

SURENDRANATH LAW COLLEGE

24/2, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Kolkata-700009

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BEST PRACTICE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: FIELD BASED LEGAL AID SUPPORT

The Context: The importance of Legal Aid and Awareness Campaigns as a mechanism for social progress has been repeatedly stressed upon by the Government of India. The Legal Aid Clinic in Surendranath Law College was established with the purpose of imparting clinical legal education, as a part of the practical training programme devised by the Bar Council of India and the State Legal Services Authority. The career of a law student is greatly influenced by orating skills and it is expected that their participation in legal assistance camps helps them gain confidence and acquire experiential learning by actively participating in legal aid activities, even before formally entering the professional world.

The Practice: The college has a well-functioning Legal Aid Clinic which plays a pivotal role in raising consciousness about constitutional rights, duties and obligations of citizens. The clinic conducts several Legal Literacy Camps to bring about legal awareness by engaging effectively, especially with the marginalized sections of the society. By forming a separate committee with student members, it also aims to provide practical and experiential learning to students by engaging them directly with clients. Through various activities that are meticulously planned and designed by our faculty members, the Legal Aid Clinic provides preventive, remedial, and reformative services by organising legal awareness camps, legal literacy camps, workshops, seminars, lectures and legal counselling in collaboration with experts and professionals in the field. It is expected that together with classroom learning, the initiatives taken by the legal aid committee will serve to instil a sense of duty among law students to advocate for justice, equality, and democratic principles in their future legal careers.

Objectives:

- i. **Provide Free Legal Assistance:** To offer accessible and free legal support to underprivileged individuals and communities, ensuring they understand their rights and have guidance on legal matters such as family disputes, criminal cases, and civil issues.

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- ii. **Raise Legal Awareness:** To educate the local community about their legal rights and the services available and promote greater awareness of legal avenues for resolving disputes and securing justice.

- iii. **Practical Exposure for Law Students:** To provide students with hands-on legal experience by allowing them to engage directly with real clients and legal professionals, fostering a practical understanding of law while nurturing a sense of social responsibility.

Programmes organised-

- i. Legal Awareness Camps
- ii. Celebration of World Consumers' Rights Day
- iii. Celebration of National Law Week
- iv. Invited/Special Lectures

Outcome & Success

The Legal Aid Committee through its programmes organised in Legal Aid Clinics has provided a platform to all stakeholders to understand and uphold rights, and duties. It has to a large extent enabled wide exposure for students through interactive sessions with senior legal professional and esteemed judges. This is expected to have enriched students and helped them develop critical thinking and legal reasoning. It has given students an opportunity to network with experienced legal professionals, which has been beneficial for mentorship, career advice, counselling and internship.

Challenges & Way Forward

Financial and logistical constraints have been an impediment in increasing the scale of the programmes especially when the programme is organised outside college. Travel and tiffin expenses soar when the scale of participation of students and clients is increased. The college is making a concerted effort towards strengthening the SNLC Alumni Network in order to jointly organise Legal Aid Camps more frequently to targeted clients and enable closer networking with students to build a close-knit legal community that is both strong, experienced and efficient.