



## Creative Pro Bono Model to Reach Clients Living in Remote Locations

In communications with pro bono program coordinators and managers, one issue that commonly arises is how to reach clients who live in remote areas. The Children's Immigration Law Academy (CILA) spoke with [Katie Annand](#), Managing Attorney for the Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) San Francisco and Fresno offices, for insight into their California tech legal services pro bono program and how technology helps them reach clients who live in remote areas.

**The Start of KIND's California Tech Legal Services Pro Bono Program:** KIND opened its San Francisco office and Fresno satellite office in 2016. "When KIND opened in San Francisco, we thought through what other areas had venue in San Francisco immigration court. There was a need in the Central Valley, a very large, over 300-mile range, very heavily rural communities. Fresno is the largest city in the Central Valley." Initially, before KIND's technology was set up, KIND placed cases with attorneys in the Bay Area. These attorneys were very dedicated attorneys and willing to travel and represent children who lived two to four hours away. "It took some work to get the attorneys to sign up. We had to hone in on the need, focus on their interest to help a child. We acknowledged it would be easier if the child lived nearby but there was much more of a need to represent a child in one of the farming towns. There was no other access." Later that year, KIND had the necessary technology in place to work with pro bono attorneys and expand their efforts to match children and youth with pro bono attorneys by helping facilitate attorney-client communication.

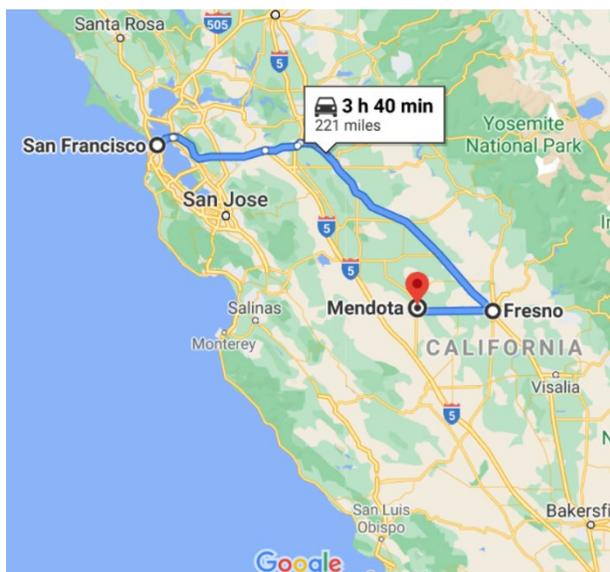
**How the Model Works:** KIND purchased a large monitor for its Fresno office. Clients come into a dedicated space in the KIND office, and a KIND staff member sets up a conference for the child to speak with their attorney privately over a virtual platform. The organization initially used Zoom for video conferencing and then switched to Skype for Business. KIND also helped coordinate to have an interpreter in their office as well to help facilitate communication with the pro bono attorney, if necessary. If the client was very young, then the KIND staff member with whom the child was familiar would stay in the room with the client's permission. "It gave a virtual space and a physical space so attorneys could connect with clients," Annand described.

KIND's other site for their tech program is a kiosk in Mendota, California. Annand explained that many of their released clients live in Mendota so there was a great need for services. "Mendota does not have a grocery store. There is no reliable transit. A bus goes down to Fresno



The above image shows the pro bono office space set-up in their Fresno office.

twice a day, but it takes twice the time it does to drive, and it only goes to one place downtown. If a client were to pay for a ride, it would cost about \$40-\$50 roundtrip,” Annand said. She described how the remoteness of where their clients live limited their access to counsel and the satellite office in Fresno. “Even if a client lives in Mendota, about forty minutes from Fresno, there were obstacles to accessing an attorney and our remote program. They could not get to Fresno, or the child was missing a day of school, or the caretaker was missing work.” To help overcome this obstacle, KIND partnered with a health clinic in Mendota. In August 2019, KIND put a kiosk with a tablet in a private space in the clinic which allows clients to come and use the tablet to connect and talk with their attorneys. KIND’s kiosk is in a small office behind the clinic’s check-in office, not by medical offices, and the office is reserved for KIND’s use two days a week.



The Google map shows the distance between the KIND San Francisco and Fresno offices and Mendota.

**The Benefits for Clients and KIND:** Annand expressed that now with this program, clients can have an attorney where there are no attorneys. “We can say ‘yes, we can serve you. We can take on your case, and you do not have to travel several hundred miles or pay \$200 to get to San Francisco. We can work with you in your community.’” The program has greatly expanded access to counsel for many children who otherwise could not work with an attorney because of the remoteness of where they live. Additionally, Annand explained another benefit has been educating the private sector about unaccompanied children, particularly unaccompanied children living in rural communities in California. The project has helped KIND reallocate advocacy tools and resources from San Francisco to an area with little to no pro bono presence.

