

2016

ANNUAL REPORT

ERIE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT, INC.





ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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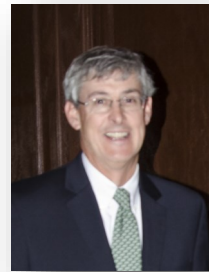
Melinda R. Saran

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A Joint Letter from Our President and CEO:



Dear Friends:

In each of its 35 years, the Volunteer Lawyers Project has faced a variety of challenges; some constant, many changing. Looking back on 2016, we were honored to assist many of Buffalo's newest residents, including many unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking. We continued the important work of eviction defense, assisting the unemployed, handling family law matters, and helping our clients resolve disputes with the IRS. Without the support of the bar—both financially, and in many thousands of volunteer hours—and the dedication of our staff, Western New York would be a less welcoming place. We owe deep and sincere thanks to all of you.

During 2016, VLP staff and volunteers represented clients in 4,023 cases, benefiting 9,934 people. Of these cases, local attorneys provided pro bono service on 2,507 cases, benefiting 6,687 people. We also provided information and referral service to over 2,500 more people.

If a single word could describe 2016, we would chose "navigate." No, we did not send volunteers or staff on long voyages, or provide travel assistance. But many VLP programs assisted eligible clients in navigating the legal system. The Family Court Help Desk, the Federal Pro Se Assistance Program, and the Attorney of the Morning Program each provided on-the-spot assistance to individuals in Family, Federal, and City Court. These programs not only help clients, but assist those courts in their important work.

The Say Yes Legal Clinics, based in the Buffalo Public Schools, involved volunteer lawyers helping parents access organizations and services that can address their legal needs. Matching clients with the organizations that can address their circumstances is extraordinarily valuable, and the success of the Say Yes Clinics is proof. Making connections, and matching clients with the resources available to them, will continue to be a big part of VLP's mission.

In sum, 2016 was a very good year for VLP. We are honored, and thankful, to be part of such a worthwhile organization. And with your help, we hope to help more Western New Yorkers, provide more opportunities for volunteers, and help make our legal system a little easier to navigate. We hope you will assist VLP in this important work.

Best wishes,

Kevin M. Kearney
President

Robert M. Elardo
Executive Director/CEO

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

BAR ASSOCIATION OF ERIE COUNTY AWARDS

SPECIAL SERVICE AWARD

CHRISTINE BIGGIE began working at VLP in 1991. Since that time, she has continuously been courteous in her treatment of members of the legal profession; efficient in handling of her duties; cooperative with members of the legal profession; and willing to extend herself for the good of the legal profession and the public.



Kevin Kearney, Christine Biggie

Over the years, Ms. Biggie has filled many roles at VLP. She is observant and proactive to better serve our volunteers and clients. Because she knows and works with so many of our volunteers, she has always been at the heart of our award winner selection process.

During her 25 years at VLP, Ms. Biggie has become the face of VLP for many lawyers in the community. She is the one that they have talked to about potential pro bono cases through VLP. She calls lawyers to see if they will handle a particular pro bono case. Many lawyers report that that they have a hard time saying no to Chris – not because she is pushy, but because she is so nice and courteous to deal with. Behind the scenes, she works to expertly match the right case with right volunteer.

She is also the person that the pro bono lawyers have provided their case updates to, received their CLE credits from, and turned to with a wide array of questions and pleas for help. Ms. Biggie was hired as a legal assistant, but many years ago her title was changed to Volunteer Attorney Coordinator because of the work that she does to coordinate and support attorneys that are providing pro bono work through VLP. She helps lawyers to “do good,” and is well liked and admired in the legal community, as evidenced by her receipt of this prestigious award. Congratulations Chris.

REV. A. JOSEPH BISSONETTE PRO BONO AWARD

KATHERINE J. BESTINE, Esq. has a long, rich history demonstrating her commitment to pro bono. Ms. Bestine began serving as our Attorney of the Morning (AOM) in Buffalo City Court defending eviction cases and accepting a pro bono divorce case in 1991. In over 25 years, she has accepted a total of 165 total cases to date. She has represented clients in multiple divorce, child support, custody, paternity, and eviction defense cases. Ms. Bestine has logged over 755 pro bono hours on the 164 cases that she has closed and currently has another divorce that she is working on for VLP.



Katherine Bestine

Ms. Bestine has not only handled a large number of cases, but has also taken on difficult cases requiring skill and tenacity to protect the client’s position. She takes some of our most difficult and problematic cases. Ms. Bestine’s calming influence on fragile divorce clients and volatile situations has been of enormous importance. VLP often handles cases that many attorneys may not take on pro bono.

While VLP was operating its Haven House Counsel & Advice Clinic for victims of domestic violence, Ms. Bestine was a trusted and frequent volunteer. She would spend a few hours meeting with victims of domestic violence, listening to their stories, and advising them of their legal options. She helped 69 clients at our Haven House Clinic. This emotionally difficult work truly impacted the lives of those that she assisted.

Over the years, Ms. Bestine has won two individual VLP Pro Bono Awards. She won the VLP Haven House Pro Bono Award in 1998 and the VLP Pro Bono Award for Divorce representation in 2012. We recognize her for her continual willingness to take on difficult and time-consuming pro bono cases.

Ms. Bestine has sat on the VLP Board of Directors since 1998. She previously served a term as president and is the representative of the Women’s Bar Association of New York. As president, she was involved and accessible, spending much time behind the scenes helping VLP in its mission. Currently, she serves on the VLP Board’s Nominating Committee and on its LSC Regulations Committee. This award recognizes Kathy Bestine’s incredible dedication. As Father Bissonette made a lifetime commitment, this award named in his honor is truly a lifetime achievement award.



NYSBA PRESIDENT'S PRO BONO AWARDS

EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

RAYMOND N. McCABE, Esq., is a partner at Barclay Damon and a volunteer attorney with VLP. He was the representative of the NYSBA President's Pro Bono Award for the Eighth Judicial District

In 2015, Mr. McCabe performed over 75 hours of pro bono work on three post-matrimonial Qualified Domestic Relations Orders (QDRO's) and assisted six not-for-profit groups through VLP.

Mr. McCabe takes on QDRO cases (post-divorce pension distribution), which are some of our most difficult cases to find pro bono lawyers to handle, and has handled pro bono cases through VLP since 1995. By 2011, he had logged over 200 pro bono hours over the years.

Mr. McCabe's firm (formerly Hiscock Barclay) won VLP Pro Bono Awards for "Law Firm Commitment" in 2011 and 2013. Each time, he was specifically acknowledged for his excellent contribution to the firm's pro bono effort through VLP. He mentors and motivates the associates at his firm to get involved with VLP.

A few years ago, Mr. McCabe was called upon to act as a consultant/mentor in a VLP QDRO matter. Our client was facing the possibility of losing pension income, which would have left her destitute. Mr. McCabe spent many hours explaining the pension law background and formulating strategies.

Mr. McCabe's work with not-for-profit groups has been outstanding. He has helped free medical clinics and food pantries incorporate, file for tax exempt status, and undergo successful reorganizations. He has assisted groups in complying with the New York Not-for-Profit Revitalization Act. This work impacts the specific not-for-profit that he helps, which leads to that group providing service to hundreds or thousands of local low-income people. He has referred not-for-profits to VLP for help with his personal guarantee that once they are qualified through VLP, he would represent them. He has always carried through on those promises.

Mr. McCabe has handled a large number of cases, put in a large number of pro bono hours, and made an immense impact on clients and the community. He has been of great help to VLP and our overall coordination of pro bono work. He always treats his VLP clients with respect and with compassion. In the words of a former client, "He helped us tremendously."



