



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

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A Joint Letter from Our President and CEO:

Dear Friends:

We want to take this opportunity to thank VLP's staff, Board, volunteers, funders and everyone who has enabled VLP to have another successful year. We could not have such a positive impact on the community without the support of each of you. The entire organization, and all of our clients, appreciate all that you have done. During 2014, VLP staff and volunteers represented clients in 3,618 cases, benefitting 9,374 people. These numbers are up from 2,951 cases, benefitting 7,494 people in 2013. We also provided information and referral service to 2,746 more people. This work has been incredibly important for our clients and their families. We helped keep families from becoming homeless, by defending against tax foreclosures and evictions. We helped unaccompanied minors and immigrant victims of human trafficking receive fair treatment under the immigration law. Our newest projects were the creation of a Federal Court Pro Se Assistance project (which launched in February), the Coordinated Refugee Project (which launched in July), and the Say Yes Legal Clinics (which we laid the ground work for a 2015 launch). In all of our work, VLP's staff and volunteers have delivered quality free legal services which had a genuine impact on our clients' lives, often helping them support and keep their families safe.

Thanks for helping us to provide all of this help to others. We look forward to an even more productive 2015, and hope for your continued support.

Kevin M. Kearney

President

Robert M. Elardo

Managing Attorney/CEO

2014 PRO BONO AWARDS

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

ATTORNEY OF THE MORNING

BRANDON WRAZEN, Esq. is a young attorney who served as our Attorney of the Morning (AOM) 20 times and represented 65 low income clients facing eviction since being admitted in January 2014. He started out helping with intake and taking an occasional case. He soon developed expertise and was serving as a second AOM on days that he was there. He sometimes saved the day by being there when another



lawyer had to cancel. Before long, Brandon was being scheduled as the sole AOM on a number of days. Brandon has done an excellent job of settling cases so that either the tenancy was saved or the clients had extra time before moving so that they did not become homeless.

When necessary or appropriate, he has also gone before the Judge and gotten eviction petitions dismissed.

FAMILY LAW

JAMIE L. CODJOVI, Esq. first became a VLP volunteer in 2013. She was one of the first volunteers at the Family Court Help Desk and has volunteered once a month since the inception of the Family Court Help Desk over a year ago. She has advised 50 pro se litigants during that time. In



addition, she is currently providing full representation in two divorce cases and one non-parent custody case. The custody case involved representing a grandmother against two parents who had abandoned their children and whose whereabouts were unknown. One of

the children needed surgery and therefore grandmother needed legal authority over the children. Grandmother obtained temporary custody and was able to arrange for the surgery. Due to the diligent efforts of Jamie, the grandmother will soon be awarded permanent custody.

IMMIGRATION

LISA A. COPPOLA, Esq. handled an asylum application on behalf an Eritrean family who found itself in removal proceedings after fleeing their country and landing in a U.S. family detention center in Berks, PA. Husband, wife and two young children (a third was born in the U.S.) feared persecution in their native country on account of their Christian faith and for having refused to participate in their country's unjust and brutal forced "national service." Ms. Coppola and her colleague, Ryan A. Lema, spent over 250 hours representing the family before the Immigration Court in Buffalo after their release from detention, and won asylum for this deserving family. On her own time, she also assisted the family to place the children in a Buffalo charter school, and arranged for assistance after the family lost its home in a fire. In addition, Ms. Coppola generously donated her time from a busy practice in business litigation to train other volunteers on litigation skills at this year's VLP CLE, "Handling a Removal Case in Immigration Court."



DIVORCE

BRYAN G. BROCKWAY, Esq. has been volunteering with VLP since at least 1990 (which is as far back as our database goes). Since 1990, he has taken over 40 cases and has logged 335 pro bono hours, not including his work on the



3 cases he currently has open. Although in the early years he handled both bankruptcy and divorce cases for VLP, since 2002 his work has concentrated on divorces and specifically divorce defendants. No matter how difficult the case is he says “send it over” and in fact, he has never said no

to any of our requests.

We always rely on him to take our more difficult cases which include out of state defendants, those who are coming to us at the eleventh hour and those who are totally confused and overwhelmed by the whole process. Although his main office and most of his practice is in Randolph, NY, he always makes arrangements to see our clients here in Buffalo.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

CHRISTOPHER SZCZYGIEL, Esq., is now a staff attorney at Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvantaged of WNY (LSED). Before joining LSED, Chris



dedicated many hours to VLP’s unemployment program. In the last year, Chris has worked on more than twelve unemployment hearings and appeals. ‘On the books’ his work totals upwards of 118 hours of service, although Chris spent additional time

helping on countless other cases by doing research or discussing case strategy that is not accounted for by that figure. The unemployment program surely would not have been as successful this year without Chris’s dedication, willingness to handle difficult cases/clients, and enthusiasm to learn this area of practice.

FEDERAL COURT

JODYANN GALVIN, ESQ., a partner at Hodgson Russ LLP and the President of the WNY Chapter of the Federal

Bar Association, was one of the first people that Chief Judge Skretny approached to assist in developing the Pro Se Assistance Program (PSAP) in Federal Court. Jodyann remains an important member of the PSAP team, volunteering her time, energy and skills to making the PSAP a success.



She assisted in developing and implementing a CLE program to introduce this limited scope legal assistance program to federal court attorneys. She recruited a core group of PSAP volunteers, and continues to spend countless hours to increase this group of impressive volunteer attorneys. Jodyann also volunteers her time and skills to assist pro se litigants at the PSAP, and mentors law student volunteers at the PSAP. Because of Jodyann’s involvement, the Pro Se Assistance Program has a roster of 34 skilled federal court litigators, many of whom are new VLP volunteers, who provide an invaluable service to the Court and the community.

NOT FOR PROFIT GROUPS

ANTHONY D. MANCINELLI, Esq. is a partner at Harter, Secrest & Emery, LLP and our award winner in the Not for Profit category. When the New York Not For Profit Revitalization Act Law was passed this year, Tony (who is also a member of the VLP Board of Directors) immediately advised VLP about the new requirements. In addition, he provided pro bono representation to VLP and 2 other not for profit groups that needed help updating By-Laws and policies to be in compliance with the new requirements. Tony also helped VLP to plan and produce an event at which 24 not for profits heard a presentation on the new law and then met individually with one of the 18 volunteer attorneys present to assist them with updating their By-Laws and policies.



