

Service Opportunity Data Sheet

Mennonite Voluntary Service



Jubilee North – Rochester NY

Position Title: Parent Advocate for Family Law Bureau

Organization/Agency Name: Monroe County Public Defender's Office

10 North Fitzhugh Street
Rochester NY 14614
Tel 585-753-4210
www.monroecountypublicdefender.com

The Agency

The Monroe County Public Defender's Office is an office of 59 attorneys and 23 support staff that represents indigent individuals in the courts within Monroe County, including the City of Rochester and the towns and villages within the geographical boundaries of the County. This area has a population of approximately 700,000 people. The Office handles cases in the town and village justice courts; Rochester City Court; Monroe County and Supreme Court; Monroe County Family Court; New York State Appellate Division and New York Court of Appeals. Last year the Office represented approximately 25,000 people in these courts.

Our goal is to provide to the poor who are accused of a crime, or who are entitled to representation in family court, truly competent legal representation which is at least equal to that which they would expect to obtain from privately retained counsel. An individual's constitutional rights must be protected regardless of his or her financial circumstances.

The Job

This Parent Advocate position is within the Family Law Bureau of the Monroe County Public Defender's Office. The Family Law Bureau is staffed with eight attorneys, two paralegals, and an administrative assistant. The staff is dedicated to serving, among other clients, over 300 families who are involved with the Child Protective system of the Department of Human Services, and who are charged in court with neglect of their children.

Many of the children of these families are in foster care throughout the duration of the case. The average length of stay in foster care for the children of our clients is two years. Foster care stays are devastating to the children and to the family.

Most of our clients in this area of our practice are single woman-head-of-households; many are people of color; many are young women; many have been diagnosed with substance addiction and/ or mental illness problems. Our clients face daunting issues including accessing necessary services, homelessness, domestic violence and financial instability.

The Parent Advocate would assist the attorneys and paralegals in the following:

- Investigating allegations brought by the Department of Human Services to help determine defenses to allegations made;
- Assisting staff in conducting thorough interviews of our clients and searching for relatives or others who may serve to house the children in lieu of foster care;
- Assisting staff in determining the needs of the client-parent(s), and to assist in procuring appropriate services to meet the real needs of the parent;
- Assisting staff in the preparation of proposed treatment plans to present to court to prevent a possible termination of parental rights;
- Acting as an advocate outside the courtroom and between court appearances by accompanying our client-parents to meetings and case reviews held at the department of human services,
- Assisting client-parents in gathering all necessary documentation to assure continuation of temporary assistance, medical insurance, housing, food stamps, and any or all other financial support for which they are eligible;
- Developing a visitation plan and securing visitation supervisors and locations that more adequately meet the needs of the family for frequent, quality visitations;
- Assisting in assuring that services that are court ordered are made available to the family, and are appropriate to meet the needs of the family;
- Assisting staff in helping to link the parents to necessary and appropriate services;
- Assisting the attorney in keeping track of service providers, reports from the providers, and reacting to and immediately addressing issues and problems raised by the providers regarding lack of parent involvement or participation in necessary services;
- Engaging in regular contact with parents to get up-to-date information regarding progress on the dispositional mandates;
- Interviewing clients regularly over the course of the case, to ascertain whether a different approach to issues in the family should be implemented.

The Qualifications

- B.A. or higher or equivalent training in social work, education, psychology, sociology, or related field
- Must have a valid driver's license
- Must have a sensitivity to the problems and concerns of the indigent
- Strong organizational skills
- Ability to work collaboratively with a team dedicated to helping indigent clients