
**STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN
YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION
AIDS LAW COMMITTEE
ADVISING CLIENTS WITH HIV**

I. Project Description

The AIDS Law Committee of the State Bar of Wisconsin Young Lawyers Division, in partnership with non-profit agencies, implemented a public awareness campaign targeting an often low-income and disenfranchised population: people living with HIV. The committee coordinated the publication of two handbooks which inform consumers with HIV of their legal rights and direct them to community legal resources. The handbooks answer many commonly asked questions and list resources and hotlines for additional information and referral. These handbooks are invaluable resources for persons living with HIV and have assisted attorneys, social service providers, and health care providers in their respective practices.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of Need

Members of the AIDS Law Committee include young lawyers from around the state of Wisconsin who practice AIDS law. Based on informal assessments and contact with individuals living with HIV, these members identified the need for public awareness of the availability of legal resources in the community for people living with HIV. Members working in the field noted that because their clients were uninformed of their rights, they often sought out legal services too late or not at all. Although people living with HIV suffer from the same types of legal issues as others, their situation is further complicated by the illnesses and opportunistic infections related to HIV infection. Members also noted that HIV-infected individuals are reluctant to seek legal assistance from traditional community sources, such as the private bar or legal aid. Members learned that the daily struggle with this life-threatening illness often takes precedence over other matters. Also, given the incredible social stigma these individuals face, preservation of their confidentiality is of utmost concern.

Based on these observations, committee members decided to produce a handbook that would make individuals aware of their legal rights and of resources available in the community before they experienced a legal crisis. This process resulted in the publication of the first handbook, *HIV and Your Rights: A Legal Guide to Wisconsin*, in 1999.

Later in 1999, a needs assessment of HIV services was conducted by the Southeastern Ryan White Consortium of approximately 200 people living with HIV. This Consortium is designated by the state to administer and disburse federal Ryan White Title II funding in Southeastern Wisconsin, which is available to help with the unmet needs of people living with HIV. The Consortium members include people living with HIV and representatives from HIV/AIDS service providers in Southeastern Wisconsin. In the needs assessment, a good percentage of HIV-infected individuals identified a need for more information on their legal rights, especially regarding issues related to returning to work. Return to work issues are becoming increasingly more important due to the advent of drug therapies that enable people to work longer and due to changes in welfare and Social Security standards.

As a result of the success of the first handbook and the knowledge of the needs assessment, members of the committee and local practitioners felt that more specific information on the workplace was needed. The idea for *Your Rights in the Workplace: A Legal Guide for People Living With HIV in Wisconsin* was conceived in 1999, and the handbook was printed later that year.

After the two handbooks had been distributed, numerous requests were made for Spanish language versions. Given these requests and the increasing number of Latinos becoming infected with HIV, the handbooks were translated into Spanish. The Spanish version of *HIV and Your Rights* was translated and printed by the fall of 2000. The Spanish version of *Your Rights in the Workplace* was translated in the beginning of 2001 and printed in July 2001.

B. Determination of Project Goals and Design

1. Decisions to be Made

a. Project Goals

The committee's primary goal was to provide people living with HIV in Wisconsin with a resource to answer questions they may have about their legal rights and to inform them of resources available in the community. The goal was to address several areas of law which affect people living with HIV. The hope was that the handbook would make individuals aware of this information before they experienced a legal crisis. Committee members realized that such a reference should be easy to read and comprehend by people with a variety of education levels. In addition to advising people living with HIV, the committee also hoped that a handbook would assist attorneys, social service providers, and health care providers in their respective practices.

Other affiliates may choose to limit the scope of the project to one area of law, target a different audience, or focus only on consumers and not attorneys or service providers. The topics included in the HIV handbooks are only some examples of the types of legal rights that can be discussed. However, the issues discussed in these handbooks--such as hiring practices, discrimination, health insurance, public benefits, consumer rights and bankruptcy--can be applied to many other client populations. For example, similar materials could be reproduced without much change for people living with other disabilities or illnesses.

b. Project Design

Identification of Need. The needs assessment conducted by the Ryan White Consortium involved a minimal financial cost of postage (about \$75). Considerable time was involved in designing and printing the survey and compiling the results. However, these duties could be spread among several volunteers.

