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ADOPT AN ANGEL PROGRAM

The Adopt An Angel Program matches domestic violence shelter organizations with local law firms that will provide them with ongoing, *pro bono* legal advice and assistance for matters arising out of the day-to-day operation and management of their shelter (i.e., negotiating lease agreements, reviewing human resource materials, providing risk management advice, etc.). This Q & A Sheet addresses some of the common questions that law firms may have before agreeing to participate in the Adopt An Angel Program. If you have other questions or would like more information about the program, please contact Marci Fukuroda at (323) 951-9847 or marci.fukuroda@cwlc.org.

Q: What does it mean to “adopt” a domestic violence shelter?

A: “Adopting” a domestic violence shelter means that your firm agrees to be available to respond to requests for legal advice and assistance from your adopted shelter concerning matters that relate to the operation and management of the shelter. The type of relationship that participating firms establish with their adopted shelter may vary according to the general policies and practices of each firm. For example, some firms may choose to have a general retainer agreement with their adopted shelter that formally recognizes the shelter as a pro bono client of the firm. Other firms may choose to have a more informal relationship with their adopted shelter whereby they agree to be available to consider requests for assistance from the shelter and will only enter into a formal retainer agreement with the shelter on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Does adopting a shelter require that my firm take on every legal matter that the adopted shelter may have?

A: No. All of the shelters that apply to participate in the Adopt An Angel Program will be advised that the fact that they have been “adopted” by a firm does not mean that the firm will be able to provide them with legal assistance for every legal issue that arises. They will also be advised that there may be many reasons why their firm will not be able to handle a particular matter for them (e.g., conflict of interest, lack of expertise in a particular area). In addition, we encourage participating firms to make any potential limitations of their representation clear to their adopted shelter at the start of the relationship. Even though your firm may not be able to address all of your adopted shelter’s legal needs, it is important that these shelters have a consistent, ongoing legal resource to turn to when they need help.



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Q: What if our firm is unable to help our adopted shelter with a particular legal matter?

A: Participating firms should direct the shelter to other resources, when possible. Firms can also direct the shelter to the California Women's Law Center so that we can advise them or find someone to help them with their problem.

Q: How should my firm handle requests for legal advice or assistance from our adopted shelter?

A: In order for the adoption relationship to be successful, it is important that participating firms develop a comfortable and familiar relationship with their adopted shelter. Consequently, we recommend that participating firms designate a person within their firm to serve as the primary contact person for the shelter. The primary contact person would be responsible for directing the shelter to, or enlisting the help of, other attorneys in the firm depending on the nature of the request and the area of expertise that it requires.

Q: What type of legal services do domestic violence shelters typically require?

A: Based on our preliminary conversations with shelter directors, some common areas in which shelters require legal assistance include employment law, contract and lease negotiations, corporate formation and governance, risk management and preserving confidential client information. Most of the shelters' needs involve legal advice and transactional work, and we do not anticipate that there will be many requests for firms to engage in litigation on behalf of their adopted shelter. We are conducting a survey of California domestic violence shelters to more accurately determine their specific legal needs. Because shelters are required to complete this survey before participating in the Adopt-An-Angel Program, we will be able to tell you what legal issues your adopted shelter identified as being important.

Please note that participating firms are only responsible for assisting their adopted shelter with legal issues involving the actual operation and management of the shelter organization. Firms are not required to provide legal assistance to the shelter's clients for matters such as divorce and restraining order proceedings. Also, please note that the California Women's Law Center has substantial expertise on domestic violence policy and discrimination issues and can be a resource to firms on this issue, including co-counseling with firms should litigation arise involving these issues.

Q: What kind of fees and costs will my firm be responsible for?

A: Participating law firms must provide their adopted shelter with pro bono legal assistance for all matters that the firm agrees to undertake for the shelter. In addition, participating firms will be expected to absorb all fees and costs associated with their representation of the shelter (e.g., filing fees, copying, telephone, and travel).

Q: How long does the adoption relationship last?

A. Firms are expected to commit a minimum of two years to assisting their adopted shelter. However, as one of the goals of the program is to ensure that shelters have ongoing access to pro bono legal assistance, our hope is that firms develop long term relationships with their shelter clients that extend beyond the two-year period required by the program.