Raymond McCabe

MID-SIZED LAW FIRM

PHILLIPS LYTLE, LLP, was the recipient of the New York State Bar Association 2016 President's Pro Bono Award for Mid-Size Law Firms. They received this prestigious award for their outstanding commitment to pro bono service through VLP. William Brennan, Esq., a well-respected partner at Phillips Lytle, volunteers as the firm's pro bono partner. He coordinates hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services by the firm's 80 attorneys in their Buffalo office, and attends numerous community events sponsored by VLP. Mr. Brennan has also sat on VLP's Board of Directors for 14 years.



Phillips Lytle attorneys are one of the backbones of our award winning Attorney of the Morning (AOM) program. Since 2000, Phillips Lytle attorneys have represented an astonishing 1,435 clients, working diligently and professionally to save tenancies and prevent homelessness. Phillips Lytle regularly provides an eviction defense CLE for their attorneys, and generously opens these programs to their colleagues in the Western New York legal community.

Phillips Lytle is a proven community leader actively involved in the Say Yes Buffalo Legal Clinics. David McNamara, Esq., managing partner, embraced Say Yes Buffalo and committed to providing limited-scope legal assistance to families of Buffalo Public School students. William Brennan provides strong leadership on the Say Yes Buffalo Legal Task Force. He facilitates ongoing CLE programs for Phillips Lytle attorneys to learn about pro bono legal services in Buffalo through the Say Yes Legal Clinics. The firm has also opened up these training programs to colleagues at five other Buffalo law firms involved in the Say Yes Legal Clinics. Since January 2015, Phillips Lytle attorneys have provided critical legal assistance to 42 families at these clinics. A total of 14 attorneys have volunteered nearly 50 hours of pro bono legal assistance at the Say Yes Legal Clinics. Their work has been tremendously important to our clients.

The generosity of Phillips Lytle attorneys has changed the lives of countless children in Buffalo Public Schools, who are now able to better focus on school because of reduced "legal noise" from their households. Phillips Lytle is truly a pro bono community leader in Buffalo, NY, providing 3,371 hours of pro bono legal services in 2015.

We further recognize Phillips Lytle as a major financial supporter of VLP. In 2015 & 2016, they were a Benefactor Firm, our highest category for financial support. The firm is also a Gold Sponsor of our annual Champions for Justice Bash, again, our highest category for financial support of this fundraiser.



WOMEN'S BAR ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK WNY CHAPTER

CAROL A. CONDON OUTSTANDING NEW LAWYER

With great pride, VLP congratulates Senior Immigration Staff Attorney, **EMMA L. BUCKTHAL, Esq.**, as the 2016 recipient of the Carol A. Condon Outstanding New Lawyer Award. In a few short years, Emma has made a tremendous positive impact on the lives of people living in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Beginning as a law student ready to change the world, Emma has remained true to her convictions. She began volunteering at VLP in 2007 as a law student and stayed with VLP after graduation in 2010.

Ms. Buckthal's practice is uniquely focused on representing immigrant survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault. She managed VLP's unaccompanied children program from 2015 until early 2016. Her hard work often stretches into evenings and weekends to make certain her clients receive the representation they deserve. She literally helps save clients' lives by helping victims escape from their oppressors.

Ms. Buckthal's work extends beyond her caseload. She is a leader within our region's immigration, human trafficking and domestic violence communities. She advocates for immigrant victims of human trafficking as the non-governmental organization (NGO) attorney representative on the WDNY Human Trafficking Taskforce and Alliance and frequently speaks at their public events.

Emma coordinates representation of victims with our area's social services agencies. She also coordinates with law enforcement agencies to make sure that undocumented crime victims can safely report crimes when they are too scared to seek out help. Emma personally accompanies her frightened clients to ensure they feel safe and supported when reporting their experiences to law enforcement.

Ms. Buckthal recruits, trains, and supports attorneys to volunteer with VLP's Immigration Program. She provides strong leadership and supervision for many UB law student volunteers. She is involved with numerous state and local professional groups, including WBASNY, BAEC, NYSBA, UB Law Alumni Association, and AILA (American Immigration Lawyers Association)-where she is their Upstate NY Chapter Pro Bono Liaison and the Fall 2012 Chapter Conference Article Peer Reviewer.

Ms. Buckthal is an outstanding new lawyer who makes a difference in the lives of her clients. She is a role model for us all, and we know she will continue working hard and looking to find that glimmer of goodness in each of her clients' difficult situations.

WOMEN LAWYERS OF WESTERN NEW YORK

2016 WOMAN LAWYER OF THE YEAR

GAYLE TOWNE MURPHY, Esq., VLP's Pro Bono Coordinator, received The Women Lawyers of Western New York 2016 Woman Lawyer of the Year Award. Ms. Murphy was selected for her notable legal work, commitment to public service and pro bono services, and support of the advancement of women in the legal profession. Throughout her established career, Ms. Murphy has demonstrated a tireless commitment to mentoring women in the practice of law, fostering diversity in the legal profession, and increasing the number of attorneys who provide pro bono legal services. At VLP, Ms. Murphy works with law firms, private attorneys, and bar associations to increase awareness about the value of pro bono legal services. She also collaborates with SUNY Buffalo Law School to recruit and train law student



Gayle Towne Murphy

volunteers at VLP. Ms. Murphy is involved with the attorney emeritus program, supporting attorneys over the age of 55 who are interested in the benefits of providing pro bono legal services. Her success is based on the personal relationships she establishes with the law firms, attorneys, judges, court personnel,

law faculty, law students, and key community stakeholders in order to educate on the importance of "speaking for those who are not heard."

Prior to joining VLP, Ms. Murphy had a private law practice for over 20 years, focusing on children's rights and the rights of individuals with disabilities. She was a special education teacher, an instructor and student teacher supervisor in the exceptional education department at Buffalo State College, and a clinical legal education instructor at UB Law School. She also practiced at Neighborhood Legal Services and Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled, or Disadvantaged of WNY, and served on the Attorney for the Child Panel for the Appellate Division, Fourth Judicial Department. In addition, Ms. Murphy has served as a court appointed attorney and court evaluator in Article 81 guardianship proceedings.

Ms. Murphy is active in the legal community, and is a member of the New York State and Erie County Bar Associations. She is the co-chair of the pro bono committee of the WNY Chapter of the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York and formerly served on the board of directors for Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled, or Disadvantaged of WNY, Inc.



2016 VLP PRO BONO AWARDS

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

VLP's award winners at the Awards Reception preceding the 9th Annual Champions for Justice Bash, December 1, 2016.



ATTORNEY OF THE MORNING

KRISTOPHER M. SIGETI, Esq., began volunteering at VLP in January 2015, shortly after attending our free eviction defense CLE. Over the past two years, his dedicated work at AOM has helped hundreds of Buffalo residents and their families avoid the trauma of losing their homes. He skillfully and compassionately works with our frightened and often confused clients, explaining the legal process in a way they can understand.



Joselyn Nieves, Kristopher Sigeti

In the past year, Mr. Sigeti volunteered at AOM on 18 days, representing a remarkable 142 clients. Since January 2015, he represented a total of 232 clients, volunteering 96.93 hours. Notably, Mr. Sigeti was our volunteer on December 23, 2015, when he prevented

homelessness during the holiday season for 15 clients. Our staff describes him as smart, kind, and patient; a dependable volunteer who makes himself available, often at the last minute, to fill in for other pro bono attorneys. Mr. Sigeti also serves as our second attorney on days when the AOM docket is staggering. His superb negotiating skills are essential at AOM. He also fills a great need at VLP by representing our divorce clients. We are grateful to Mr. Sigeti for his commitment to access to justice for our community's most vulnerable people.

VLP "VIP"

BRIDGET M. O'CONNELL, Esq. is a fundamental component of the success of the Family Court Help Desk.

Since its inception, Ms. O'Connell has been instrumental in recruiting volunteer attorneys, working with Family Court staff, and mentoring



Robert Elardo, Bridget O'Connell, Gayle Murphy

student interns. She has been available as a last minute help desk volunteer and continues to support the help desk by assisting in furthering its development.

