

Indiana Legal Services, Inc

Using the law to fight poverty, empower clients, and improve access to justice.

www.indianalegalservices.org



Volunteering at ILS

What Is Indiana Legal Services?

Indiana Legal Services (ILS) is a law office with a heart! Since 1974, regional level legal services programs in Indiana have received funding from the Legal Services Corporation. As of January 1, 2001, several of these regional programs merged to become Indiana Legal Services, Inc. ILS assists in civil areas such as housing, public benefits, consumer, health, and family law. The organization advocates on behalf of its clients in state and federal courts, with landlords and nursing homes, and before administrative bodies such as the Social Security Administration, the Division of Family and Children, the unemployment office, housing authorities, and township trustees.

Who Volunteers?

Volunteers come from local communities and represent a varied cross-section of people and backgrounds. All share a dedicated interest in helping low-income persons gain equal access to justice. Volunteers are homemakers, students, retired persons, teachers, nurses, persons working full or part time, and YOU! They are busy people who share their skills, time, and talents to help the lives of others. Some volunteers participate in RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program), a national program through which volunteers who are 55 years and older are eligible for mileage reimbursement.

Being a volunteer with ILS is interesting and challenging work, full of learning opportunities. Student volunteers integrate course work with the realities of social problems as they explore potential careers. Volunteering at ILS may also qualify as an academic internship for college students. Feel the satisfaction of helping someone in need, develop new interests and skills, and gain insights into yourself and community service.

What Do Volunteers Do?

Most volunteer positions are related to intake, the process of taking initial client applications. A volunteer is the first person to really give a listening ear to one of the thousands of people who seek legal assistance from ILS each year. As intake workers, volunteers gather basic background, statistical, and financial eligibility information. But most importantly, the volunteer listens to the person's problem and prepares a written summary for a staff attorney to review. Special questionnaires also guide the volunteers in gathering additional relevant information. For

convenience and efficiency, most of the interviewing is done over the telephone. Computer, interviewing, and bilingual skills are helpful, and volunteers must have a professional work ethic. Our South Bend and Bloomington offices have an ongoing need for Intake Workers, Hotline Screeners, and Hotline Interviewers to staff the Hotline. Other volunteer opportunities have included Administrative Assistants, Data Entry Clerks, Attorney Assistants, and Law Students. Our Fort Wayne office utilizes volunteers to fill the roles of Legal Secretary, Intake Personnel, and Paralegal.

What Commitment Is Required?

The volunteer commitment may vary by office. Volunteers in South Bend are asked to commit to work one regularly scheduled 3½ hour shift (either morning or afternoon) per week for a minimum of six months (alternate arrangements can be made for students). Shifts are M-F, 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon; and M, W, Th, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The commitment for Bloomington volunteers is one 3 hour shift per week completed any time from M-Th, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. or Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Most volunteer duties are performed at the ILS offices, and volunteers are asked to regard their commitment as if it were a paid job. Because ILS is a law office, volunteers are required to protect client confidentiality by keeping all client information within the office. Volunteers may give no advice to clients. Completion of a formal training program is also required. In addition, on-going informal training, support and supervision are provided by the Indiana Legal Services staff.

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