Legal Hotline Quarterly

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Legal Files: The All-in-One Legal Services System
*By Matt Ryan**

The following article was submitted by Legal Files Software, Inc. LHQ solicited satisfaction surveys from two users whose names were provided by Legal Files. The results of those surveys immediately follow the article.

***LHQ does not recommend any particular product but provides this information in keeping with its mission to inform legal hotlines about available products, services and resources.*

Managing your legal services organization or hotline presents many challenges. In addition to tracking cases from initial inquiry through completion, you have to handle dozens of daily deadlines, a multitude of administrative issues and the demands of your clients and staff. Everywhere and every way possible, you look to eliminate redundant data entry, perform tasks more efficiently and compile timely and accurate reports. Legal Files Software was created to help you make the most of your limited resources.

Legal Files specializes in managing office workflow. From the moment someone inquires about your services until the case is resolved, Legal Files manages every piece of information, every document, every appointment, every note. You decide exactly how you want to use it.

Legal Files was designed with dozens of customizable features to manage every type of matter, integrating comprehensive contact/intake management with full-featured case management and groupware. Legal Files offers unlimited reporting capabilities. Yet Legal Files is easy to use. It brings a true team concept to case management, sharing and integrating the varied responsibilities of staff and pro bono attorneys, legal assistants, volunteers and administrators, enhancing productivity at every level.

To help manage your office's cases and workflow from start to finish, Legal Files integrates all these features:

- Intake/Eligibility Screening
- Contacts/Parties
- E-mail
- Notes
- Document Assembly
- Document Management
- Phone Messaging
- Event/Calendaring
- Tasks/Deadlines
- Time Tracking
- Case/Problem Info
- Demographic Info
- Pro Bono Attorney Info

Legal Files for Intake

Legal Files includes a complete, integrated intake module that makes it fast and easy to perform eligibility screening, including gathering household, income, expense, asset, benefit, funding source and demographic information. You can easily modify the intake module to capture precisely the data you need. As part of the intake process, staff can perform a conflict check on all individuals involved in the matter, cross-referenced against a master party index.

This "Eligibility Wizard" steps staff and volunteers through the intake process and automatically calculates financial eligibility based on program-specific or LSC guidelines. Once an intake is accepted, all the information entered seamlessly migrates into an open case, where advocates and others can take over.

Legal Files for Advocates

When advocates first launch into Legal Files, they'll be presented with a helpful summary of that day's upcoming activities. Called "Heads Up," this alert system acts as a personal assistant, organizing important deadlines for any case and timely incoming messages – whether related to e-mail, telephone calls or documents.

When working in a case, Legal Files provides one-button access to the information advocates need most, with dozens of built-in reports that can be printed, e-mailed or faxed. And when finished with case activities, Legal Files automatically creates a timeslip of how much time was spent in that matter.

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**Matt Ryan is a Senior Applications Consultant at Legal Files Software, Inc., and a frequent author and lecturer on law office automation issues. He can be reached via e-mail at matt@legalfiles.com or by phone at (217) 523-7480.*

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Legal Files for Support Staff

Using the document assembly built into Legal Files, support staff can save hours and hours of time by eliminating the need to re-type the same documents. A form can be used again and again in different cases, automatically generating a new document merging the template and any data fields you choose. With our document management features, staff have easy access to every document linked to their cases.

Support staff and advocates alike will find Legal Files an excellent training tool and guide. By using a variety of checklists and smart "Task Wizards," staff users can be prompted to complete the next task in a sequence and won't have to re-invent the wheel.

Legal Files for Administrators

Administrators will find that Legal Files gives them the "big picture" overview they need for monitoring caseloads, tracking deadlines and making sure nothing falls through the cracks. By seeing at a glance where a case is at, administrators can help less experienced advocates and staff manage their cases and work proactively to address potential problem areas early on. And by using the reporting capability in Legal Files to spot trends in case types and demographics, administrators can better plan pertinent outreach activities and anticipate services to provide.

If you're trying to manage more than one office, Legal Files provides a means for transferring cases and reporting across sites or the entire enterprise, offering prompt, cumulative data that you can use to accurately and consistently track caseload activity across office locations.

Legal Files…Not Just for Cases

In addition to its intake and case management capabilities, Legal Files also includes a feature called "Office Files" that can be used for tracking non-case-related items. For example, Office Files can be set up for storing information on projects, grants and fund-raising efforts. Additionally, Office Files are ideal for recording staff outreach activities, such as seminars, with the specifics on the type of event, number of people served, materials provided, etc.

Using Office Files makes it easy to report on these other activities and fulfill reporting requirements to funding sources or to satisfy your organization's own needs. As with regular case files, Office Files can include a history of all communications related to the matter, as well as a listing of staff or other related individuals. If greater security is needed, as may be the case with personnel issues, Office Files can be marked "private" making them accessible to only those staff assigned to the matter.