LAW FIRM COMMITMENT

For tax years 2011 and 2012, over 1,000 Immigrants in Buffalo were victims of a massive fraud by a Tax Preparation firm which has resulted in a Federal Indictment and guilty plea in Federal Court this summer. Many of the victims, who are now being audited, are left “on the hook” for what totals millions of



dollars of wrongfully obtained refundable credits, much of which went to the disreputable tax preparer.

The IRS has taken the unusual step of acknowledging that the individuals will not be assessed a “penalty” for the fraudulent credits claimed

on their returns, because they did not speak or read English and were unwilling participants in fraudulent scheme.

Unfortunately, the IRS position is that they must still pay back all of the improper refunds, with interest.

The law firm of **ANDREOZZI, BLUESTEIN, WEBER, BROWN, LLP** offered to help and in a big way. Attorney **Michael J. Tedesco, Esq.**, had already taken several Tax Cases, pro bono from VLP and indicated that the firm wanted to play a bigger role in helping their community. **Randall P. Andreozzi, Esq.**, attended an Outreach Event at the Burmese Community Center, sponsored by VLP to assist victims of the fraud and to assist with interviews, brought with him **Justin Andreozzi** and **Heather L. Schmidt**, both recent Law School graduates working at the firm and awaiting admission to the NY Bar. In addition to having provided advice to all who attended our outreach event, the firm has taken on full pro bono representation of 11 clients before the IRS this calendar year. Justin and Heather are working under the supervision of the two attorneys, Michael and Randall. Justin has even been coming to our offices to meet with clients to review documentation and sign papers, where we have arranged to have interpreters since most of the clients do not speak English.

Clearly without the participation of **Andreozzi, Bluestein, Weber, Brown, LLP**, VLP would not have had sufficient resources to assist the amount of victims of this fraud that have come forward.

LAW FIRM PRO BONO COORDINATOR AWARD

JOSHUA FEINSTEIN, ESQ., continues Hodgson Russ LLP’s long standing commitment to pro bono legal assistance in our community as the firm’s Pro Bono Partner. He encourages attorneys and staff at Hodgson Russ to support VLP with their time, skills, and passion. He is a champion for VLP’s pro bono initiatives. He recognizes the importance of the good work of our pro bono attorneys, and generously provides support when we give him a call. As pro bono partner, Josh is ready, willing and able to assist. He leads by example. He represents his firm on the 8th Judicial District Pro Bono Committee and Large Law Firm Subcommittee. He oversees the firm’s participation in the Attorney of the Morning eviction defense program. He is a valued pro bono attorney at VLP’s Pro Se Assistance Program in Federal Court. He provides firm support for the National Green and Healthy Homes initiative. He is an active participant on the Say Yes Buffalo Legal Task Force, and has committed his firm’s support for the upcoming Say Yes Buffalo legal clinic initiative. Joshua has demonstrated strong pro bono leadership not only with his firm, but also in the legal community as a whole.



SOLO PRACTICIONER

JOSHUA E. DUBS, ESQ. is a solo practitioner who has provided over 200 hours of pro bono services over the past 5 years. More than just providing quantity, we always know that Josh can be counted on to provide quality and compassionate representation for our clients. This past year, he has worked on 7 name change cases, 2 related tort defendants, and 1 last minute will. In addition, he helped out at Attorney of the Morning 10 different times. He was scheduled to be the AOM on 4 of those days. On the others, he was at City Court and stopped to see if we needed any help and ended up handling a case or two. This past Law Day Josh was awarded the prestigious New York State Bar Association President's Pro Bono Award for the Eighth Judicial District in recognition of the pro bono work he has provided to VLP clients.



LITIGATION AWARD

JENNIFER A SHAH, Esq. is an Associate at Phillips Lytle LLP. Jennifer successfully handled a VLP case that was difficult legally, emotionally and logistically. The client was a severely disabled 75 year old woman that VLP and NLS have represented in different matters for the past 30



years. About 25 years ago, VLP arranged for a volunteer attorney to represent this client. He and his wife befriended her even though they never been in the same room with her since she has a medically documented extreme case of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity which prevents her from leaving her specially equipped home and extensive precautions are

required before anyone can enter. When the client was about to lose her specially equipped home, the attorney and his wife bought a home, hired a contractor to specially prepare the home and then transferred a life estate to the woman. The contractor knew the woman because he had done some work at her previous home. He talked with the woman about what she wanted in the house. She told him some wish list things, but said that the contractor needed to clear it with the attorney/owner. The contractor never got the permission of the attorney and some work done under the original contract was not up to specifications. The attorney hired another contractor to fix the work and to get estimates about the value of the extra work done by the first contractor. He concluded that he had been greatly overcharged for the work that he never authorized and only paid what he considered to be fair value for that work. The contractor sued the attorney, his wife and the client, even though she was not a party to the contract. That is when Jennifer Shah entered the picture to defend the client. Jennifer needed to defend the client without being able to meet her face to face, needed to discuss documents even though printed papers could not be sent to the client, needed to conduct discovery with a client that could not leave the house or have visitors. After 80 hours of diligent and challenging pro bono work, Jennifer was able to get a stipulated dismissal of the case. Instead of walking (or running) away, Jennifer asked if she could also assist the client with another issue she was having. That case is currently on-going.

JUDICIAL AWARD

HON HUGH B. SCOTT, US Magistrate Judge, is a busy Federal Magistrate in the WDNY with an impressive resume of community involvement. He is a long-time friend of VLP, dating back to his days as Assistant Attorney General-in-Charge of the Buffalo Regional Office of the New York State Department of Law and later as a Judge in Buffalo City Court. Most recently, Judge Scott accepted an invitation to serve as the Co-Chair of the Say Yes Buffalo Legal Task Force. In this role, Judge Scott has been instrumental in guiding the development of the Say Yes legal clinic initiative. He facilitated, hosted and moderated two successful kick-off events to introduce the Say Yes legal clinics to Buffalo's Top 50 law firms. He is dedicated to helping close the access to justice gap and making a difference for vulnerable people facing the loss of the basic necessities of life who cannot afford an attorney. His stature in the community gets others interested in helping, but Judge Scott also puts his own time into the effort and is always quick to ask, "What else can I do to help?"



