



LEFT TO RIGHT: Liz Reppe, George H. Norris, Katie Barrett Wiik, Erik Hansen, Jennifer Young, Dean Eyler and Liz Kramer.

APPEALS SELF-HELP CLINIC: Access to justice

According to the state office of court administration, almost a quarter of appellate filings in Minnesota during 2015 involved at least one pro se party. That's a lot of people who appealed cases with no more than lay knowledge of the law, which can lead to backed-up court dockets among other issues.

A group of attorneys and other legal professionals founded the Appeals Self-Help Clinic in early 2016 to provide a resource that helps pro se appellants be better prepared when their day in court arrives. Only the second of its kind in the United States, the clinic helps pro se parties identify the standard of review, find the correct forms for various filings and meet filing deadlines.

"It originated out of some needs we saw here," said state law librarian Liz Reppe. "Many of the people we have coming in are trying to tackle appeals without an attorney."

The law library in 2013 started a clinic for people appealing denials of unemployment

insurance, most of whom are unrepresented.

"But we still had people coming in who were struggling with family law appeals, misdemeanors and civil litigation," said Reppe.

Reppe and Erik Hansen, then chair of the



governing council for the Minnesota State Bar Association's Appellate Section, put together a group of attorneys to outline the strategies and materials that would make the clinic work most efficiently.

"This was a goal I had when I first came to the state law library because there's almost nothing out there for people to get free assistance with an appeal," said Reppe. "Even for people able to navigate a family law case in district court, appeals are a whole other ballgame."

The Appeals Self-Help Clinic held 70 consultations with pro se parties during the first nine months of last year. According to feedback surveys, more than two-thirds of clinic users believed they couldn't afford a lawyer, and almost half are on some sort of public assistance.

"[My] client was happy when he walked out of the clinic," wrote Robin Wolpert of Sapia Law Group, who volunteered at the clinic last year. "He felt like he had access to justice and that justice was possible. He was empowered."

—Dan Heilman

