

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Affiliate Spotlight: The Illinois State Bar Association/Young Lawyers Division

By Kelley A. Gandurski

This year, I had the distinct pleasure to chair the Illinois State Bar Association/Young Lawyers Division (ISBA/YLD). The ISBA/YLD originally set out to foster relationships among young lawyers in Illinois and to assist young lawyers in networking while providing tools to young lawyers as they begin to practice law. In the past twelve years, the ISBA/YLD has promoted this philosophy and has also developed a means to involve Illinois young lawyers in public service.

Children's Assistance Fund

The ISBA/YLD created the Illinois Bar Foundation/Children's Assistance Fund ("Children's Assistance Fund"), a 501(c)(3) charity, designed to provide grants to other charitable organizations promoting programs relating to children and the law. The Children's Assistance Fund originally provided seed funds to children's waiting rooms in courthouses throughout Illinois. These waiting rooms provide children with a safe place to stay separate from the often-difficult reality of courtroom business. The Children's Assistance Fund has since been extended to provide grant money for other projects relating to children and the law, such as programs that provide legal assistance to children, that reduce domestic violence in families with children, that reduce recidivism of juvenile offenders, that encourage pro bono legal work as it relates to children, and that promote continuing legal education.

Funding

To raise funds for the Children's Assistance Fund, the ISBA/YLD holds several fundraising events each year. In the 2009–2010 year, the ISBA/YLD held its "Fifth Annual Golf Outing," "Second Annual Day at the Races," "Twelfth Annual Holiday Party," "Third Annual Bean Bag Toss," and "Second Annual Summer Soiree" (formal event). All profits from these events provided grant money to the Children's Assistance Fund. The events are designed to appeal to a broad range of audiences.

Although the main purpose of these events is fundraising, another purpose is to help foster relationships among young lawyers. In the current economy, young lawyers in Illinois are finding it difficult to find work after graduating law school and passing the bar exam. Holding these events provides an opportunity for young lawyers to take leadership roles within the ISBA/YLD, as all of these events require at least one young lawyer to chair the event. Furthermore, as these subcommittees meet in preparation for the events, individual subcommittee members begin to cultivate relationships by working with one another. Each event often takes months to plan, providing subcommittee members with an opportunity to form relationships. It is also very common for members of the ISBA at large to attend YLD events, and this provides another opportunity for young lawyers to network with experienced attorneys involved in the ISBA and to gain leadership recognition from the ISBA at large.

As Chair of the ISBA/YLD, one of my goals was to continue to promote ISBA/YLD events for the Children's Assistance Fund and also make it affordable for young lawyers to attend these events. To do this, I had to work with the subcommittee chairs to find affordable venues for events. We changed the regular venue for three of our events, the Holiday Party, Bean Bag Toss, and Summer Soiree, to keep the events' costs low. Although we were able to save costs by changing the venue, we were presented with other challenges of contract negotiation and advertising. I am proud to report that despite these obstacles, the ISBA/YLD was able to give away \$23,500 in grant funds in the 2009–2010 year. The 2010–2011 year will face similar challenges.

Get Involved!

In addition to fundraising, the ISBA/YLD sponsors continuing legal education programs for young lawyers and presents Young Lawyer of the Year Awards to two outstanding young lawyers. The ISBA/YLD also publishes six newsletters per year and is a liaison to the Law Student Committee to encourage involvement and membership in the ISBA.

I have personally benefited from my involvement in the ISBA/YLD. I have strengthened my leadership skills, increased my networking opportunities, and, most importantly, built valuable friendships that will last a lifetime. As ex-officio of the ISBA/YLD, I cannot stress enough the importance of getting involved in your local bar and of participating in public service projects.

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