COMMUNITY RECOGNITION OF VLP VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

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NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT PRO BONO AWARD

Joshua Dubbs, Esq., A solo



practitioner, Joshua Dubbs was recognized for performing in excess of 60 hours of pro bono service with VLP.

Joshua's service involved defending 48 eviction proceedings, eight name changes, three wills, and two tort claims. Joshua is a go-to volunteer, someone who can be counted on to accept a complex case or one that requires immediate attention. "He seems to never say 'no' when we ask him for help. He even tells low-income clients that try to hire him in his private practice to go through VLP and that he will take their cases pro bono."

BAR ASSOCIATION OF ERIE COUNTY SPECIAL SERVICE AWARD

Dilma Rosales. VLP paralegal Dilma Rosales was recognized for her work in coordinating VLP's Attorney of the Morning Program through which volunteer lawyers provide free representation to low income residents facing eviction in Buffalo City Court. Ms. Rosales dedicated twenty years of service to VLP prior to her retirement in late 2013.



NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION EMPIRE STATE COUNSEL OUTSTANDING PRO BONO VOLUNTEER AWARD

Lisa A. Coppola, Esq. Ms. Coppola, a



seasoned litigator with over 25 years of experience, was recognized for the over 250 pro bono hours she dedicated to assisting an

Eritrean family win their Asylum case. When asked about her experience Ms. Coppola said "It all comes back to meaningful work and the opportunity to live one's integrity by advocating for deserving people who faced their misfortune with nothing but courage, fortitude and gentle tenacity."

NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION, SENIOR LAWYER AWARD

Frank Longo, Esq., Frank Longo



pursued a legal career later in life, following a distinguished career as a teacher and school administrator. While in law school he began volunteering with VLP. Upon graduation he worked for several years as a Law Guardian, after which he worked as a dedicated confidential law clerk to a Family Court Judge. Retiring in 2012, Mr. Longo again contacted VLP and offered to volunteer. As a volunteer, Mr. Longo handled non-parent petitions for custody and visitation in Family Court. Last year he worked on seven

such cases, providing more than 60 hours of pro bono service. Described as "an extremely valuable volunteer," Mr. Longo also volunteers at the Family Court Help Desk which provides limited scope advice to unrepresented litigants. Besides his vast experience in Family Courts matters, Mr. Longo has a calm and compassionate demeanor which enables him to handle some of the more difficult and emotionally draining cases involving the safety and well-being of minor children. In each case, Mr. Longo has made a tremendous difference in the lives of the endangered child and the non-parent client.

BAR ASSOCIATION OF ERIE COUNTY, REV. A. JOSEPH BISSONETTE PRO BONO AWARD

James DeMarco, III., Esq., James



Demarco has handled 85 cases representing more than 640 volunteer hours. Over the years, DeMarco has earned seven VLP Pro Bono Awards in three different categories and won a NYSBA President's Pro Bono Award for his volunteer work through VLP. "He takes some of the most difficult or messy cases and he often takes them on short notice," according to the Awards Committee report. "Yet, he always treats his VLP clients with respect and compassion and goes the extra mile to represent them." He has achieved outstanding results for his VLP clients.

The following attorneys have taken their pro bono obligation to heart and have provided pro bono legal services through VLP on at least one case during 2014.

Many thanks to each of you.