If your organization is considering ways to improve efficiency and provide even better legal services to the community, we invite you to consider Legal Files Software. With Legal Files, you will open the door to greater productivity and join the family of thousands of satisfied Legal Files users.

What the Users Say:

LHQ sent a user satisfaction survey to Kathy Daniels at Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut (SLSCT) and Gray Wilson at Legal Aid of North Carolina. (LANC) The two users were referred to *LHQ* by Legal Files and both agreed to be identified for this article. SLSCT installed Legal Files in June 2002. SLSCT has 180+ users at 10 offices and remote locations. It hosts the application on its own SQL server. Users access the program using frame relay and CITRIX. Users can also access the software through the Internet using CITRIX.

LANC has about 250 users in 25 offices and remote locations. It also runs the application using CITRIX. The first office to start using Legal Files did so in March 2001. The last office came aboard in August 2002.

Kathy Daniels at SLSCT notes that files can be transferred between the program's offices in real time. They have a central intake office and this eliminates the need to re-enter files. She finds the software to have good security features. SLSCT uses Crystal Reports for the data beyond the reports included in Legal Files. Reports they create in Crystal Reports can be imported into Legal Files. The software does interface with Outlook but Kathy notes this interface could be developed further.

Gray Wilson at LANC notes that their implementation was gradual and they are only now starting to use some of the excellent tools included in Legal Files such as document templates, web links, task wizards, etc.

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Legal Files Software User Satisfaction Survey
1 = poor 5 = excellent

Software Characteristic	Rating/Comments Connecticut	Rating/Comments North Carolina
System Administration		
Was it easy to install and set up?	**4**	**4—** LF was not the problem; there were initial issues re: network connectivity
Was the conversion of old data smooth?	**4**	**4—**
Can in-house staff easily make modifications?	**4**	**4**—through custom windows and file menu etc. Some components can be modified only by LF programmers
Performance of software over the Internet?	**4**	**5**
Can back-up be performed efficiently?	**5**	**5**—network administrator function
Overall rating for system administration:	**4**	**5**—now that everything is set up properly, can install upgrades in less than one hour
Cost, Training, and Support		
Was the cost of the software a good value?	**4**	**5—** It's expensive but you get a lot for your money
Was the training you received from the vendor sufficient?	**4 —** used them for initial training and are continuing training as users progress	**5—** but it's a complex program and we're always learning new stuff
How was technical support supplied?	**5 —** phone, email, Citrix	**5—**primarily email; excellent response time, friendly and helpful staff
Client Intake Section		
Is the database search function efficient?	**5**	**5**
Can client input be done quickly?	**2**	4—by some users; others have more difficulty– depending on their computer skill level
Can demographic information be changed quickly?	**5**	**5**
Performance of conflicts checking function?	**3**	**4**—I'd like to see some changes in this component
Overall rating for intake section:	**4**	**4**
Is the tickler system satisfactory?	**4**	**5—**excellent component! Still insufficiently used at LANC
Is the calendar/scheduler satisfactory?	**4**	**5—**excellent-again we could use it more effectively and hopefully will soon
Casenotes and Services		
Can casenotes be input efficiently?	**5**	**5**
Can old casenotes be easily retrieved?	**5**	**5**
Can casetype codes be added or changed easily?	**5**	**5—**by admin. only
Does system facilitate mailing materials to clients?	**5**	**5**
Overall rating for casenote section:	**5**	**5**

Software Characteristic	**Rating/Comments SLSCT**	**Rating/Comments North Carolina**
Referral Section	Not using	LANC tracks PAI referrals but otherwise maintains only very limited data on referrals
Ability to match clients to referral agency	Not using	Not currently done by LANC except at receptionist level
Ability to match clients to referral attorney	Not using	**4—**PAI attorney name cards list types of cases they'll accept
Is it easy to make changes to referral sources?	Not using	**5—**(name cards)
Ability to track referral disposition and/or Appointments	Not using	**5—**(appointments)
Ability to track billings to referral attorneys	Not using	Not using
Overall rating for referral section:	Not using	Not using
Document Preparation		
Ability to generate client letters	**5**	**5**
Ability to create other documents/pleadings	**5**	**5**
Overall document preparation rating	**5**	**5** Excellent document assembly component
Reporting Printing Function		
Does the software run the reports you need?	**3**	**5** a. Legal Files built in reports b. MS Access front end c. Crystal Reports Add-on
Ability to tailor reports as needed	4	**5**
Ability to print cases individually or in defined batches	4	**5**
Can software efficiently report attorney time and productivity	**4**	**5**
OVERALL RATING FOR LEGAL FILES	**4+**	**5**