As a lawyer and social worker, Ms. O'Connell understands the importance of civil legal services as a part of the array of services that help people with unmet needs. Over the years, she has consistently supported and promoted VLP, and facilitated pro bono attorneys in her roles with the Courts and various local bar associations.



FAMILY COURT HELP DESK

ELIZABETH “ELI” J. CIAMBRONE Esq., began volunteering at the Family Court Help Desk shortly after it opened in October 2013. Since then, she has volunteered at the help desk 75 times and assisted 283 clients, for a total of 162 volunteer hours. In 2016 alone, Ms. Ciambrone volunteered 34 times and helped 140 Family Court



Shelby Maroselli, Elizabeth Ciambrone

clients. Her expertise and familiarity with Family Court practice helps her quickly assess each pro se client's unique situation to deliver sound legal advice, even when seeing several clients in one afternoon. She also found time to provide full representation in a pro bono child support case.

FEDERAL PRO SE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PERSONIUS MELBER, LLP attorneys began volunteering at the Federal Pro Se Assistance Program during the summer of 2014. With 100% participation, Rodney Personius, Brian Melber, and Scott Hapeman can each be counted on to volunteer at least once each semester, and are always willing to cover for a colleague. Overall, the firm's attorneys have volunteered 18 times, providing crucial legal advice and assistance to 31 Federal Court pro se litigants who are often confused by the complex Federal Court rules. Mistery Personius, Melber, and Hapeman also spend significant time mentoring law student volunteers who assist at the program.



Scott Hapeman, Gregory Miller, Brian Melber,
Hon. Paula Feroletto, Rodney Personius



Family Court Help Desk

Questions about Family Court?
Can't afford a lawyer?
Free legal advice is available.

Monday — Friday
11:30 a.m. — 2:00 p.m.

Erie County Family Court
4th Floor – Room 428
One Niagara Plaza, Buffalo, NY 14202

A volunteer attorney is available at the Family Court Help Desk to provide brief limited scope legal advice to unrepresented low-income people.



Please note that the Help Desk is not staffed or coordinated by the Erie County Family Court. It is a program provided by the ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP).

Pro Se Assistance Program

A Joint Program of the SUNY Buffalo Law School
and the ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project
at the Robert H. Jackson Courthouse

Questions about Federal Court? ~ Can't afford a lawyer? ~ Free legal advice is available.

Wednesday and Friday
11:30 a.m - 2:00 p.m.

A volunteer attorney, assisted by SUNY Buffalo Law students, is available to provide brief legal advice to unrepresented, financially eligible individuals in the U.S. District Court of Western New York. Located next to the Office of the Clerk, 2nd Floor Robert H. Jackson Courthouse, 2 Niagara Square, Buffalo, NY.



SUNY Buffalo Law School
The State University of New York



Federal Bar Association
Western District of New York Chapter



LAW FIRM PRO BONO COORDINATOR

ERIN L. CODY, Esq., is an associate at Rupp Baase Pfalzgraf Cunningham, LLC. Shortly after she began volunteering with VLP's Immigration Program, Ms. Cody began developing a firm-wide pro bono initiative. It did not take Ms. Cody long to channel the firm's charitable spirit and strong community commitment into a pro bono policy within the firm. After our initial meeting with Ms. Cody in early 2016, she



Erin L. Cody

quickly and capably obtained the support of the firm's partners. The firm adopted a Say Yes Legal Clinic in the summer of 2016 and organized CLE programs to promote its pro bono commitment. Ms. Cody is the firm's resource for pro bono referrals.

Because of Ms. Cody, Rupp Baase Pfalzgraf Cunningham attorneys have a regular presence at Attorney of the Morning eviction defense, helping protect our clients from homelessness. In total, Rupp Baase Pfalzgraf Cunningham attorneys volunteered over 267 hours and handled 104 cases.

LAW STUDENT

COLLEEN MOONAN is a 3L student at SUNY Buffalo Law School. Ms. Moonan started volunteering for the Family Court Help Desk in February 2016 through the law school's Pro Se Assistance Program. She continued volunteering through the summer. As an intern, Ms. Moonan was always ready to assist in last minute research assignments, help with program development, and help recruiting law students to the Family Court Help Desk and to VLP.



Colleen Moonan

JUDICIAL

HON. PAUL G. BUCHANAN, retired Family Court Judge, has played an important role to the success of VLP's Say Yes Legal Clinics. Judge Buchanan is an active member of the Say Yes Buffalo Legal Task Force. Family law questions are some of the most frequently raised questions at legal clinics. Judge Buchanan is instrumental in providing support for our pro bono attorneys, obtaining memos of law and fact sheets on frequently occurring family law questions for our volunteer attorneys. Additionally, he has visited each of the legal clinics. A supporter of restorative justice and alternate dispute resolution (ADR), Judge Buchanan is quick to share his wealth of knowledge in these areas with the Legal Task Force and our volunteer attorneys, and is taking the lead in developing a policy statement regarding ethical issues.



Hon. Paul Buchanan

INCOME TAX CONTROVERSY

HODGSON RUSS, LLP's pro bono partners Joshua Feinstein, Esq., and Thomas W. Nelson, Esq., lead the firm's tax practice area and international tax practice. They were quick to respond when we approached them about partnering with VLP's Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC). Hodgson Russ tax attorneys attended a CLE to learn more about opportunities to provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income clients with tax disputes. Under the direction of Mr. Nelson, the firm's attorneys compile and submit offers in compromise to resolve clients' tax debts. This partnership has been highly successful and the firm has agreed to accept one case per month, continuing to be a consistent supporter of VLP.



James Bandoblu, Jr., Derek Wheeler



IMMIGRATION

BENJAMIN R. DWYER, Esq. is counsel at Nixon Peabody, LLP, where he normally litigates commercial and products liability cases. In May 2012, VLP's Immigration Program met a Congolese citizen, a university student, who had fled his country after having been imprisoned and violently beaten as an active member of an opposition political party. He had hoped to go to Canada, where one of his native languages, French, is spoken, but was unsuccessful.



Emma Buckthal, Benjamin Dwyer, Sophie Feal

Instead, he ended up facing removal proceedings in Buffalo and living in a local shelter. Shortly after we met the client, Mr. Dwyer agreed to represent the Congolese client, though he had no prior experience in

this area of the law.

Over five years, Mr. Dwyer appeared at least four times in Immigration Court on this client's behalf—three of those appearances were half-day long trials. At his own expense, he flew an essential, but at his expense in order for the man to testify in Immigration Court; he recruited a pro bono handwriting expert to testify to the authenticity of letters sent from Africa; and he recruited a colleague to translate documents and medical records that were vital in supporting his client's case. In the end, Mr. Dwyer gathered some 400 pages of supporting documentation for this case, and authored a pre-hearing brief and closing argument on asylum law for his client's claim.

As though this case was not challenging enough, Mr. Dwyer turned his sights to another violent region of the world and agreed to take on cases of unaccompanied minors from Central America, and one from China. Most recently, he also made himself available for legal representation in the immediate aftermath of the "travel ban," when we were not certain whether nationals of the named seven countries were going to be admitted at the Peace Bridge. Fortunately, all of the permanent residents and nonimmigrant visa holders, whose attorneys were advised through VLP, were ultimately admitted to the U.S.A.

DIVORCE

CECILE M. DORLIAE, Esq., is a valued volunteer who has been representing VLP divorce clients since 1995. Cecile has spent over 267 hours assisting clients on 108 cases. She gladly represents clients with complex cases and we can always count on her to provide quality representation. She is also a regular volunteer at the Family Court Help Desk.



Cecile M. Dorliae, Robert Elardo

Ms. Dorliae is a first-rate, dependable volunteer who has always answered our call for help over the past 21 years. Her longstanding commitment is worthy of recognition.

DIVORCE

MINDY L. MARRANCA Esq., has been a respected VLP pro bono volunteer since 2007. Since then, she has spent 309 hours assisting clients in 70 cases. She is currently working on five open VLP cases, including one in which the client requires an interpreter. She gladly accepts complicated cases that require a smart, direct approach.