Adams, Eugene P.	Ciccarelli, Patricia	Gupta, Sheela	McCoy, Dennis	Schulefand, Keith
Addelman, David R.	Cimasi, Michael	Hagen, Matthew	McCready, Maureen A.	Schultz, Eric
Alexandre, Felipe	Cisneros Vilchis, Brenda	Hapeman, Scott	McDonald, Kathleen M.	Schwach-Miecsnikowski, Michelle
Aloi, Cheryl	Ciurczak, Diane	Hargesheimer, Elbert, III	McKenna, Lindsay M.	Sciandra, Stephanie
Amigone, Nicholas P.	Codjovi, Jamie L.	Harrington, Jeffrey	McNamara, Mark	Scinta, Joseph
Amodeo, Michael	Coheley, Marissa	Hartman, Daniel	McLean Siana	Sciortino, Michael Anton
Anderson, Ann L.	Cohen, Kenneth A.	Hashmi, Kamran	Meadows, Sherree	Scioremmano, Frank
Anderson, Ryan	Colaiacono, Emilio L.	Hasiotis, Georgette	Meeks, Mario	Sette-Camara, Leonardo
Andreozzi, Randall P.	Colaiacono, Kimberly	Hawthorne, Tina	Melber, Brian	Shah, Jennifer A.
Anthis, S. Lee	Colby, Jeremy	Hazeldean, Susan	Mettile, Michael	Shahram, Nadia
Apa, Jill A.	Colucci, Elisabeth	Heary, Robert	Metzger-Kimura, Jennifer	Shapiro, David A.
Aquino, Mark	Condon, Kevin C.	Hemenway, Amy	Miller, Andrew	Shatkin, Marc
Archer, David	Conklin, Robert	Hennessy, Timothy J.	Modica, Francine E.	Shonn, Daniel D. Jr.
Arcuri, Kristin Langdon	Conell, Mary Anne	Herdzik, Jr., Matthew B.	Montani, Oriana	Short, Emelia
Arthurs, Christina H.	Consoli, Dannine	Herman, Audrey Rose	Moran, Megan	Sigeti, Kristopher
Auerbach, Corey	Crandell, Patrick	Hickey, Darice L.	Morrisroe, Richard	Silverstein, Michael
Augustine, Joseph M.	Crawford, Ryan	Hinds, Harold	Mueller, Deena	Simon, William
Ayers, Emily C.	Davidzik, Brad	Hines, Patrick	Murchie, Nevin	Skolar, John C.
Bard, Jonathan	Davis, Estelle	Hoffman, Rebecca	Murrett, John C.	Smith, Sheldon
Barrett, Michael	Davis, James A.	Hogan, Susan S.	Mussell, Jessica	Smyton, James W.
Barth, Philip C., III	De Freitas, Michael A.O.	Holdsworth, Christina G.	Nacca, John	Sommers, Crosby
Bauer, James M.	De Marco, James C.	Hoppe, Bernadette M.	Nagel, Catherine	Sperrazza, Daniel J.
Baum, Holly	De Prima, Gina Marie	Hoppe, Bradley	Navarro, Cindy P.	Stadler, Joseph
Beck, William J.	De Rose, Elise M.	Horn, John	Nichols, Ann	Steffan, Thomas
Beckage, Jennifer A.	Degnan, Kristen	Hughes, Thomas	Nichols, Jon Allon	Stergion, Jennifer
Becker, Paul	Deuschle, Thomas A.	Ieraci, Frank	Nisengard, Michael	Stiller, Douglas
Beebe, Lydia	Devine, Andrew	Ilecki, William	Nogueras-Trummer, Lynette	Stimson, Andrew
Bengart, Steven B.	Di Pirro, Elizabeth	Irizarry, Ramon	Nosenchuck, Sharon	Stoessel, Sara
Bennett, Diane	Donaghue, Claire	Jaworski, Christine	O'Connell, Bridget M.	Storr, Amber
Berardi, Christopher	Donatelli, Alan	Jaworski, Myriah	O'Neill, Barbara	Stulmaker, Mark
Bertozzi, Sarah	Donathen, James D.	Jay, Hope R.	Offermann, Francis	Sugarman, Steven R.
Bestine, Katherine	Dorliae, Cecile Mathis	Jiva, Taj	Olivieri, Robert	Suozzi, Paul
Bice, Lawrence	Dubs, Joshua	Katz, Eileen	Ortiz, Andre	Suttell, Lauren
Birnholz, Alan	Dwyer, Benjamin	Keane, Thomas	Osgood, Sharon Anscombe	Svisco, Rosa S.
Blackhall, Jennifer	Dylan, Andrew	Kearney, Kevin M.	Oswald, Phillip A.	Swift, Sharon A.
Blewett, Richard	Eagan, Gayle	Kelly, Daniel P.	Palladino, Ashlea L.	Szczygiel, Christopher
Borgese, Frank	Eberl, Catherine B.	Kim, Minryu Sarah	Parthasarathy, Remla	Talmud, Rebecca J.
Borowski, Matthew	Emerson, Laura	Knoer, Robert E.	Parzymieso, Susan	Taylor, Suzanne
Bostick, Kenneth, Jr.	Eraca, Nancy	Kohane, Dan D.	Paulino, Jennifer	Tedesco, Michael J.
Bouquard, Leah	Evans, Anne C.	Kolaga, John	Perley, Michael	Terragnoli, Joel
Brady, Daniel	Falvey, Julie	Kolch, Kimberly	Personius, Rodney O.	Tessyman, Francis, Jr.
Braun, Beverley	Fay, Patricia A.	Kolken, Matthew	Pharr, Robyn G.	Thibodeau, Pamela
Breen, Lauen	Feinstein, Joshua	Koren, Bruce Kevin	Phillips, Gary M.	Tokarczyk, Brett
Brennan, Terrance C.	Fernandez, Noemi	Kozlowski, Steffanie	Phillips, Margaret L.	Tomkins, Suzanne
Brenner, Barbara	Feroletto, John P.	Kraengel, Elizabeth	Pignataro, Rafael	Torres, Francisco, Jr.
Brenon, John G.	Filbert, Shannon	Kruger, Julie	Polowitz, Steven H.	Trigilio, John L.
Brock, David	Fiut, Jeffrey	La Fever, Christopher R.	Poulos, Amber	Turner, Christopher
Brockway, Bryan	Flannery, Jennifer	Lamarque, Stephanie O.	Quartarone, Michael	Urbaniak, Jason Aaron
Brown, Denise	Fleming, Andrew P.	Lamarre, Colleen	Quinlan, Lawlor	Van Dette, James M.
Brown, Marc C.	Flynn Kozara, Abigail	Lane, Robert, Jr.	Quinn, Courtney	Varavenkatarmann, Radhika
Brown, Michele	Foit, C. Kenneth	Laub, David	Racki, Jason	Vasilion, Peter P.
Brownstein, Joel	Foley, Gabrielle	Laudisio, Mark	Randolph, Sallie	Venkova, Vera
Brunea, Chris T.	Fraze Galbraith, Clair	Lazarus, James A.	Reese, Melissa	Vertlieb, Yvonne A.
Bucki, Craig R.	Freedman, Jeffrey M.	Lenhardt, Clayton	Reich Lynch, Jessica N.	Walker, Regina
Buckley, Elizabeth F.	Freidfertig, David	Lestak, Christopher	Reich, Shari Jo	Walsh, John B.
Bundt, Melissa	Friedman, Richard J.	Link, Richard	Rennie, Aven	Ward, Dennis E.
Buscaglia, Elizabeth	Gabriele, Vanessa	Lochner, Thomas	Richards, Jeremy	Weber, Cory
Buscaglia, Kara	Galvin, Jodyann	Longo, Frank	Ridall, Barbara	Weinrieb, Pieter
Bussi, Nicholas C.	Gannon, Joseph T.	Lovallo, Timothy R.	Riedel, George Jr.	Weishaar, Michael
Buyer, Martha	Gargano, Bernadette	Lowe, Amanda	Roach, Patrick	Welsh, Brian
Cacciato, Louis M.	Garvey, Kathleen	Lucinski, Ryan	Robinson, Edward C.	Wettlaufer, Catherine
Calahan, Eric M.	Gathings, Peter	MacPherson, Scott	Rosciglione, Maria	Whittemore, David
Calabrese, Kyle	Gaughan, Dennis C.	Mahoney, David J.	Ross, Paulette E.	Wiens, Wallace
Cantwell, Earl K., II	Gelber, Ross	Mahoney, Ryan	Rossi, Karalyn	Wieser, John D.
Cardarelli, Antonio	Gewolb, Joshua E.	Mancinelli, Anthony	Rougeux, Debra C.	Wisniewski, Daniel E.
Carr, Alana P.	Gibbons, Kenneth W.	Mannillo, Jeffrey	Roux, Gerard R., II	Wojtan, Gary J.
Casey, Thomas J.	Gibbons, Kevin	Margulis, Randy S.	Rubinstein, Eva	Wolter, Stephanie
Cassano, Thomas R.	Glynn, Eric	Marks, Kelly	Rubinstein, Steven	Woodward, Laurence
Castaldo, Jennifer	Goldsmann, Mark	Marra, Catherine	Rupp, R. Anthony, III	Wrazen, Brandon
Celani, John D.	Graber, Timothy	Marranca, Mandy	Sandison, Trish	Wright, Andrew
Chan, Mary	Grieco, Charles D.	Marrero, Rachel K.	Sauer, Barbara A.	Wright, Jeri
Chen, Joanna	Grimm, Richard A., III	Marszalkowski, Michael E.	Saykin, Aaron	Yale-Loehr, Stephen
Chiari, Gerald	Groschadl, Laura	Martin, Eileen M.	Schaeffer, Dennis K.	Young, Daniel
Chiriboga, J. Christine	Grossberg, Kenneth	Mattingly, Christopher	Schaus, Barbara	Zeis, Erica M.
Christophersen, Wendy	Guerra, Joseph M., III	McAllister, Bruce	Schmieder, Jane	
Ciambrone, Elizabeth	Gugino, Randy H.	McCabe, Raymond		

