

Power Lunch Project - Submitted by Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles

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The Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles ("WLALA") is dedicated to promoting the full participation of women lawyers and judges in the legal profession, maintaining the integrity of our legal system by advocating principles of fairness and equality, and improving the status of women in our society. Established in 1919, WLALA has been a powerful and respected advocate of women attorneys, women in general, persons of color, the disadvantaged, and the under-represented in Southern California. WLALA currently has approximately 1200 members.

Among the special projects of WLALA are: the Harriett **Buhai Center for Family Law**, which assists low income individuals in preparing and handling pro per family law matters; the **Jail Project** committee in which volunteer lawyers advise and assist incarcerated women on their non-criminal legal matters such as domestic relations; the **WLALA Foundation**, which provides grants to law students for projects to benefit the disadvantaged, and funding for historical and educational projects, pro bono projects and scholarships, and the **Power Lunch Project** providing education and mentorship for high school students in under-served, high-crime, and ethnically diverse communities.

Power Lunch Project - Detailed Project Description

The Power Lunch Program is a collaboration of Women Lawyers of Los Angeles (WLALA) and the Los Angeles Superior Court to provide education and mentorship for high school students in under-served, high-crime, and ethnically diverse communities. Throughout the year, approximately 400 students from various schools come to courthouses throughout Los Angeles County to have lunch with justice system professionals including judges, lawyers and members of law enforcement during which they hear presentations about the Constitution and the legal system. Following the presentations, the students break out into smaller groups to allow for personal interactions with the participating judges and lawyers. This part of the program provides the opportunity for students who might not otherwise cross paths with legal professionals to do so in a positive and informative manner. In fact, the lawyer and judge participants often learn as much from the students as the students learn from them. The Power Lunch concludes with an interactive game of 'Judicial Jeopardy.'

The mission of the Power Lunch Program is to provide members of under-served communities, many of whom have either had only negative experiences with and/or otherwise distrust the legal system, with information about and positive access to the justice system. By providing the students with role-models and a pleasant experience with the legal system, the Power Lunch Program hopes to empower, inspire, and cultivate a diverse new wave of future members of the legal system. We believe it is essential to provide a free, nutritious lunch for the student participants, many of whom may not be able to afford a healthy meal, as an additional inducement to encourage the participation of those who might not otherwise attend. The

students are also provided with a focused but informal setting to interact with professionals. In addition, each student who participates in the program receives a personalized certificate.

Power Lunch recruits middle and high school students and schools from throughout under-served communities within Los Angeles County. During the grant year, the Power Lunch Program will draw students from a variety of schools representing different geographic communities within Los Angeles, to include students from the San Fernando Valley (north), the Westside, the Eastside, and the Southern/Central portion of Los Angeles. In 2010 we conducted five Power Lunch programs, with approximately 60-70 young people attending each Program (plus ten judge/attorney participants), representing approximately 350 students served by the Program. We anticipate conducting six separate Power Lunch programs in 2011.

Representing a variety of multi-lingual and multi-ethnic enclaves, the youth in these areas face a number of historic socio-economic and cultural barriers that limit their access to positive career and academic role-models, whether in the legal or other professions. Many only know the legal system through their or their family members' negative experience with the courts. In prior years, several student participants in the Power Lunch Program have subsequently secured positions with the Los Angeles Superior Court.

The Power Lunch Program addresses three key elements to increasing access to justice and improving the public's trust and confidence in the justice system:

Civic Education. The Power Lunch Program provides education about the legal system through site visits to a local courthouse and inter-active presentations by judges and members of the bar. This type of real-world experience is increasingly valuable in light of reduced school funding for other outside field trips.

Diversifying the Legal Career Pipeline. The Power Lunch Program encourages minority and economically disadvantaged students to consider learning more about, and perhaps aspiring to become a member of, the legal system by providing exposure to positive professional role models and mentors within the legal profession. The mentorship by judges has extended beyond the Power Lunch program, with judges providing support to the students on a continuing basis.

Justice System Collaboration. The Power Lunch Program also fosters increased collaboration and positive relationships between members of the bench and the bar by having judicial officers and attorneys participate together to educate and mentor students. Law enforcement personnel, court staff, and paralegals also make presentations to the students, which further fosters a sense of partnership between the justice system's various participants, as well as providing additional, alternative role models for young people in attendance.

The Power Lunch Program is staffed by WLALA volunteers and representatives from the Superior Court's Community Relations Office. The Hon. Beverly O'Connell (boconnell@lasuperiorcourt.org) and Nicole Bershon (nbershon@gmail.com) are the WLALA

Board members with primary responsibility for creating and implementing the Power Lunch Project. We work with the schools to arrange transportation for the students and their teachers from the schools to the courthouse, either through public transportation or chartered vans or buses. We provide the food, drink and utensils. The Court provides the facilities for the lunch and meeting sessions. We fund the Project through money from the sponsoring organizations, donations and grants.

We work to measure the success of the Project through regular feedback processes. Through follow up conversations and electronic mail correspondence, we will survey participating teachers, students, and attorneys regarding the Program's effectiveness, including how well it educated them about the legal system and the importance of civic engagement. Both during and after the program, we endeavor to assess whether the program inspired students to consider a profession in the legal field, as well as advanced education.

We also track the number of participating students, judges, and attorneys, and as well as the general demographic make-up of the student participants in each program.