

ASSESSING LEGAL NEEDS OF LAWRENCE COUNTY'S VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

2017-2018

A partnership between Maurer School
of Law's Access-to-Justice Program &
Lawrence County Circuit Court





SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
About Sustaining Hoosier Communities	4
About the Course	5
About the Legal Access of Lawrence County’s Vulnerable Populations	6
Connecting Course & Community	7
Student & Community Outcomes	8



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

Acknowledgements

This project was completed as a collaboration between the students in a course under the Indiana University Maurer School of Law's Access-to-Justice program, LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers, and Lawrence County Circuit Court as part of the 2017-2018 Indiana University Sustaining Hoosier Communities (IUSHC) initiative. IUSHC is a program within the IU Center for Rural Engagement (CRE).

This report represents original student work and recommendations proposed by the students in LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers for Lawrence County Circuit Court. The memos from the three top student teams who studied the needs of rural residents, the needs of low-income seniors, and the needs of homeless and low-income populations in Lawrence County are included in this report. The contents of this report represent the views of the students in LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers and do not reflect those of IUSHC, CRE, Indiana University, or Lawrence County.

IU Faculty

Victor Quintanilla, Maurer School of Law
vdq@indiana.edu

Community Partner

John Plummer III, Juvenile Referee – Lawrence County Circuit Court
johnplummeriii@lawrencecounty.in.gov



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

About Sustaining Hoosier Communities

Indiana University Sustaining Hoosier Communities is an initiative that partners with a local community within south central Indiana to explore, understand, and resolve challenges and projects identified by the community. Based on a tested model for university/community engagement that has been successfully implemented by over 25 universities and their community partners, Sustaining Hoosier Communities is a yearlong collaboration between Indiana University and a single community partner.

Indiana University's faculty who opt in to Sustaining Hoosier Communities match their courses to the projects based on their areas of research, expertise, and teaching. Each course uses a cross-disciplinary approach to explore and solve sustainability issues identified by the community partner through project-based research. Faculty and community stakeholders agree before classes begin on a scope of work and deliverables for each class, and project liaisons are identified by the community and the university to coordinate this unified effort.

Sustaining Hoosier Communities is just one example of many types of community engagement Indiana University plans to pursue as part of the Center for Rural Engagement. By harnessing the research, expertise, energy, and service of Indiana University's faculty, staff, and students, Indiana University and our local partners work collaboratively to improve the health, prosperity, and vitality of southcentral Indiana.

To learn more about IU Sustaining Hoosier Communities, visit www.shc.indiana.edu.

To learn more about the IU Center for Rural Engagement, visit www.rural.indiana.edu.

Sustaining Hoosier Communities Project Process





SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

About the Course

LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers is a course within the Indiana University Maurer School of Law's Access-to-Justice (A2J) Service-Learning Program, which seeks to improve the lives of vulnerable Hoosiers in the 11-county region of south-central Indiana. Maurer's A2J Program is the largest access-to-justice service learning program in the United States that has mobilized over 180 law students to collaborate with legal-aid providers and social service providers across Indiana to design strategies to increase access to justice for underserved populations on a *pro bono* basis. Each academic year, approximately 60+ first-year law students and 17+ second- and third-year law students will participate in this program. New projects will be launched in additional counties in the 11-county region every two years.

Students in LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers partnered with the Lawrence County Circuit Court to assess the most pressing and unmet legal needs of Lawrence County's low-income populations, including residents of rural counties, minority language speakers, migrant workers, seniors, veterans, homeless persons, and persons with mental illness. By examining the current legal services delivery systems as well as reviewing effective and innovative programs nationwide, students helped determine the level of access to legal services for rural and underserved communities and recommended ways to improve the delivery of civil legal services to low-income Hoosiers in Lawrence County.



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

About the Legal Access for Lawrence County's Vulnerable Populations

Lawrence County is home to approximately 46,000 individuals and experiences a poverty rate of 13.7% (as of 2016). The need for legal services for vulnerable populations is staggering, but the resources within Lawrence County are scarce. The memos included in this report from LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers were ranked as the top three in the class: Needs of Rural Residents in Lawrence County, Needs of Homeless and Low-Income Members in Lawrence County, and Needs of Low-Income Seniors in Lawrence County.

The needs of rural residents and homeless/low-income populations in Lawrence County include the lack of unemployment assistance, mental health facilities, and transportation options and are often related to the opioid crisis. Unemployment is thought to be the predominant contribution to the persistent, cyclical effect poverty has in Lawrence County and is further exacerbated by the opioid epidemic. The lack of attorneys in rural areas and the inability to purchase affordable, stable housing are also serious issues facing these populations.

Low-income seniors in Lawrence County are often homebound and unable to leave their homes to perform daily activities due to lack of public transportation, the inability to drive, or the financial means to modify their homes as they age. The result of being homebound often results in lack of companionship and the consequent deterioration of their mental capacities due to this isolation. These are significant contributing factors to how low-income seniors access the limited social and legal services they do have available to them.

By analyzing the demographics of Lawrence County's underrepresented populations, students in LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers could better understand the existing legal and social services Lawrence County residents can access as well as how access to these services can ultimately be improved.



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

The Project: Connecting Course & Community

Law students in LAW-B515: Project Management for Lawyers were assigned to study particular demographic groups: seniors, veterans, homeless persons, rural population, minority language, migrants, persons with mental illness, and juveniles who wound up into the Lawrence County problem solving court. Through a series of seven assignments, each team focused on one of these demographic groups in either Monroe County or Lawrence County and engaged in an ecosystem scan of unmet needs of the demographic group and used their research to identify barriers to accessing legal services as well as to suggest recommendations on how to improve the access to these services.

In the first six assignments, student teams investigated the most pressing needs of their demographic groups within Lawrence County and on a national level; how social service providers, legal aid providers, and legal officials attempted to address these needs; how members of this group think about their most pressing challenges and legal problems, including unmet civil legal needs; and the perspectives of a national expert who shared programs and interventions to address these legal issues. Each law student interviewed six stakeholders: (1) a social service or human service provider, (2) 3-4 members of the demographic group identified by a social service or human service provider, (3) a local legal-aid provider who serves the demographic group, (4) a court official, commissioner, and/or a clerk of that office, (5) a national legal-aid provider who serves the selected group, and (6) an alumnus who engages in pro bono service that serves their demographic group. In the seventh assignment, each team created a memorandum for the Indiana Coalition Court Access that identified the needs of the assigned demographic group, the gaps in addressing these needs, and strategies for more effectively meeting these needs. Each team then created an in-class presentation that communicated research findings to Lawrence County Circuit Court representatives.



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES

Student Outcomes

- Built relationships with social service and legal-aid providers throughout Lawrence County
- Assessed unmet legal needs of Lawrence County's vulnerable populations
- Examined current legal services delivery systems to determine rural and underserved communities' access to legal services
- Reviewed legal services programs to determine ways to improve resource allocation and collaboration with other programs
- Conducted comprehensive legal needs assessments and legal aid system scans
- Prepared memorandums for the Indiana Coalition for Court Access

Community Partner Outcomes

- Support from Maurer School of Law for legal aid work
- Identification of gaps in local and regional legal services in Lawrence County
- Recommendations for resource development to bridge these gaps
- Comprehensive legal needs assessment and legal aid system scan that can influence policy-makers and legal-aid providers in making strategic decisions on how to allocate resources to effectively deliver civil legal services in Lawrence County



SUSTAINING HOOSIER COMMUNITIES



RURAL ENGAGEMENT

A BRIGHTER FUTURE *for* ALL