IMMIGRATION

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SPOTLIGHT ON IMMIGRATION

A young mother and daughter from Central America were both unaccompanied minors in foster care. Our older client had suffered horribly in her home country after members of a drug cartel kidnapped her from her middle school and forced her into domestic and sexual servitude. While hostage, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter. Although our client and her daughter eventually managed to escape back to their family, our older client's parents fled the country's gang violence and abandoned her. Without family support, our client made the difficult decision to seek safety in the U.S. On arrival, both clients were placed in foster care. With the help of a dedicated family court attorney, we obtained family court predicate orders to allow both clients to apply for special immigrant juvenile status. We later successfully helped both clients apply for permanent residence.

"Last week I was able to accept and start my first job. Many people ask me why I've chosen to accept such a low paying, poor hour job. I want to tell them because I finally can. I want to tell them because when an employer asks if I'm authorized to work, I can proudly tell them yes, I want to tell them because for once in my life instead of always expecting a hand out or hand up, I'm earning a part of my living ...because I can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel."

VLP's Immigration Project employs four full-time attorneys. Some of our work is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review, via the Vera Institute of Justice, to conduct legal orientations and pro se workshops to men and women detained by U.S. immigration authorities for removal.

We also recruit, train and mentor pro bono attorneys to represent both detained and non detained non-citizens in removal proceedings, focusing primarily on asylum cases and waivers for long-term permanent residents.

The Immigration Project is also funded through Neighborhood Legal Services, to represent non-citizen survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking so that they may obtain special relief under U.S. immigration laws. Given our work, we serve on the WNY Human Trafficking Task Force and Alliance along with law enforcement agencies and other organizations.

Finally, through a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services via the Vera Institute of Justice, we represent non-citizen unaccompanied minors who are in foster care to obtain permanent residency through special immigrant juvenile provisions of the law. We also handle select naturalization cases.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

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"I really appreciate the fact that someone believed my story and thought I was worth defending. There is someone looking out for the little guy!"

VLP's Unemployment Insurance Benefits program serves individuals throughout Western New York in obtaining or maintaining their entitlement to receive unemployment insurance benefits (UIB). The program is primarily funded by a grant from the Office of Court Administration.

We help clients during the application process for benefits, as well as with direct advocacy with the New York State Department of Labor. Representation during these preliminary steps is offered in an attempt for clients to be found eligible for benefits without the need for a hearing. The main focus of the program is to provide legal representation to individuals at unemployment hearings. The program also handles select unemployment appeals. In 2014, we won \$146,420 in retroactive benefits for our clients.

The program also trains and mentors pro bono attorneys to handle unemployment matters.

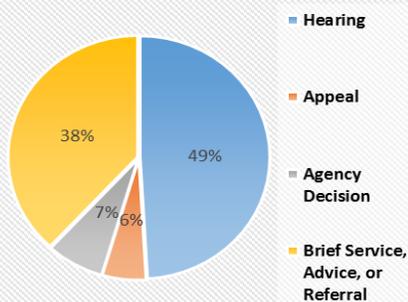
SPOTLIGHT

ON

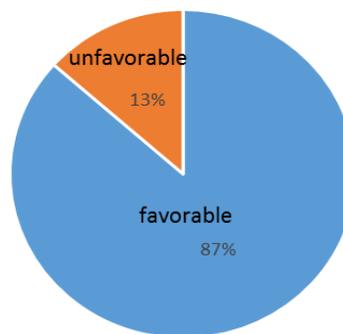
UNEMPLOYMENT

Client came to VLP when his benefits were stopped when the Department of Labor claimed that he refused a reasonable offer of employment. The client had refused to return to his prior employment because his prior employer was verbally abusive, called him names, mocked his weight, and made jokes of a homosexual nature about him. VLP represented the Claimant and successfully argued that his refusal to return to a work environment filled with such harassment established good cause for his refusal of the job offer. The Claimant was awarded nearly \$6000 in retroactive benefits.

2014 Types of UIB Cases



2014 Case Outcomes



FAMILY COURT HELP DESK

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON FAMILY COURT

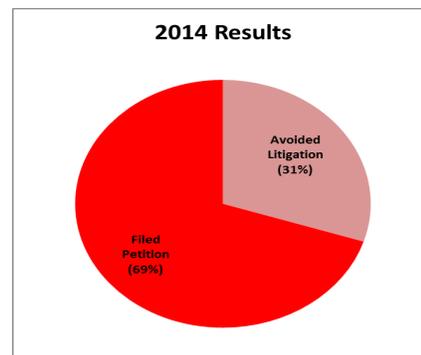
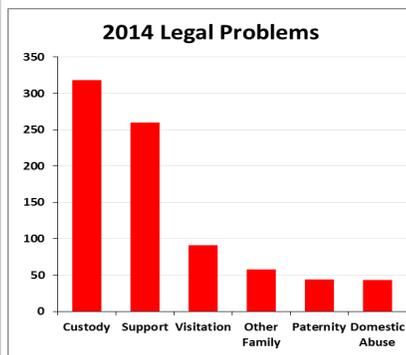
A child support matter had been flagged for domestic violence by the Magistrate. The victim was then sent over to the Help Desk for advice and potential assistance with a Family Offense Petition. The Volunteer Attorney spent over an hour with the victim, answering all of her questions, giving her all of her options and assisting her with a Family Offense Petition and Order to Show Cause. Thanks to the Volunteer Attorney's thorough assistance, the victim was able to obtain a "stay-away" Order of Protection that same day and seek refuge at a local battered women's shelter.

"I was very depressed because I couldn't visit my grandchildren, now I'm very happy, it was like a weight was lifted off me. Thank you!"