Mindy L. Marranca, Robert Elardo

For example, Ms.

Marranca represents a client who married several men over the years without divorcing the others. The matter was brought to light when the client realized she needed help defending herself in an annulment proceeding. Ms. Marranca is handling the matter by filing for divorce against one husband, while taking legal action to have the others marriages nullified.



LAW FIRM COMMITMENT



Melissa Morton, Gregory Miller, Hon. Paula Feroletto, Timothy Graber

Last year we honored five local law firms that had adopted the newly created VLP Say Yes Legal Clinics in four Buffalo Public Schools. This year, we are honoring another firm, **GIBSON McASKILL & CROSBY, LLP** for their support of the Say Yes Program by completing training and co-adopting a clinic in October 2015. Each week, the firm sends one or two lawyers to a Buffalo Public High School to help families of Buffalo Public School children to navigate through important legal problems that could affect not only the family, but also the child's performance in school. As Federal Magistrate Judge Hugh Scott (co-chair of the Say Yes Legal Task Force) likes to say, these lawyers are helping to remove some of the legal noise that interferes with the children's ability to learn. In addition, largely through the support of partner, Timothy Graber, Esq., Gibson McAskill & Crosby attorneys generously support our Immigration Program by representing clients in deportation proceedings, Attorney of the Morning eviction defense, and the Federal Pro Se Assistance Program. In 2016, the firm's attorneys provided free legal assistance to 73 clients.

9th Annual Champions for Justice Bash



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THE VALUE OF PRO BONO

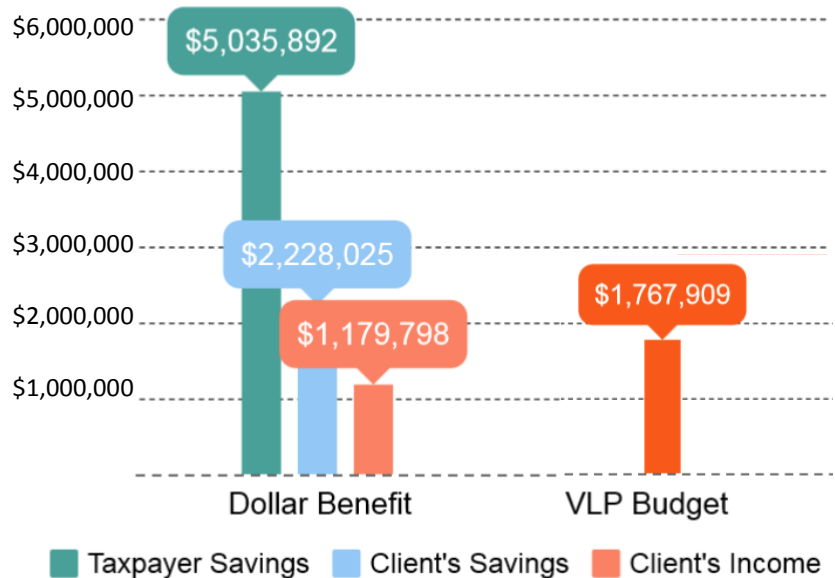
In 2016, pro bono lawyers provided nearly \$1 million in free legal services to VLP clients, in addition to nearly \$1.8 million of services provided by VLP staff.

Together VLP staff and pro bono counsel created over \$8.4 million 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 Volunteer Lawyers Project a very worthwhile investment.

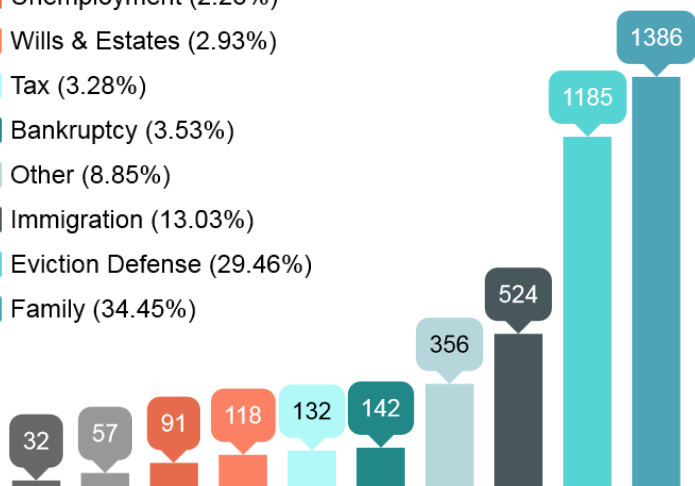
2016 Economic Benefits

\$8.4 Million in Benefits



Case Distribution Total Cases: 4,023

- Non-For-Profit Orgs. (0.80%)
- Tax Foreclosures (1.42%)
- Unemployment (2.26%)
- Wills & Estates (2.93%)
- Tax (3.28%)
- Bankruptcy (3.53%)
- Other (8.85%)
- Immigration (13.03%)
- Eviction Defense (29.46%)
- Family (34.45%)

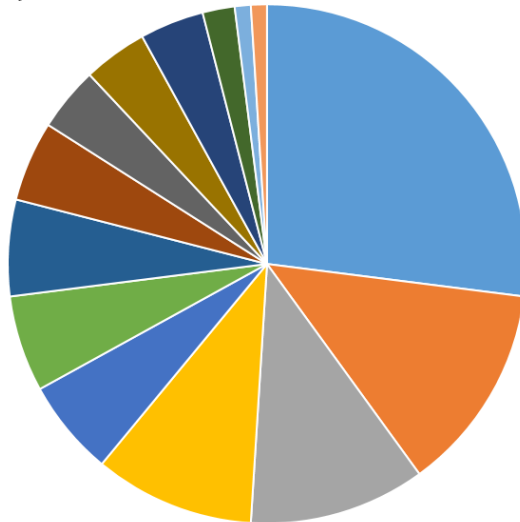


2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Revenue
\$1,888,373.67

FUNDING GENEROUSLY
PROVIDED BY

- Judiciary CLS (NYS) (27%)
- IOLA (NYS) (13%)
- Indigent Legal Services (NYS)/Erie Co. (11%)
- Dept. of Health (NYS) (10%)
- NY Imm. Family Unity (NYS)/Vera (6%)
- Law Firm Fundraising (6%)
- Other Federal Grants (6%)
- EOIR/Vera (5%)
- Say Yes Foundation (4%)
- IRS (4%)
- LSC/NLS (4%)
- BAEC Dues Checkoff (2%)
- Oishei Foundation (1%)
- Special Events (1%)



NYS Office of Court Administration (OCA)

NYS Interest On Lawyer Account (IOLA) Fund

NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services

NYS Department of Health

Vera Institute of Justice

US Department of Justice

Executive Office of Immigration Review

Say Yes Foundation

Internal Revenue Service

Legal Services Corporation

Neighborhood Legal Services

International Institute of Buffalo

John R. Oishei Foundation

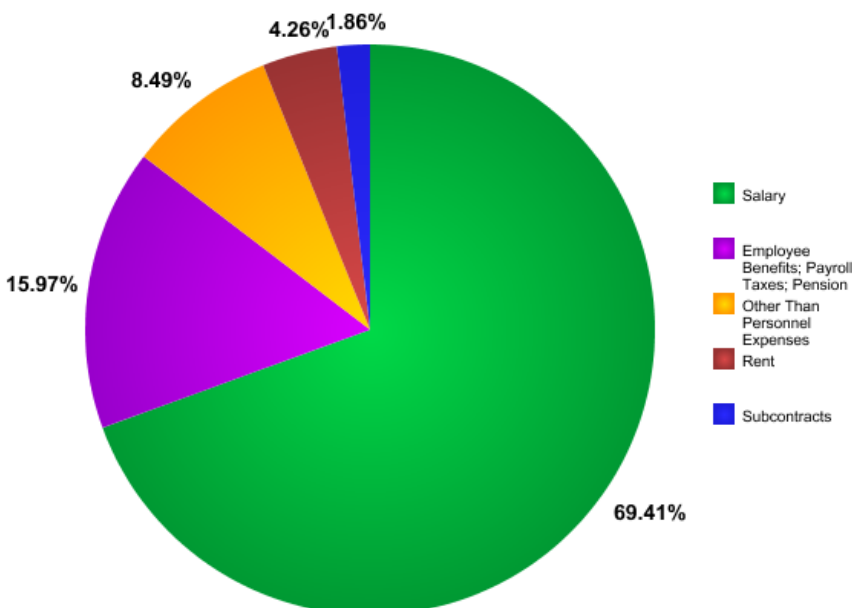
United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

Evans Devereux Memorial Fund

Cornell University

Law Firm, Corporate, and Individual Contributions

Expenses *
\$1,767,909



* Does not include accrued vacation or depreciation



PRO BONO ACTIVITY & TRAINING

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"Volunteering is a nice touchstone to remind you why you became a lawyer."
Jodyann Galvin, Esq.

