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From the Chair...

By Richard Cassidy

Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services

I am proud to announce the recipients of the 2010 Louis M. Brown Award. The recipients joined the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services both at a presentation at the ABA Midyear Meeting and at the Committee's business meeting. I will devote my next column to those who were honored. Suffice it to say for now that Illinois Legal Aid Online received meritorious recognition, Richard Granat was honored for Lifetime Achieve and the 2010 Brown Award was presented to the CUNY School of Law's Community Legal Resource Network. All are extraordinarily worthy of this honor and add to the prestige of the Award.

In this column, I'd like to focus on some additional nominees, all of which exemplify the spirit of the Louis M. Brown Award by exploring innovations in the delivery of legal services to those of moderate incomes. The Brown Award is unusual because its nominees come from so many sources. This year, we received a total of 19 nominations, from bar associations, law schools, non-profit programs, practitioners and entrepreneurs.

Some programs are highly targeted and focused on niche needs that are often difficult to address otherwise. For example, the Center for California Homeowner Association Law provides resources to the residents of condos, mobile homes and subdivisions that are managed by the 46,000 homeowner associations in the state. Many of the residents are elderly and/or people of moderate incomes. When they have an association dispute, they face an institutional adversary that typically has far greater resources. The Center provides workshops, web-based training and materials, and lawyers who provide coaching services so that people are able to level the playing field when trying to resolve their disputes.

The Texas Shared Parenting Project is an example of a program serving a niche, doing so in a collaborative way. The Texas Access to Justice Foundation and the Attorney General have teamed on this program to

resolve co-parenting disputes. It provides a statewide Access & Visitation Hotline and Parenting Order Legal Clinics to both avoid and resolve disputes.

This year, the Committee received nominations from Canada for the first time, including an initiative from the University of Toronto on middle income access to the civil justice system in Ontario. The project, which is unfolding in 2010, will include academic research and a policy paper, a law school research course, education courses for the public, think tank discussions, an international conference in the fall of 2010 and development of a pilot delivery model as a student program. After this program has advanced, the Delivery Committee hopes to look for opportunities to replicate it in the US.

While some nominees address much needed but narrowly focused legal needs, others are much broader and potentially transformative. The National Center for Technology and Dispute Resolution, lead by Prof. Ethan Katsh, has advanced Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) tools that enable tens of millions of dispute to be resolved through technology every year. It appears we have come to a point where more disputes are resolved online than through the American judicial system. Through various outlets, ODR has not only become a crucial part of the infrastructure of the Internet, but also of dispute resolution. The Center has led this transformation.

These programs illustrate the breadth of work that is being done to improve access to justice in innovative ways. We thank them for their involvement in the Brown Award and look forward to their continued successes.

Further information about the Brown Award, including details on each nominee, is available at <http://www.abalegalservices.org/delivery/brown.html>.

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