At the Family Court Help Desk in Erie County Family Court, clients can speak to an attorney prior to filing their petition or prior to their court appearance.

Our goal is to help inform unrepresented litigants of the Family Court process and rules. We also hope to reduce the number of unnecessary petitions that are filed, and to reduce the number of proper petitions dismissed due to issues with petition drafting or filing.

Clients are also provided with general information that helps the client navigate Family Court more effectively. This information includes: referrals to programs that may be able to represent the client; information about Assigned Counsel and how to obtain an attorney through the program; and general advice regarding the court process for clients who are unfamiliar with the procedure, particularly explaining what occurs at the first court appearance and what the client can do to prepare for Court.



POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

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“(VLP) helped me re-establish a relationship with my son and my grandson. (My VLP attorney) was an excellent attorney. She was honest with me and always kept me informed as to the status of my case.”

The Positive Individuals and Families Project serves people living with HIV/AIDS in all eight (8) counties of Western New York.

Funded by the New York State Department of Health, the project has a special focus on creating end of life plans and care and custody plans for individuals and families facing HIV/AIDS. In partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services, the project also provides generalist civil legal services covering such topic areas as: health care issues, family law, discrimination, confidentiality, debtor/creditor issues, housing issues, public benefit issues, and tax issues.

Attorneys in the Positive Individuals and Families Project are also very involved in community outreach and provide training to community members and service providers on the HIV Confidentiality Law, and other issues surrounding HIV status and disclosure.

SPOTLIGHT ON POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

Client came to VLP for help with end of life planning. Unfortunately, because the client was still married to her long time estranged husband, she could not bequeath her home in the way that she wanted. VLP agreed to do a divorce for the client in addition to a will, healthcare proxy and power of attorney. The client's health took a turn for the worse prior to the finalization of the divorce. VLP was able to visit the client in Hospice and execute client's will with a spousal waiver just two days prior to the client's passing thereby insuring that her property was bequeathed according to her wishes.

ATTORNEY OF THE MORNING

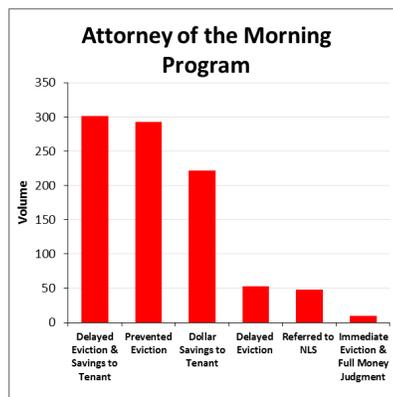
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SPOTLIGHT ON AOM

A mother of two had lost her job and recently gone on public assistance. In the process she had fallen 3 months behind on her rent and the landlord had brought a non-payment eviction. Our volunteer attorney was able to get the landlord to stipulate to give the woman time to go back to the Department of Social Services for emergency housing assistance, where she obtained a Letter of Guaranty from the County to pay the landlord the delinquent 3 months' rent. The family avoided homelessness, the landlord got paid, and the County will be paid back in small increments over time.

"It took a lot of stress off (us) and we learned more of how to be a tenant and we know our rights as tenants and you were there to help us! Thank you!"

2014 marks the 24th year trained volunteer attorneys, assisted by VLP staff and student volunteers, represented low income clients facing eviction in Buffalo City Court through our Attorney of the Morning Project (AOM). This highly successful program, replicated across the country, helps vulnerable families in our community avoid homelessness.



Clients consult with a VLP attorney who will assist them in negotiating a settlement with their landlord or in arguing their case in front of the judge. AOM is also a valuable experience for our volunteer attorneys, providing them the opportunity to complete client intake, negotiate with opposing counsel, and argue before the court.

DIVORCE, BANKRUPTCY & TAX

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

"(My attorney) fought hard for me. He was not intimidated by the other attorney. He would not make a bad deal for me just to hurry the case up. My ex-husband and his attorney were shocked when I walked into court with an attorney this time...I needed so much help with my ex-husband's constant court bullying. Thank you so much for everything. I sincerely needed your help."

DIVORCE: VLP has a long history of representing people seeking as well as defending a divorce. VLP assists low income clients who fall through the gaps created by other programs' rules. Divorce is a subject matter where we always have a long list of clients waiting to be referred to a pro bono attorney. VLP has a group of attorneys committed to handling pro bono divorces, relieving a great deal of stress for both the clients and the VLP staff.

BANKRUPTCY: We see many individuals and families who are in need of a fresh start, facing the loss of their homes or garnishment of an already insufficient income. Our bankruptcy volunteer attorneys do an outstanding job representing our clients in bankruptcy proceedings to protect their property and their income.

TAX: The number of people unable to pay their income tax obligations has increased over the past few years. In addition, even those who are trying to pay their taxes can have trouble understanding and complying with our complex system of tax laws and end up in trouble. VLP attempts to assist low income taxpayers who have controversies with the IRS by providing advice and, when needed, representation before the IRS concerning the establishment and collection of income tax obligations.

SPOTLIGHT ON TAX

A refugee who did not speak English, came to VLP after the IRS disallowed Taxpayer's younger brother as a Qualifying Child for Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The client could not produce birth records, because the family fled their native country of Burma without any identity documentation. VLP was able to convince the IRS to accept the Household Registration Document the family obtained from a Refugee Camp prior to coming to the United States in conjunction with current School Records. VLP successfully persuaded the IRS to reduce the tax assessment from \$3,888, down to \$588.

TAX FORECLOSURE

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SPOTLIGHT ON TAX FORECLOSURE

A VLP client that we had previously assisted with several other matters, recently took over ownership of the home he had been living in for several years. Unbeknownst to him, the home had an outstanding user fee bill. This put the house on the City of Buffalo In Rem foreclosure list. However, VLP was able to negotiate a Stipulation with the City attorneys, whereby the client made a modest down payment and agreed to make monthly payments over a 20 month period to get caught up. The home was removed from the foreclosure list and the client (who has serious health issues) was saved from homelessness.

"I'm so impressed and thankful. (My VLP attorney) was so patient and went above and beyond. She saved my house!"

Each year, the City of Buffalo puts thousands of properties on an In Rem Tax Foreclosure list. The properties can be foreclosed upon if they have arrears in property taxes, sewer tax or user fee (for garbage collection). Old water bills that had been the previous cause for an In Rem action could also land properties on the list.

