

2005 Showcase in Excellence Awards Recipient



**Office of the Legal Advocate - Maricopa County
“Office of Legal Advocate/Felony”**



Company Information:

Highest Ranking Official:

Susan Sherwin
Legal Advocate

Contact Person:

Susan Sherwin
Legal Advocate
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Type of work:

The Office of the Legal Advocate provides quality legal representation for indigent clients

Workforce:

79 full-time employees

Testimonial of Value of the AZ State Quality Awards Program

“The Office of the Legal Advocate’s Felony case management system was the basis for our Showcase Award application. In preparing the application according to the outline provided by the AQA, we examined and defined aspects of the process that we had not previously articulated. Doing so brought us to recognize that our case management system reflects core values of our Department we may not have consciously referenced during its development. Every organization can profit from such analysis”

-Susan Sherwin, Maricopa County Legal Advocate

Highlights of Organizational Process:

OLA was established July 1, 2000, with an annual budget of \$1.9 million, and 30 authorized full-time positions. In fiscal year 2004-05, our approved budget was \$6.5 million, with 79 full-time positions. Our Mission is to provide quality, cost-effective legal representation to each client who is assigned to us by the court, thus safeguarding the fundamental legal rights of every member of the community. Our Vision is to serve our clients by working collaboratively, efficiently and innovatively, so that we will be responsive to the needs of all of our customers within the framework of our allotted budget.

Our Values are

- Respect -- for our colleagues, clients, and constituents;
- Excellence – providing otherwise disenfranchised with representation equal to that available to the wealthiest or most privileged member of society
- Teamwork – helping each other so that the client is best served
- Integrity – these values are reflected in all of our actions

Our clients fall into one of two categories: those who charged with or convicted of felony offenses in the adult division of the Superior Court, and children who are removed from their families of origin because they have been victims of abuse or neglect.

The rapid growth of Maricopa County has yielded a corresponding increase in case filings and, accordingly, case assignments. While OLA's authorized full time employee positions have more than doubled in size in its five years of existence, its individual attorney's caseloads have continued to grow more congested due to changes in the Court's application of speedy trial rules, Court decisions and legislative changes to capital case procedures, as well as changes in the way that capital legislation is implemented by a newly elected administration in the prosecutor's office. These dual pressures require an accurate, reliable and transparent method of tracking cases assigned, their progress through the courts, and the amount of resources expended upon them so that an accurate cost-per-case can be reported in conjunction with performance measures monitoring the quality and efficacy of our work.

We began with the premise that a public office must be more accessible, responsive and flexible than a method based in paper or primitive technology would allow.

The system that we developed (Office of the Legal Advocate/Felony or "OLAF") places the inputs we receive, from all sources including the Courts, jails, clients and our attorneys, into a central database where it is immediately accessible to all of the system's users and can be sorted or organized into reports according to the needs of each user or any constituent. Each client's case is tracked as it progresses, of course, but the information may also be formatted as a case list, individual calendar, departmental daily or weekly calendar, or in any of a number of other layouts as the occasion dictates. OLAF, by merging modern case tracking technology with an efficient and economical case flow design, allows anyone in our office to access a felony case and report its progress and status on demand to any of our constituents.

We measure our organization's success by reference to our mission and vision. Utilization of a system that allows our staff to better serve our clients and our attorneys to use their time effectively, while providing reliable data regarding our efficiency and productivity, makes it possible for us to strive toward our mission: providing quality, cost-effective legal representation to each client who is assigned to us by the court, thus safeguarding the fundamental legal rights of every member of the community. Further, OLAF allows us to work collaboratively, efficiently and innovatively, so that we will be responsive to the needs of all of our customers within the framework of our allotted budget.

The core values of SQA provide a basis for the evaluation of this process. Most closely aligned are:

Customer-driven excellence – the very foundation for OLAF was the requirements of our customers and constituents. The accessibility and ease of use of the system contribute to the satisfaction of its users, and its accuracy and flexibility of reporting satisfies our external customers. Our continuous effort at improvement anticipates emergent needs and addresses them. By remaining current on technology, we are prepared to adopt new methods to serve our customers' needs.

Management by Fact -- By establishing a system where actual statistics, not estimates or averages, are reported, we have introduced a transparency that has not always existed in government culture. In so doing, we have opened our organization to meaningful change in all of its processes. Our employees are encouraged to approach challenges creatively, to share their solutions, and to work toward improvement as an everyday event.