**Fine-Tuning the Program:** Annand explained they had a high need for pro bono representation at the beginning of the program, and it was a challenge to encourage attorneys to take a case for a client who lived several hours away. When the program first started, the organization worked to educate firms about the program and encouraged firms to have small teams take one to two cases and see how the experience went. There were some simple technology challenges to start. There were times when the pro bono attorney had difficulty accessing Skype for Business. If there were any drops or delays in audio, that had potential to hurt rapport between the client and the attorneys if it could not be resolved quickly and explained to the client. To help make the process go more smoothly and work out these issues, on the day of a meeting, a KIND staff member on-site at the Fresno office would test the connection with the pro bono attorney to ensure there were no problems opening the application. KIND also got a stronger wired connection to help connectivity issues.

Additionally, in June 2018, KIND started a project to provide cell phones to clients who were particularly vulnerable, lacked communication resources, or with little family support. This helped provide youth with an option to reach their attorney if it was difficult for them to physically get to Fresno or Mendota. KIND downloaded Skype for Business on the phone and created user accounts so children and youth could more

easily talk with, and see, their attorney. “When the program started in 2018, the phones were clunky,” Annand said. “When working with teenagers and having a phone that is not cool, it may dissuade a teenager from using it. We improved the phones’ cool factor, and that has helped.” The cell phones also help to ensure youth can speak to their attorneys in a safe and private location, to provide more choice in where they speak with their attorney.

**Considerations for Pro Bono Recruitment and Case Placement:** KIND explains to both the client and potential pro bono attorney that the goal is not that every meeting is via video, but the technology provides a way to stay in touch. When recruiting pro bono attorneys KIND also ensures that the attorney can travel to meet the client when it is appropriate. KIND encourages attorneys to travel when they need to discuss substantive, sensitive issues with their client. Annand explained, “It requires more screening of pro bono attorneys to ensure they have understanding of the model, and the need to travel at times, that we need the same level of engagement or investment in the case.”

Before a case is placed, KIND speaks with the child client and family to explain the program and that the pro bono attorney may be geographically far away to ensure they are comfortable with that before moving forward. Annand remembers one instance in which the client was not comfortable with this distance, and KIND decided to place the case in-house. KIND has three attorneys in their Fresno office who provide direct representation. In placing cases with pro bono attorneys, KIND considers a number of factors, such as the complexity of the child’s case and past trauma. Annand said, “Sometimes you don’t know from the intake what happened exactly in the child’s life. We have seen many pro bono attorneys who have built amazing rapport even from video meetings. They would consistently meet with clients and learn their stories. I give a lot of credit to the attorneys and clients. It takes more vulnerability and bravery on both ends.” Building rapport virtually is one of the challenges of the program. Annand described that they encourage pro bono attorneys to spend the time to build rapport and know that it may take longer to do so. To help pro bono attorneys develop a strong, working relationship with their clients, KIND recommends more frequent, consistent meetings.

She also noted that at the beginning, there were concerns about the kids using the technology to connect with their attorneys. While the level of familiarity each child has with technology varies, many of the children are tech savvy already and watch videos and use applications such as WhatsApp to talk with family. “Our clients typically are not scared by the video component,” Annand said. This varies, of course, depending on the child’s age and developmental abilities. Another challenge noted by Annand is that there are not funds to give phones to everyone. She hopes that this program challenge can be fixed over time and perhaps in the future, they can expand and provide tablets so clients can more easily communicate with their attorneys and access documents related to their legal case. Since the initial launch of the program, KIND has developed a way to review documents over the phones with clients and obtain signatures electronically.

**Program Support for Pro Bono Attorneys:** KIND has a very hands-on model for mentorship and training with a knowledgeable mentor attorney assigned to each case, as well as regular trainings and check-ins. Coordination of the remote program is done through the pro bono mentor and other advocates on the team. Trainings for pro bono attorneys cover topics such as best practices for working with child clients, ethics, cultural responsiveness, and trauma-informed interviewing techniques along with core concepts, advanced topics, and updates on changes. KIND trains pro bono attorneys how to work with children,

specifically in the Central Valley, educating attorneys on some resources in the area and the transportation challenges in the region, for example. Additionally, Annand expressed how they themselves have made a large effort to learn the community to help with mentorship of the cases. From their efforts, they have built an understanding of the farm worker communities and work to incorporate knowledge of the Central Valley culture into mentorship of their pro bono attorneys, who often live in the Bay Area.