People owing as little as \$201 could lose their home through this process and end up homeless. VLP brought a team of people to County Court the week before the sale was scheduled to occur. We worked cooperatively with other legal services providers to assist low income owner occupiers and their families. We interviewed clients and opened files at the Courthouse. VLP was able to negotiate stipulations which saved 52 homes.

VLP's work on these cases keeps families from becoming homeless. This not only saves the families, but also preserves neighborhoods by keeping owner occupiers in homes that their families have often owned for decades — or even for generations.

PRO BONO ACTIVITY & TRAINING

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

"I think we all chose to become lawyers because we want to help people. Pro bono work provides the opportunity to do that in the purest sense, to help those who truly need it, while using and developing our legal knowledge and talents. I cannot think of a single reason not to do it." Eric Glynn

VLP staff matches our pro bono attorney's interest, experience and availability in assigning a case and works hard to make every attorney's pro bono experience count.

Volunteer attorneys continued to undertake full representation of our low income clients' civil matters. Limited scope legal assistance programs continued in Buffalo City Court for VLP's AOM eviction defense program, and at the Family Court Help Desk. The Pro Se Assistance Program in Federal Court opened February 2014, and groundwork was completed for the January 2015 opening of the four Say Yes Legal Clinics.

VLP provided 13 free CLE trainings for 206 our attorney volunteers. VLP also provided nontraditional CLE formats for our volunteers through our video library and our secure You Tube channel. VLP continued providing mentoring and litigation support for our volunteers. VLP assisted attorneys in meeting the 50 hour pro bono aspirational goal and law student volunteers in meeting their required 50 hours of pro bono service for admission to the bar.



Volunteer Attorney Steven Rubinstein counseling Suckie Smith from the WNY AIDS Network on the Non Profit Revitalization Act.

SPOTLIGHT ON PRO BONO

In May 2014, fourteen pro bono attorneys provided valuable pro bono legal services for eighteen smaller not for profit organizations at a free legal clinic, "Preparing for the NY Nonprofit Revitalization Act of 2013: A Free Clinic." Organizations were asked to bring their bylaws, policies and procedures in order to achieve compliance with the new law. Volunteers also offered a free 1 hour follow up session scheduled for another day to review changes and answer any further questions or concerns.

"Thank you for this opportunity to be on the cutting edge of change as we, as a community, continue to help families prosper through our services."

– Representative from Martha Mitchell Community Center.

SAY YES TO EDUCATION & CRLS

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SPOTLIGHT ON CRLS

Through targeted outreach to the Burmese community in Buffalo, VLP learned of a tax preparer who preyed on the community by promising large cash refunds. The tax preparer capitalized on the clients' lack of English proficiency by having clients sign documents reporting false information to the IRS. The preparer then directed the refund monies into his personal bank account. Clients came forward after receiving notices from the IRS demanding that they repay the fraudulently obtained tax refund. To date, VLP has secured legal representation for 12 clients before the IRS and expects to represent more victims as they come forward.

"I was able to have someone that knew the law there for me. Thank you for your help."

CRLS: In July of 2014, VLP partnered with the Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, Neighborhood Legal Services, Legal Services for the Elderly Disabled and Disadvantaged of WNY, The Western New York Law Center, Journey's End Refugee Services, and Vive to launch the Coordinated Refugee/Asylee Legal Services Project (CRLS) funded by the John R. Oishei Foundation. The CRLS Project provides culturally and linguistically appropriate legal services to Refugee and Asylee communities and provides civil legal services for refugees, asylees and asylum seekers who are income qualified.

Say Yes: During 2014, the Say Yes Legal Clinics, providing free outreach/counsel & advice for the families of Buffalo Public School District students, were well on their way to reality. Robert Elardo co-chaired the Say Yes Legal Task Force (Task Force) with Hugh B. Scott, US District Court Magistrate Judge for WDNY. The Task Force identified four Buffalo Public Schools to host the Legal Clinics, assisted with law firm recruitment, and laid the groundwork for the Legal Clinics opening. The 2014 efforts of VLP staff and community partners resulted in a successful opening of the Say Yes Legal Clinics in January 2015.



PRO SE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

"I achieved something that changed my life for the better. I wouldn't change anything (about VLP's services). Thank you very much."

On February 12, 2014, VLP began the Pro Se Assistance Program (PSAP) along with our partners the US District Court for the Western District of New York (WDNY), SUNY Buffalo Law School, and the WNY Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The PSAP provides free limited scope civil legal assistance to pro se litigants in the WDNY. It fosters access to justice for our clients by helping the pro se litigant in the WDNY understand and navigate the unfamiliar and complex Federal Court system. It also assists the Court in more efficiently managing these cases.

PSAP volunteer attorneys provide valuable limited scope legal assistance by helping our pro se clients to determine if federal court is the proper forum to commence a lawsuit; reviewing documents prior to filing with the court; explaining federal law and federal court procedure as it relates to the client's case; and making referrals to other legal and social service providers where appropriate.

In our inaugural year, the PSAP has opened 100 cases and the list of experienced federal court litigators who volunteer to staff the PSAP has grown to 38. Our attorneys were supported by ten law students from the law school's Pro Se Civil Litigation Support Practicum and two law student Research Assistants.

SPOTLIGHT ON PSAP

A woman with 2 young sons came to PSAP. She was overwhelmed as she struggled to understand how to move her employment discrimination case through the federal court system. After listening to her story and reviewing her documents, the attorney helped her understand how to comply with the court's directives. The pro bono attorney's skilled assistance empowered the client to confidently handle the next steps on her own.