In 2016, VLP continued to recruit, train and support our pro bono attorneys to ensure successful and meaningful volunteer work with our clients. We provided CLE programs for law firms participating in the Say Yes Legal Clinic Program. We provided a customized CLE program for Hodgson Russ LLP tax attorneys when they began participating in our Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program (LITC). We coordinated a Child Support CLE. We presented CLE programs on the importance of pro bono.

In 2016, VLP issued 363 CLE certificates of completion for attorneys who attended our 21 free CLE trainings. We provide these free trainings in exchange for the attorney agreeing to handle a VLP case.

Proud to be a VLP Volunteer Proud to be a VLP Volunteer Proud to be a VLP Volunteer Proud to be a VLP Volunteer

**Pro Bono lawyers worked on
2,513 VLP cases during 2016!!**


Proud to be a VLP Volunteer Proud to be a VLP Volunteer

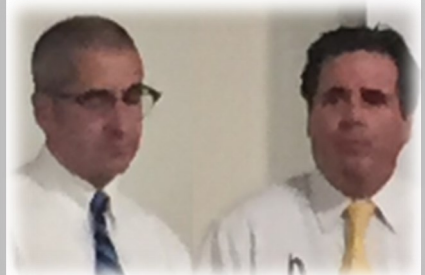
During 2016, we were able to secure additional funding to allow us to dramatically increase our Pro Bono Coordination team during 2017.



SPOTLIGHT ON PRO BONO

 This fall we hosted Alyssa Telander, a 3L law student intern from Northeastern University School of Law. At VLP, she worked primarily in the Immigration Program. She undertook legal research, drafted pre-hearing briefs & pleadings, prepared an asylum application, negotiated a bond with the Dept. of Homeland Security, and made appearances before the Immigration Court.

 On 10/4/16, Hon. John Aman and James DeMarco, Esq., provided participants with a basic, practical overview of handling child support matters in Erie County Family Court at a free CLE, Child Support Nuts & Bolts. The 20 participants agreed to handle a family law case on exchange for two free CLE credits.



Hon. John Aman, James DeMarco

← Mayor Byron Brown proclaimed **October 23rd to 29th 2016 Pro Bono Week** in Buffalo in recognition of the hard work that pro bono attorneys undertake for clients in the Buffalo area.



The following attorneys provided pro bono legal services through VLP on at least one case during 2016. Many thanks to each of you.

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Adams, Eugene P.	Bivona, Beth Ann	Cardamone, Danielle	Coppola, Lisa A.
Addelman, David R.	Blackhall, Jennifer	Carducci, Erica	Cottrell, Carla
Aloi, Cheryl	Borek, Erin C.	Carr, Alana P.	Crandell, Patrick
Altreuter, William C.	Bouquard, Leah	Casey, Thomas J.	Crawford, Robert
Anderson, Ryan	Brady, Daniel	Caso, Jr, Raymond H.	Crawford, Ryan
Andreozzi, Justin	Brasky, Adam	Cassar, James J	Davidzik, Brad
Andreozzi, Randall P.	Braun, Beverley	Cercone, Marco	Davis, James P.
Anthis, S. Lee	Brechtel, Christopher	Chaas, Michelle	Davis, Mark C.
Apa, Jill A.	Brennan, Terrance C.	Chan, Mary	De Marco, James C.
Aquino, Mark	Brenner, Barbara	Chen, Joanna	De Prima, Gina Marie
Arcara, Mark	Brenon, John G.	Chiari, Gerald	De Rose, Elise M
Arcuri, Kristin Langdon	Brock, David	Christophersen, Wendy	Deck, Jillian
Arthurs, Christina H.	Brockway, Bryan	Ciambrone, Elizabeth	Della Posta, Gregory
Auerbach, Corey	Brown, Gillian	Cimasi, Michael	Deuschle, Thomas A.
Augustine, Anne	Brown, Marc W.	Cisneros Vilchis, Brenda	Di Done, Kyle C
Ayers, Emily C.	Brown, Michele	Ciurczak, Diane	Di Pirro, Elizabeth
Baase, Jeffrey F.	Brunea, Chris T.	Codjovi, Jamie L.	Dickinson, Joanna
Balkin, Patrick	Bucki, Craig R.	Cody, Erin	Digati, Thomas
Balkin, Sean	Buckley, Elizabeth F.	Coheley, Marissa A.	Dines, Catherine
Balogh, Sarah Beth	Buffum, Sharon K.	Cohen, Frederick	Domagalski, James
Barnas, Brian	Bundt, Melissa	Colaiacono, Emilio L.	Donahue, Courtney
Barrett, Michael	Burge, Benjamin	Colaiacono, Kimberly	Donathen, James D.
Barth, Philip C., III	Buscaglia, Elizabeth	Condon, Carol A.	Donovan-Bub, Christine
Bartlett, Paul	Buyer, Martha	Condon, Kevin C.	Dorliae, Cecile Mathis
Batt, Jamie Jasinski	Cacciato, Louis M.	Conklin, Robert	Downey, Anne F
Baum, Holly	Calabrese, Kyle	Connare, Erin	Drury, Thomas J.
Beckage, Jennifer A.	Cantone, Peter	Consoli, Dannine	Dubs, Joshua
Beebe-Safulko, Lydia	Cantwell, Earl K., II	Cook, Stephanie	Dukmen, Kyle
Berbary, George	Cantwell, Earl K., III	Copeland, Jessica	Dutta, Reena
Bestine, Katherine	Capote, Ashlyn	Coppola, Lee	Dwyer, Benjamin



