



CHARLOTTE PRO BONO TRIAGE PARTNERSHIP

WHAT IS CHARLOTTE TRIAGE?

In September of 2018, the Charlotte legal community came together, to initiate a pro bono program we called Charlotte Triage. Charlotte Triage brings pro bono volunteers together to assist Legal Aid and Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy in the key areas that particularly affect economic mobility and opportunity: housing, criminal record expungement and healthcare. For example, in Charlotte, only 1.9% of tenants with housing matters were represented by counsel in 2017. Despite the fact that 20% of all people in North Carolina had an arrest or criminal record, and this information is so very detrimental to economic mobility, few Charlotte residents could afford lawyers to expunge such records (as North Carolina law readily allows). Moreover, the state health care registry is hard to navigate, leaving many families with incomplete or improperly-reviewed applications for service — and no legal counsel to support them.

The goal of Charlotte Triage is to help Legal Aid shift some of the practice areas impacting low income people over to a “second ring” of Legal Aid, namely the private bar. Accordingly, under the Charlotte Triage plan that kicked off on September 5, 2018, champions in law firms and corporate legal departments began training pro bono lawyers to serve unrepresented clients in these three identified service areas — with the prospect of the expansion as Charlotte Triage grows.

The nine-month report card for Charlotte Triage is impressive: the 77 newly-trained pro bono housing lawyers have already handled more than 50 housing referrals from Legal Aid; the 53 healthcare navigator volunteers who were trained last September have collectively worked on over 60 enrollments; and the 79 lawyers who have been mentored to handle expunctions have aided just over 60 referred clients. Importantly, every single client who was referred to Charlotte Triage by its Legal Aid partners (Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and the Legal Aid of North Carolina) has been accepted — and served by pro bono counsel.

On September 4, 2019 the Charlotte Triage initiative will mark a first anniversary by training even more lawyers and legal professionals to provide increased service in the future, and by refreshing the experience of the initial volunteers, including in a new service area — representing victims of human trafficking. The program will bring together clients, lawyers, the community, and city leaders to promote the ideal of excellence in pro bono legal representation, and to celebrate the enduring American value of service to one’s neighbor in need.

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