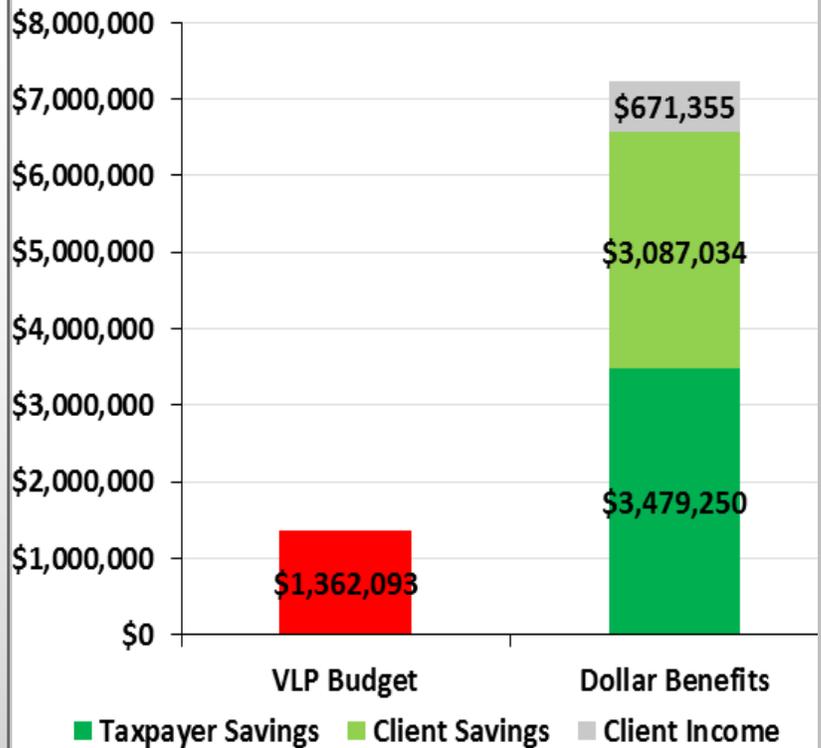


PSAP Law Student Volunteers: Milton Gordon, Carin Gordon, Jocelyn Seitter, Sarah Draper, Katherine Ellis.

THE VALUE OF PRO BONO

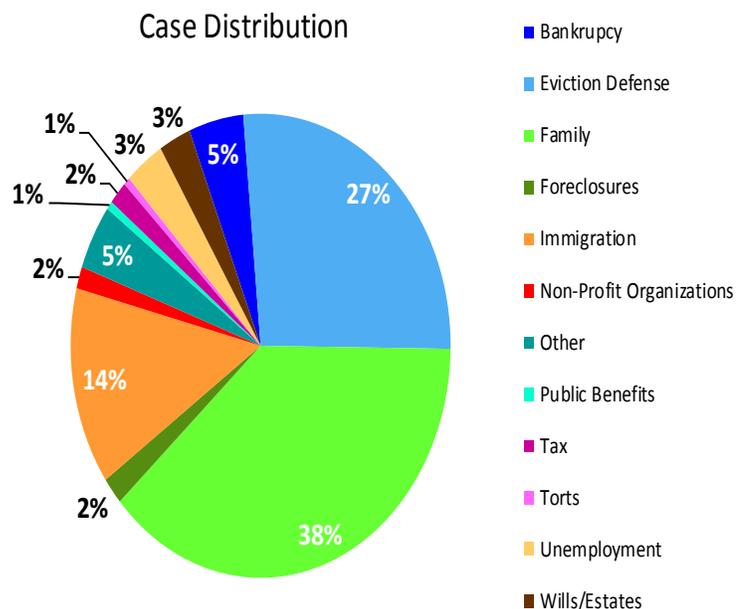
In 2014, pro bono lawyers provided nearly \$1.1 million dollars in free legal services to VLP clients, in addition to \$1.3 million dollars of services provided by VLP staff. Together VLP staff and pro bono counsel created over \$7 million dollars in benefits to clients and taxpayers. In this manner, pro bono services allow VLP to exponentially increase the benefits to the clients and the taxpayer, proving VLP a very worthwhile investment.

Dollar Benefit

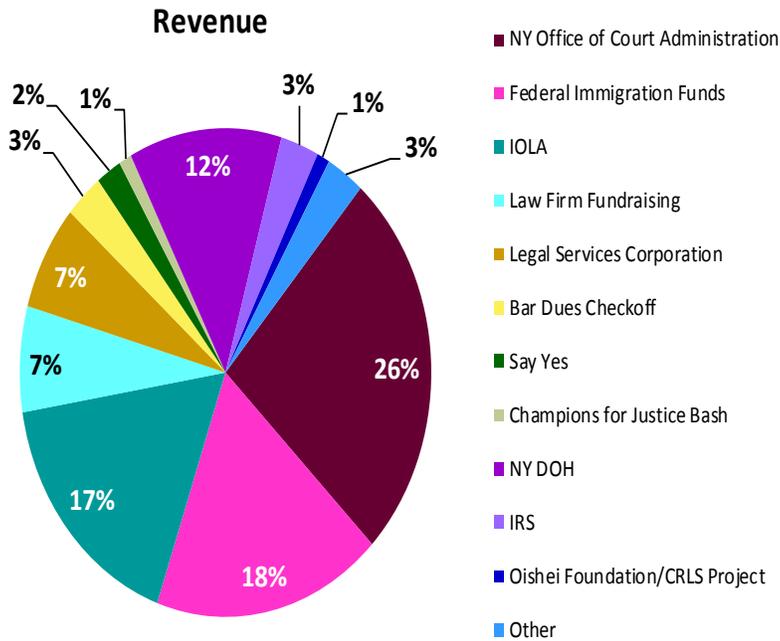


Case Distribution

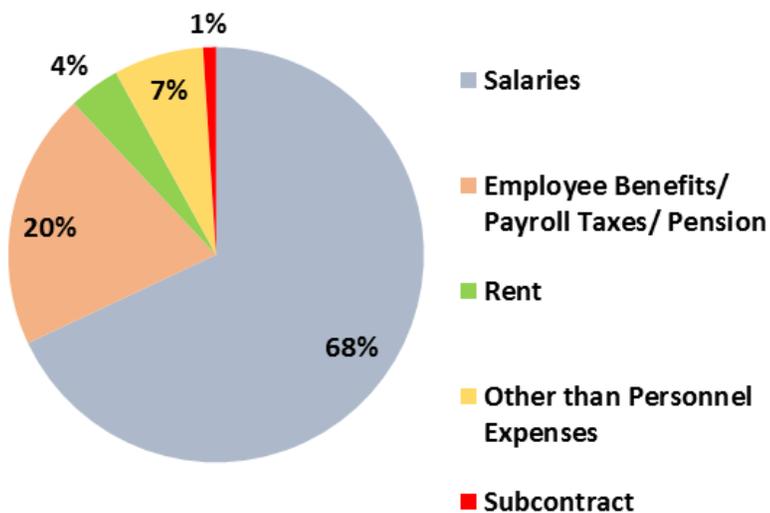
Total Cases: 3611



Revenue
\$1,340,725



Expenses
\$1,362,093



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