Dwyer, E. Meghan	Gibbons, Kevin	Ieraci, Frank	Lenhardt, Clayton
Eagan, Gayle	Gioia, Horace A.	Ihde, Regan	Leonard, Graham
Emerson, Laura	Glose, Herbert J.	Ilecki, William	Leonardi, Jennifer
Enright, Rosemary	Glynn, Eric	Ireland, Katie	Lestak, Christopher
Estridge, Valdora	Goldsmann, Mark	Irizarry, Ramon	Lewandowski, Thomas
Evans, Anne C.	Gordon, Milton	Jasinski, Jonathan	Lillis, Brendan
Eyre, Kara	Graber, Timothy	Jaworski, Myriah	Lochner, Thomas
Falvey, Julie	Graziano, Robert	Jay, Hope R.	Longo, Frank
Fatimah, Amat	Greco, James J.	Joerg, Theodore	Lowe, Amanda
Fay, Patricia A.	Greene, Alvin M.	Johnsen, Ryan	Lucinski, Ryan
Feal, Sophie	Grenda, Torrey	Johnson, Robert C	Lugo, Alexandra
Feinstein, Joshua	Grieco, Charles D.	Jordan, Alyssa L.	Lynch, Adam
Fennell, Thomas J.	Guerra, Rebecca	Katz, Eileen	Lyons, Thomas
Fenster, Sarah E.	Gugino, Randy H.	Kearney, Kevin M.	Maguire, Daniel
Ferdman, Michael	Gupta, Sheela	Kellogg, Leslie	Mannillo, Jeffrey
Feroletto, John P.	Gutierrez, Alejandro	Kelly, Daniel P.	Mantharam, Marybeth
Filbert, Shannon	Gwitt, Brian	Kernan, David H	Margulis, Randy S.
Flannery, Jennifer	Hanley, Marianne	Kim, Minryu Sarah	Marlette, Peter S.
Fleming, Andrew P.	Hanley, Patrick	Knoer, Robert E.	Marranca, Mindy
Flick, Kristen	Hapeman, Scott	Kolaga, John	Marrero, Rachel K.
Foit, C. Kenneth	Hargesheimer, Elbert III	Kolken, Matthew	Marszalkowski, Michael
Foley, Gabrielle	Harrington, Jeffrey	Koren, Bruce Kevin	Martin, Eileen
Fortin, Claire	Hartman, Daniel	Koval, Rebecca	Mattingly, Christopher
Frech, Jr., David H.	Heary, Robert	Kraengel, Elizabeth	Mc Cabe, Raymond
Friedfertig, Richard B.	Herberger, Michael	Krauza, Molly	Mc Carthy, Anna S. M.
Friedman, Richard J.	Herdzik, Jr., Matthew B.	Kristoff, Karl W.	Mc Coy, Dennis
Gabriele, Vanessa	Herman, Audrey Rose	Kruppa, Kevin	Mc Cready, Maureen A.
Gaffney, Thomas	Hiebert, Zachary	Kucinski, Timothy	Mc Grath, Peter
Galvin, Jodyann	Hogan, Susan S.	Kwiatkowski, Arianna	Mc Guire, Patrick
Gargano, Bernadette	Holmes, Elizabeth	Lafferty, Riane F.	Mc Lean, Siana
Garvey, Kathleen	Hoover, Timothy	Lamarque, Stephanie O.	Meier-Davis, Katherine
Gaughan, Dennis C.	Hoppe, Bernadette M.	Lane, Jr., Robert	Melber, Brian
Geary, Nathan	Horn, John	Laub, David	Michalek, Daniel
Gelber, Ross	Horton, Scott	Lazarus, James A.	Michalek, Sarah
Gibbons, Kenneth W.	Hujer, Tristan D.	Lazroe, Matthew	Mikienis, Christopher



Miller, Andrew	Quinn, Courtney	Schwach, Michelle M.	Trigilio, John L.
Miller, Sarah	Radel, Robert R.	Scinta, Denis	Trow, Clark
Modica, Francine E.	Randolph, Sallie	Sciortino, Michael Anton	Ulatowski, Jason G.
Montani, Oriana	Reese, Melissa	Shah, Jennifer A.	Van Dette, James M.
Moore, Vincent	Reich Lynch, Jessica N.	Shahram, Nadia	Varavenkatarman, Radhika P.
Moran, E. Megan	Reinoso, Bruce	Shatkin, Marc	Vasilion, Peter P.
Morrisroe, Richard	Richards, Jeremy	Sheldon, Patrick	Venkova, Vera
Morton, Melissa	Richmond, Anna Marie	Siegel, David Alan	Vesper, Jessica
Mucklewee, James M.	Riedel, George Jr.	Sigeti, Kristopher	Vincton, Melissa
Mueller, Deena	Rizzo, Danielle	Singer, Robert	Violante, Marten
Murchie, Nevin	Roach, Patrick	Skolar, Shea	Virginia, Mary E.
Murphy, Lynn	Roberson, Shatorah	Skompinski, Lauren	Walker, Regina
Murray, Robert G.	Robinson, Edward C.	Smith, Sheldon	Walling, Mark R.
Murrett, John C.	Robshaw, Nora B.	Snider, Carol	Watt, Margot
Mussell, Jessica	Rosado, Louis	Snyder, E. J.	Weinrieb, Pieter
Myers, Jessica A.	Rosciglione, Maria	Sobieski, Lee	Weiss, Jeffrey
Nagel, Catherine	Roshia, Marylou K.	Sperrazza, Daniel J.	Welsh, Brian
Nelson, Thomas W.	Rougeux, Debra C.	Speyer, Carly M	Wettlaufer, Catherine
Ngwashi, Martha J B	Ruotolo, Lissette M.	Stearns, Ryan	White, Benjamin T.
Nichols, Jon Allon	Rupp, R. Anthony III	Steffan, Thomas	Whittemore, David
Nisengard, Michael	Same, Jeffrey	Stergion, Jennifer	Wiens, Wallace
Nucheren, Leah	Sanchez, Jack	Stewart, Gregory	Wieser, John D.
O' Brien, Margaret	Santoro, Jeffrey P.	Stiller, Douglas	Wile, Jonathan B.
O'Brien, Sean	Sarfraz, Amil	Stoessel, Sara	Wiltenburg, Peter
Offermann, Francis	Sarkovics, David	Stutz, Natalie	Wiseman, Steven G.
Oppenheimer, Randolph	Sarzynski, Daniel	Suozzi, Paul	Wisniewski, Benjamin
Oswald, Phillip A.	Sauer, Barbara A.	Svisco, Rosa S.	Wojtan, Gary J.
Palmieri, Matthew R.	Schaeffer, Dennis K.	Szczygiel, Christopher	Woll, Richard
Perley, Michael	Schaus, Barbara	Tanbakuchi, Sarah	Woodward, Laurence
Personius, Rodney O.	Scherer, Jr., Richard M.	Tedesco, Michael J.	Xu, Mengyi
Phillips, Gary M.	Scherer, Matthew	Terragnoli, Joel	Young, Daniel
Phillips, Margaret L.	Schmidt, Heather	Tesseyman, Jr., Francis	Zajas, J. Grant
Pizzi, Rosa	Scholand, Gregory P.	Thibodeau, Pamela	Zarcone, Kelly
Pocheban, Paul M.	Schrader, Steven	Tiveron, Diane R.	Zomerfeld, Henry A.
Pullen, Seth	Schulefand, Keith	Tommaney, Elizabeth	
Quinlan, Lawlor	Schulz, Paul	Tredo, Debra	



ATTORNEY OF THE MORNING

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON AOM



Our client came to our Attorney of the Morning Program at Buffalo City Court. She was a few months behind in her rent and the landlord had brought a non-payment eviction.

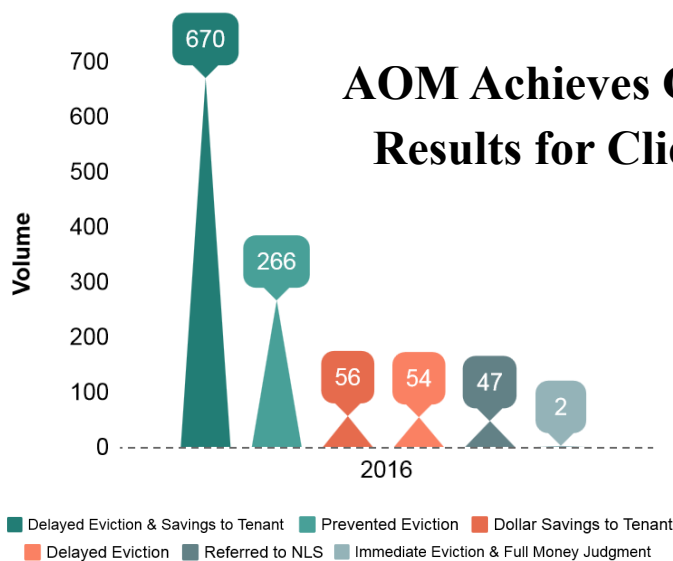
Our paralegal discovered from the woman that they had fallen behind in rent because her husband was out of work. She had recently applied for social security and was waiting for her first check.

Our volunteer attorney was able to present this to the landlord's attorney and get the clients more time to get caught up. In the end the landlord said that he agreed to the additional time because they had been good tenants, but were going through a hard time.

