

Stone Soup Assignment

Background

This is a project conceived by faculty members at the University of Missouri School of Law's Center for the Study of Dispute Resolution. This is part of a large-scale research project to improve our understanding of clients' experiences of dispute resolution processes. It has been adapted, here, by Professor Gemma Smyth, to deepen our understanding of clients' experiences of the law and its processes from an access to justice perspective.

This assignment is the "capstone" for the Access to Justice course. In it, you will apply all the principles we have learned throughout the course to a single case of your choosing. Further information is available in the "Instructions".

What is "Stone Soup"?

"Stone Soup" is a fable adapted in many cultural traditions and languages. The characters change to fit the circumstances, but the basic facts remain similar.

Travelers arrive at a village with only an empty cooking pot and they find that the villagers won't share any food. The travelers fill the pot with water, drop in a large stone, and place it over a fire. One by one, villagers ask what is happening and are told that the travelers are making "stone soup," which tastes wonderful but needs a little of this or that to improve the flavor. Different villagers contribute various ingredients until the soup truly becomes a delicious meal, which is shared with all the villagers.

The aim of this assignment is to arrive at a more fulsome and holistic understanding of lived experiences of access to justice through each student adding their own "ingredients".

Why "Stone Soup"?

The need for practical education in law schools is reflected in sociolegal scholarship about pervasive "gaps" between the "law on the books" and the "law in action." The theory taught in law school and other professional disciplines often isn't the way things work in practice.

Students who conduct interviews practice effective questioning, listening, documenting interviews, and assessing the veracity of the information received, which all are critical skills for lawyers. Students develop rapport with their subjects, elicit sensitive information, and protect confidentiality. They write up the interviews in a coherent analysis and consider possible alternative explanations, noting possible other perspectives, limitations of subjects' memory, subjects' desire to present themselves favorably, etc. These are important skills for lawyers in virtually every area of practice.

Access to Justice

Fall 2017

Professor Gemma Smyth

This assignment should also respond to the critiques in the access to justice movement that there is inadequate attention to clients' lived experiences (see course readings). This assignment should deepen your understanding of access to justice impacts on people's lives.