Project Concept. The committee felt that a handbook would be the best means of providing the type of information needed in the community because it could be easily distributed to service providers around the state and reach a large percentage of the HIV-infected population quickly. Other options for providing this type of information could include seminars held at local service providers, conferences for providers or the general public, a website, or a phone hotline.

Drafting. Each handbook contains chapters on various legal topics. For the substantive content of the handbooks, the committee relied on the expertise of its

members and solicited help from attorneys in the community practicing in relevant areas.

Title. The Committee wanted a title that would explain the content and purpose of the handbook without being too complex or wordy. It also was important to let consumers know that the handbook covered only Wisconsin law. Committee members, therefore, came up with *HIV and Your Rights* and then added the subtitle *A Legal Guide to Wisconsin* to further explain its focus. The committee followed the same guidelines with the second handbook, *Your Rights in the Workplace: A Legal Guide for People Living With HIV in Wisconsin*. However, to avoid confusion with the first handbook, HIV was not used in the main title.

Design and Layout. The Committee had sufficient funding to hire a graphic artist to design a cover and logo for the original handbook. The committee wanted the second handbook, *Your Rights in the Workplace*, to look similar in order to maintain consistency and to identify it as a companion reference. As a result, the same logo was used for the cover, but a different color was chosen to distinguish it as a separate book. Using the same cover design also reduced the design costs associated with the second handbook. Also, the graphic artist also professionally formatted the inside text of the handbooks to maximize white space, distinguish the questions from the responses, and to highlight important information or notes.

The layout of a handbook can easily be designed or tailored to fit a variety of budgets. For example, groups with less funding could save costs by doing the layout themselves or by choosing less complex designs for the cover or text.

Printing. Because the first handbook had a wider audience and sufficient funding was available, 1500 copies were printed. The second handbook had a more limited audience (people living with HIV who are working or returning to work), so only 500 copies were printed. To save costs, an affiliate could print fewer copies, use black and white ink instead of color, or employ a photocopy service instead of a professional printer.

Distribution. The handbooks were made available to people living with HIV through AIDS service organizations, disability groups, hospitals and clinics, and legal service organizations across the state. The handbooks also were selected for cataloging in the Wisconsin Public Library system and are available online through the State Bar website.

2. Decision Making Process

The project was coordinated by the committee chair who is also a member of the YLD Board. The main decisions were made by the chair with input from other committee members and volunteers. Apart from approval for funding, committee members did not have to seek approval from the YLD Board or the State Bar of Wisconsin. Periodically, the chair held planning meetings to solicit ideas for the handbooks and to make decisions affecting the program. Otherwise, committee members and volunteers were contacted when necessary.

3. Considerations in Project Planning

a. Community Resources

All of the handbooks were produced in conjunction with a local AIDS Service Organization, AIDS Network. The committee also used other community resources to help with the drafting and editing of the handbook. The most willing partners were attorneys from other non-profit agencies providing free legal services to low income people with disabilities. A few private attorneys also volunteered a few hours of their time to provide topic ideas and edit the handbooks. These community resources also were very useful in distributing the handbooks to HIV positive clients around the state.

b. Personnel

The entire project was coordinated by the chair of the YLD AIDS Law Committee, who spent at least a few hours a week for several months on the project. At least ten lawyers (from private and public practice) volunteered their time to develop, draft, and edit the first handbook. The time commitment for these volunteers varied from a total of five to forty hours. For the second handbook, similar volunteers were used; however, grant funding enabled the committee to contract with local legal organizations for a set number of hours of drafting and editing (about 40 hours total). Minimal time was required from volunteers on the Spanish handbooks because most of the work was done by the paid translator. A graphic artist was paid to design and do the layout for each handbook.

c. Revenue Availability/Fundraising

Costs for the first handbook, *HIV and Your Rights*, were covered by the State Bar YLD and AIDS Network (which contributed staff time, postage, and photocopying for the project). The second handbook, *Your Rights in the Workplace*, was produced through an educational grant from the Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation (which manages the state's IOLTA funds) and in-kind donations of time from the State Bar YLD and AIDS Network. The Spanish language versions were paid for from an educational grant from the Dane County Bar Association and by minimal funds from the State YLD and AIDS Network.