"Thanks for all your hard work. Thanks for keeping me in my home."

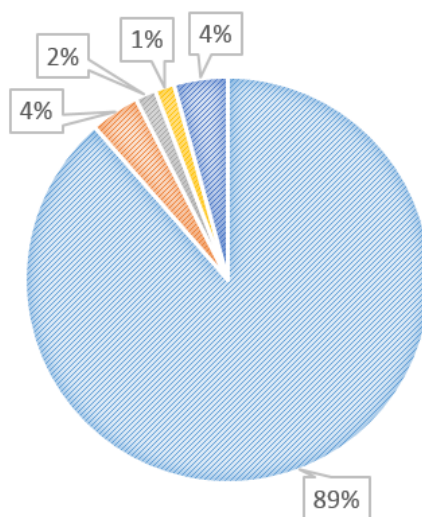
Since 1990, trained volunteer attorneys, assisted by VLP staff and student volunteers, have represented low income clients facing eviction in Buffalo City Court through our Attorney of the Morning (AOM) program on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. This highly successful program, replicated across the country, helps vulnerable families in our community avoid homelessness.

AOM Achieves Great Results for Clients



AOM Case Distribution

- Stipulation
- Tenant Counseled
- Contested Court Decision
- Uncontested Court Decision
- Case Adjourned to NLS




In 2016, over 1,000 clients consulted with volunteer attorneys, who assisted them in negotiating a settlement with their landlord or in arguing their case in front of the hearing officer. AOM is also a valuable experience for our volunteer attorneys, providing them the opportunity to negotiate with opposing counsel and argue before the court. Law and paralegal student interns also gain from the experience of performing client intake and observing volunteer attorneys.



FAMILY COURT HELP DESK

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON FCHD

 A mother of two young children came to the Family Court Help Desk. The children's father had recently filed a petition for custody and the client did not know what to do. Prior to the mother separating from the father, there was a history of domestic violence in the relationship.

The Volunteer Attorney was able to sit down with the client, review the petition that was filed against her, and explain to her what it all meant. The Volunteer Attorney was also able to explain how the court process would work, the roles of various people in Family Court, what the client could expect at her first appearance, and that the Court could assign an attorney to represent her.

The client left the Help Desk feeling much better and had a greater understanding of how the next steps in her custody case would go.

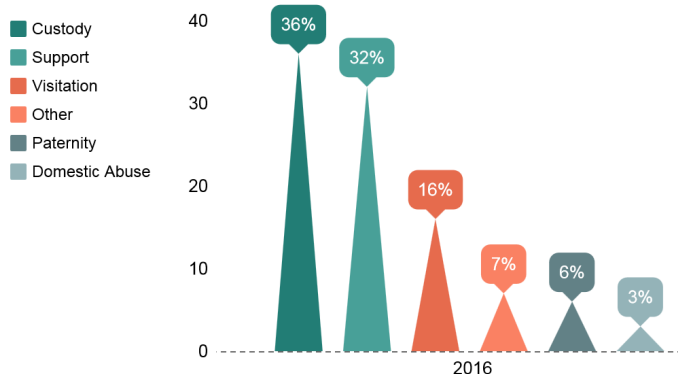
"Working at the help desk helped me get better at working with clients, particularly those with mental health problems and sensitive issues. Further I think it improves the community's perception of the legal system. Finally, for many of the individuals we help, they are really in this alone and the assistance this program provides helps them navigate the complicated legal system."
-FCHD Law Student Intern

At the Family Court Help Desk in Erie County Family Court, clients can speak to an attorney prior to their court appearance or filing a petition. With the assistance of over 70 attorneys and 21 law students, the help desk served 925 clients in 2016. Volunteers worked over 1,500 hours at the Family Court Help Desk. As a result of the advice of our volunteer attorneys, we helped to avoid or reduce litigation in 23% of our cases.

Our goal is to help inform unrepresented litigants of the Family Court process and rules. We hope to reduce the number of unnecessary petitions and to improve the quality of properly filed petitions. Clients are provided with personalized case advice and general information that helps them navigate the Family Court more effectively. This information includes referrals to legal service organizations, information about the Assigned Counsel program, and advise on what to expect during the court process.

2016 was an exciting year for the Family Court Help Desk. In April of 2016, the Family Court Help Desk moved to a new, dedicated space in the Family Court Building. This space, located right next to where petitions are filed, includes two private offices where law students and volunteer attorneys can privately meet with clients.

FCHD Problem Types



UB Law School student interns, Jill Wnek & Keli Hernandez



PRO SE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

"It's the responsibility of every attorney to give back to the community that offers us an opportunity to make a living. I really enjoy volunteering at the PSAP because it gives us a chance to assist people who really need help and have no place to turn."
Michael Perley, Esq.

The Pro Se Assistance Program (PSAP) continues to provide critically important limited-scope legal assistance to low-income, self-represented litigants navigating the maze of procedural rules and complicated terminology in the Western District of New York (WDNY). Our clients and the court benefit from VLP's partnership with the WDNY, UB Law School's Pro Se Civil Litigation Support Practicum and the WNY Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The PSAP is housed in the Robert M. Jackson Federal Courthouse in Buffalo. Clients can walk in to meet with a pro bono attorney on Wednesdays and Fridays.


Between January 20, 2016 and December 2, 2016, during **71** days of operation, **98** clients received invaluable legal advice from **29** volunteer attorneys at the PSAP. Since opening in February 12, 2014, the PSAP's **43** volunteer attorneys and **20** law student interns served a total of **356** clients.

The PSAP pro bono attorneys are experienced federal court litigators who advise clients on the substantive and procedural requirements of their case. This basic legal guidance helps the WDNY as well as the pro se litigants. Procedural errors are reduced when clients better understand the court process. Clients visiting the PSAP submit more complete and legible submissions. They are able to understand and better prepare for the court's mandatory mediation program.

As reported by the Administrative Office of the U.S Courts, in the twelve-month period ending September 30, 2016, there were a total of 1,830 civil cases filed in the WDNY, with 652 being pro se cases. Of the 652 civil pro se cases, 130 were commenced by non-prisoners.

We are proud of the work this program continues to do to narrow the Access to Justice Gap for our clients faced with navigating their Federal Court legal cases on their own.

SPOTLIGHT ON PSAP

 Our client, a learning disabled, 49-year-old single mother of two brought an action against her employer for employment discrimination. She was struggling with complying with the court's order to timely respond to the defendant's discovery demands and interrogatories. Our volunteer attorney reviewed the client's documents, explained the court order, and called defense counsel to get an extension. Because our volunteer was concerned about the client's ability to adequately respond, he met with the client a few days later at the PSAP to assist with drafting her responses to interrogatories and document demands. Our volunteer's commitment left our client with a complete response, a greater understanding of the process, and the confidence to continue her case.

2016 PSAP Legal Problems



Fall 2016 Pro Se Civil Litigation Support
Practicum Law Students
Taylor Baker, Nelson Laurencio, Vincent
Parlato, Michelle McCabe & Aisha



VLP'S SAY YES LEGAL CLINICS

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

"Children are instrumental to our future. We want to use our talents and our profession to help children to be able to focus on education. We want to make sure they aren't worried about where they are going to sleep if their family is evicted."

Tracie Lopardi, Esq.

This was VLP's second year coordinating the Say Yes Legal Clinics. In 2016, we focused on growing the program to continue to meet the needs of Buffalo Public School (BPS) families, adding a year round legal clinic at the BPS Adult Education Program and a summer legal clinic at BPS Central Registration.

The commitment of our pro bono attorneys continues to be remarkable. We welcomed two new pro bono law firms, Gibson McAskill & Crosby, LLP, and Rupp Baase Pfalzgraf Cunningham, LLP. Additionally, Barclay Damon, LLP, attorneys adopted the adult education legal clinic and staff it year round. Attorneys from Harris Beach, LLP, Hodgson Russ, LLP, Lippes Mathias Wexler Friedman, LLP, and Phillips Lytle, LLP continue to sponsor legal clinics.

