

"Schar Mitzvah" – The Israel Bar Association Pro Bono Program

"Our professionalism includes social responsibility, caring for others, caring for the principles of a proper society and for the accessibility of law to any person, especially if he is weak, different or other. From behind these social glasses, we will eventually find ourselves better lawyers, better jurists and better people."

Yori Geiron, Esq.
President
Israel Bar Association

"Just as a chain is as strong as its weakest link, a society is strong to the extent of its weakest people. There is no resurrection for a society without the rule of law, and there is no existence to a human being in a society without protecting the law. Statutes are insufficient. Legal rights must be accessible to all. Lawyers must implement this accessibility. That is our destiny. "

Yigal Arnon, Esq.
Founder of the Israel Bar Association
Pro Bono Program

Helping Law Income Individuals

For the past 7 years, thousands of under-privileged people have enjoyed free legal advice, provided to them through "Schar Mitzva," the Israel Bar's pro bono program.

Our Mission

The Program's mission is to substantially expand accessibility to the justice system and provide legal aid to those who cannot afford to pay for legal services.

Since 2002, the Program has been the social flag project of the Israel Bar Association (IBA), which is zealously working to further develop the Program.

Justice for All

Under Section 3(2) of the Israel Bar Association Law: "The Bar Association is entitled, inter alia, to provide legal aid to those of limited means."

Indeed, our objective is to protect the rights of those who lack the means to hire professional legal services, by providing them free legal aid.

We provide legal advice on a wide-range of civil matters, such as: Family law, bankruptcy, employment law, housing, civil disputes, banking, social security issues, etc.

Working in the Communities

We operate 47 Free Legal Aid Centers across the country, from Kiryat Shmone, at the Israeli Northern border, to the Bedouin villages in the South.

These centers provide free legal advice by professional certified attorneys to under-privileged populations, assisted by law students. The Centers are located at the heart of law-income neighborhoods, making access to them to the local population as easy as possible.

Diversity – Reaching out to ALL Under-Privileged Populations

In the segmented Israeli society there are many different populations. We undertake to reach out to all of them, trying to assist every segment, with respect to its special needs.

To that aim, we have volunteers from all types of communities, speaking various languages, assisting those unfamiliar with local culture and the Hebrew language.

In order to reach out to as many marginal populations as possible, our Program provides for:

- A Hotline assisting callers in 5 different languages;
- A highly diversified staff working in the Program;
- Special assistance to new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, etc.;
- Intense activity within the Israel Bedouin community in the South;
- Constant presence in the city of Sderot, which has being under attack by Qassam rockets from Gaza for the past 8 years and is under economic distress;
- Special project assisting the mentally ill; and
- Immediate response at time of emergency to specific populations in need

Full Representation at Court Proceedings

Our Program offers pro bono legal representation to individuals who meet certain economic criteria, as set by the IBA.

A District Committee, in each of the Bar's 5 counties examines the eligibility under the criteria set by the IBA. Once the application has been approved, the regional

coordinator assigns a volunteer attorney who will represent the applicant pro bono throughout all legal proceedings.

Eligibility Criteria for Legal Representation

Under the law, The Legal Aid Bureau of the Ministry of Justice provides legal representation to those of very limited means. While the law provides for strict eligibility criteria for the State's legal aid, eligibility for legal aid through our Program is determined using criteria which allow more flexibility.

In order to maximize the extent of legal aid available, the criteria set by the IBA are *supplementary* to those of the Ministry of Justice. Our Program, therefore, assists with cases which do not fall within the Ministry of Justice's criteria.

Accordingly, individuals who meet the criteria for the State's legal aid are referred to the appropriate of the Legal Aid Bureau.

The Hotline 1-700-505-500

Our hotline is available 9 hours a day, 5 days a week, providing callers with assistance in 5 different languages.

The law students volunteering at the Program's Hotline perform an initial in-take interview and provide the caller with some general guidance and specific referrals, as needed. When appropriate, a consultation meeting is scheduled at one of our Free Legal Aid Centers with a volunteer attorney, in accordance with the caller's legal issue and his place of residence.

"Schar Mitzvah" Donation Fund

Established in 2003 and headed by a Former Supreme Court Justice, the Honorable Eliyahu Mazza, the Fund collects donations from lawyers to financially support the low income individuals in our Program with their auxiliary legal expanses.

Over the past 7 years, hundreds of people have applied and received funds from our Donation Fund required to pay for auxiliary costs they were required to pay for such as: Court fees, specialists' opinions, etc.

An annual appeal is sent to all members of the Bar asking them to make a donation to support the Program and make its vision become a reality. All donations are tax deductible.

It's Is All About Our Volunteers

It is thanks to the volunteers' professionalism, devotion and care that the Program is able to help thousands of underprivileged people every year.

Over 2,400 attorneys are part of our Program today, in addition to about 80 law students nationwide. The Program offers training and seminars for its student and attorney volunteers in the relevant areas of expertise. In addition, our staff is always available to advise volunteers on any questions they may have.

By joining our Program, lawyers and students demonstrate their social commitment as part of the mission the IBA has taken upon itself to aid underrepresented people to uphold their rights.

Striving to help as Many People as Possible, the Best Way We Can

Over the past year, we were able to assist a growing number of law-income individuals, and we plan to continue reaching out to more and more people every year.

- We opened 7 new Free Legal Aid Centers, and we plan to open at least 5 more in the upcoming months in various locations throughout the country;
- We extended the hours of our Hotline, now available 9 hours a day, 5 days a week, offering assistance in 5 different languages;
- About 400 new volunteer attorneys have joined our Program;
- We tripled the number of students volunteering in our Program;
- We offered many training programs to our volunteer attorneys; and
- We initiated a public campaign to reach out to all under-privileged populations and offer our assistance to them