KIND has built partnerships with organizations yielding two to three additional locations in Mendota available for clients and attorneys to use a private space to meet in person as needed. A team paralegal in Fresno helps coordinate meetings with the partner location to have a space. KIND has also recruited volunteer interpreters for the meetings. They have played a role in helping with logistics “to help encourage a pro bono attorney who is busy and has good intentions and lives a few hours away. It helps to have the community partners and volunteers, and to recommend where to grab a sandwich or coffee, to help facilitate and make it a smooth process.”

**Connection to the Community:** KIND typically hosts four in-person resource fairs a year in different Central Valley communities, and providers from the area come to share information with their clients. The fairs feature a variety of resources such as a table for a health clinic to discuss their services, a table regarding public health needs, Know Your Rights information, library youth groups, school district representatives, highway patrol child seat safety demonstrations, and a winter coat drive. KIND encourages pro bono attorneys to invite their clients to attend the fairs.



KIND hosts resource fair with a coat drive in Fresno, CA. KIND’s America Hernandez, Social Services Coordinator, speaks at a Fresno, CA resource fair.

KIND staff will also bring several clients together to show them how to use a tablet, like the one they use in Mendota. A couple of the children will demonstrate to help make the information more relatable and help the program feel accessible. Each fair usually reaches twenty to fifty clients and their caretakers and lasts about three hours and includes a donated dinner. KIND includes some fun activities in the agenda as well, such as healing circles and planting plants together to take home. They also have a “passport-type” game, where the child checks off each of the community partners’ tables they visited and gets a toy at the end. “We are a support system. We are not just filing papers with court. We want to help the children navigate different things as well because sometimes they are too nervous to go to the library or health

center.” Annand reflected on a fond memory from a fair of a child connecting with a school district representative to join the science club. “She didn’t know how to do it, and she wanted to be a doctor. It was great! For us, bringing the resources to the clients goes hand-in-hand with having a physical presence of where they are.” KIND’s last resource fair was in February 2020. Due to COVID-19, the remaining fairs scheduled for this year have been cancelled.

**Impact of Current Times:** Currently with so much work being remote, KIND is also using some of the same ideas and tools for cases in more urban areas. Moreover, some kids have been given tablets from school districts so that has helped children stay connected with their attorneys.

**Plans for the Model:** KIND’s California tech legal service program began as a pilot project in the San Francisco/Fresno office. Now KIND is exploring expanding the program to other KIND offices around the country. In the meantime, they are improving their equipment, videoconference services, and simplifying processes. Annand hopes that others can learn from and improve upon what they are doing in the KIND San Francisco and Fresno offices and Mendota kiosk location site to help children in other rural areas who have difficulty accessing legal services.

CILA is grateful to Annand and KIND for sharing their creative pro bono model with CILA. We hope it helps spark some ideas for how your organization can reach clients in remote locations to further expand access to legal counsel for children and youth.

## ADVICE FOR PROGRAMS WHO WANT TO IMPLEMENT A SIMILAR MODEL

- **Choosing Where to Set Up the Program:** Annand explained, the first question is: “Where is the need?” KIND identified a need with many clients in the areas around Fresno and particularly Mendota. Before they started the program, options to access clients there were limited.
- **Choosing a Partnering Location for a Kiosk:** KIND was very thoughtful about where to set up their kiosk location in Mendota. Annand explained, “We wanted a place that was culturally responsive to our clients’ needs, that they were not scared to access. The health clinic was already a central place in the community, with a large physical presence. People know where it is and could get there, and most of the staff speak Spanish.” Additionally, KIND created a medical-legal partnership with the clinic and conducted trainings with front office staff regarding who KIND is and what services they offer. KIND also used the office at the clinic from time to time to meet with clients in-person, so KIND had already developed some relationships there, which helped. Annand explained, “Laying the foundation is important, having relationships is key because it makes it easier to do the proposal.” KIND does not pay rent to use the space, but they have an agreement in place regarding use of the office. Other considerations when setting up the partnership included questions regarding access, insurance, and space. In their experience, it was easier to get through those issues because they had buy-in with the community partner already through their relationships and had a similar goal to serve the community, despite providing different services.
- **Choosing Technological Applications:** KIND has primarily used Skype for Business in their Fresno office and on the Mendota kiosk tablet because it has the capability to share screens and documents during video calls. For example, the attorney can share a document and review it with the client. Additionally, KIND has a pilot pro bono portal that hosts KIND’s training resources and shared files that help with mentoring. There is also a bot to answer basic questions about the immigration process.
- **Helping Clients Use the Technology:** KIND realized early on that when a child went to the kiosk in Mendota by themselves or with a sponsor, sometimes the technology could be intimidating, especially with the prompts in English to “start the meeting” or “push here.” To counter this, KIND created a very detailed instructions sheet in Spanish with arrows explaining what to do. Additionally, they set the tablet to be “on” at all times to avoid some issues. Annand recommends having a client test out the device/system, and to create an instruction sheet from the beginning.