If funding is not available through the affiliate itself, community organizations using the handbook and other private grant sources (local bar associations, law firms, private foundations or the ABA) could be used to fund the project. It would be possible to have the entire project (except printing) completed by volunteers. Drafting and editing could be performed on a pro bono basis by members of the bar and graphic design work could be donated or secured for a reduced cost. Also, a small fee could be charged for each handbook to help raise revenue.

d. Other (Equipment/Physical Needs)

No equipment or physical needs were required.

III. Implementation . . . How to Replicate this Project

A. Timetable

An affiliate should probably begin planning this project 8 to 12 months in advance.

Eight to twelve months in advance

1. Identify committee members and core volunteers.
2. Identify target audience and general goals of project.
3. Conduct needs assessment or focus group of target audience.

Six to Eight months in advance

1. Based on needs assessment or focus group, identify scope of project, including topics to be covered and general format (question and answer, etc.).
2. Identify volunteers with expertise in topic areas to provide information for chapters or to actually draft chapters.
3. Begin drafting text.
4. Form editing team and set schedule for editing.

Two months in advance

1. Select graphic artist and choose layout and design.
2. Once layout and design are chosen and draft is near completion, seek quotes from printers and determine number of copies needed.
3. Set schedule for final draft completion based on time needed for layout (usually 1-2 week process) and printing (also a 1-2 week process).

While or after handbooks are printed

1. Develop plan for distribution by identifying community organizations, clients, etc. to receive books.
2. Make plans for publishing handbook on internet or cataloging in public library.
3. Draft press releases or articles to advertise release of handbook.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers

No formal training was needed for volunteers. However, because the handbooks deal with such a wide variety of law, this project necessarily involves lawyers in diverse areas of practice. Volunteers were recruited from non-profit and government agencies and law firms specializing in these areas of law. In most cases, committee members had worked with or knew people who were willing to help with the handbooks. Some volunteers did drop out or

committed only to only a limited amount of time and had to be replaced. Usually, another attorney from their organization was recommended.

C. Publicity

Various articles were run in state and local bar newsletters and publications to announce the handbooks. In addition, local community groups and the clients of AIDS Network were provided complimentary copies and were informed of their availability.

D. Day-To-Day Operations

The project is currently being run out of AIDS Network, a state designated AIDS Service Organization, by a State Bar of Wisconsin YLD board member. The State Bar YLD has posted the handbooks on the State Bar of Wisconsin website and assists in distributing the handbooks to attorneys and the general public.

IV. Evaluation and Impact

This project has been very successful and well received in the legal and social service communities. Fifteen hundred copies of *HIV and Your Rights* have been distributed statewide to legal and social service providers, public libraries, and HIV-infected individuals. More copies are now needed, requiring a second printing. At least 500 copies of *Your Rights in the Workplace* were distributed and its demand will require a second printing also. That publication has been used extensively by the Pathways to Independence Program, a national Social Security program being piloted in Wisconsin which assists people with disabilities who return to work. The most challenging aspect of implementing the project was drafting the handbooks, and the easiest aspect was the actual printing and production.

No formal evaluation tool was used. However, various community groups and AIDS service organizations across the state have reported that their clients feel the handbooks are an important resource. Other affiliates may wish to conduct a needs assessment or focus group of their target audience (clients and service organizations) to determine the areas in which more information is needed. After the handbook is published, feedback can be solicited through focus groups or surveys of clients or organizations using the handbook.

V. Bibliography/Other Resources

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Other Resources:

AIDS Network
600 Williamson Street
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608-252-6540

AIDS Legal Council of Chicago
220 South State Street, Ste 1330
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Legal Action Center
153 Waverly Place
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