to Justice Commission. One of its board members is a member of the commission, and a number of staff members are serving on its committees. PSLS also works with statewide agencies such as the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice.

The program's attorneys are active participants in their local county bar associations and often serve in leadership positions, which provide substantial benefits to the program and its clients. In addition, PSLS collaborates with the two other LSC-funded programs located in Illinois, and the three executive directors enjoy a good working relationship.