The Say Yes Legal Taskforce, led by Co-Chairs Magistrate Judge Hugh B. Scott and Robert M. Elardo, continues to provide strong leadership for the Legal Clinics.


VLP's online reference guide, developed in 2015, proves to be a well-used tool by our pro

bono attorneys. It is regularly updated by volunteers and VLP staff. Former Family Court Judge Paul G. Buchanan has provided significant support for the highly utilized family law section. We provided each Legal Clinic and our community partners and volunteers with copies of this invaluable guide.

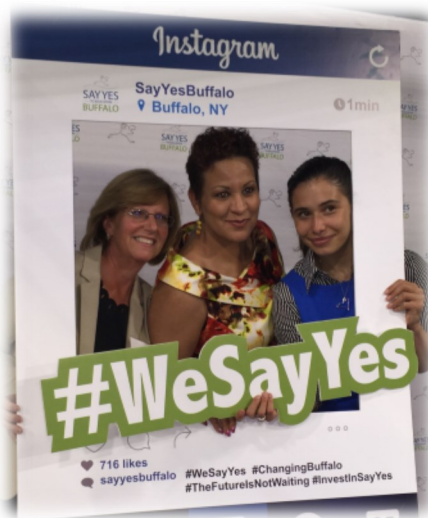
During the **111 days** the legal clinics were open in 2016, **80 volunteer attorneys** met with **205 clients** to assist them with civil legal needs. This work benefited a total of **569** people, **290** of who were children. Using interpreters, we also provided free legal assistance to **53** non-English speaking clients.

VLP also helped **690** additional Buffalo Public School families through other VLP free legal clinics. Over **436** of these families faced homelessness and received free legal representation at our Attorney of the Morning eviction defense program. An additional **242** BPS families utilized our Family Court Help Desk for legal assistance in Family Court matters. Other clients visited VLP's office and various offsite outreach clinics for free legal assistance. VLP is proud to be able to continue to provide high quality, free civil legal services to our Buffalo Public School community.

SPOTLIGHT ON SAY YES

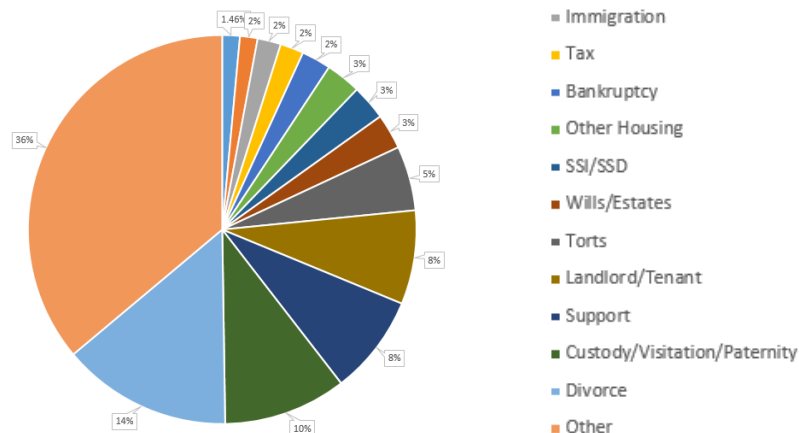
 Our client, a Spanish speaking Puerto Rican native, was a student in BPS Adult Education Program and his children were enrolled in a Buffalo high school. He did not understand his federal tax problem. After reviewing the client's documents, our pro bono attorney explained how the Internal Revenue Code applied to the specific situation and provided detailed legal advice about pursuing "injured spouse status."

Because of the complexity of the client's tax law issue, he was referred to the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) at VLP. Our LITC Staff Attorney assisted the client with the federal tax lien, and also discovered that our client was a victim of identity theft. This client continues to receive ongoing free legal assistance from VLP.



Gayle Murphy, Nadia Moore, Talia Rodriguez


2016 LEGAL PROBLEMS



BANKRUPTCY

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON BANKRUPTCY

 A Houston attorney recently wrote to VLP. This is an excerpt of his letter:

I would like to sincerely thank you for the recent representation of my brother with his bankruptcy filing. I currently reside in Houston, TX, and can only provide support to my family from afar. This can be problematic in many circumstances without people and organizations like yours that treat people with dignity and professionally represent them when needed most. The initial interaction my brother had with VLP was very professional, during a time when the rest of society was not so pleasant.

VLP took the time to talk with my brother and put things into a meaningful perspective. My brother felt very relieved from his very first interaction with the [volunteer attorney] who treated my brother as he would treat a paying client; he never made him feel as though he was a pro bono client, or a burden. These interactions were a relief and provided me with peace of mind knowing that he was in good hands. I cannot stress enough how helpless I felt when my brother was confronted with a multitude of financial hurdles just as he was preparing to become a father. For this, I thank you for not only helping my brother, but for helping my family by relieving us of the stress of his financial hardships. Thank you all for the great work that you do.

"[VLP] relieved a great burden for me"

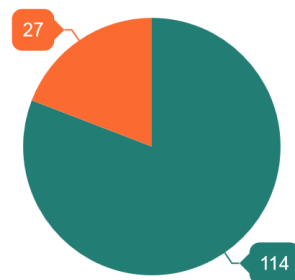
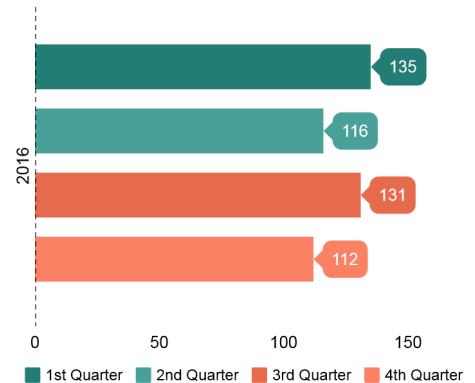
VLP continues to receive a steady volume of calls from individuals struggling to meet the often unreasonable demands of creditors and debt collectors. After screening for financial eligibility, a consultation is scheduled. The client's finances are reviewed to determine whether bankruptcy is reasonable, necessary, and a priority.

If filing bankruptcy is not a priority, the client is counseled one-on-one regarding dealing with creditors and the meaning of "judgment proof." VLP provides an overview of various methods of debt collection and what assets are exempt. Clients are given an overview of rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act & the NYS Exempt Income Protection Act, as well as practical tips on dealing with debt collectors. If a client still wishes to pursue bankruptcy, they are referred to the private bar, consumer credit counseling, or other appropriate agencies.

Priority cases are referred to one of our pro bono volunteers. Many of our bankruptcy volunteers accept additional cases immediately after concluding one. Cases often involve the removal of judgment liens upon clients' primary residences. Procedural requirements and complexities would create a daunting task for a pro se debtor. In the vast majority of cases, our volunteer attorneys were able to secure a "fee waiver" of the \$335.00 filing fee normally required by the Court. Our longstanding relationship with Consumer Credit Counseling of Buffalo also benefits our client through their policy of allowing a fee waiver for their services in providing the pre filing Credit Counseling Certificate necessary for each case.

Judges encouraged the Bankruptcy Bar to participate in our program and have touted the fact that our district has a very favorable (low) ratio of pro se cases, due to the existence of our program. Not only are the benefits to clients clear and substantial, but the Courts are better able to maintain standards and goals when clients are represented.

Bankruptcy Inbound Calls



■ Counselor & Advised by VLP (80.85%)
■ Referred to Volunteer Attorney (19.15%)



COORDINATED REFUGEE/ASYLEE LEGAL SERVICES

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

"I feel like living my life once again, which could not have been possible without your help. Thank you so much. I will live my life to the fullest!"



Western New York's population has undergone a dramatic diversification in recent years as a result of the resettlement of approximately 31,000 refugees over the past 10 years. The vast majority of these people now reside in Buffalo. Many have limited English language ability and require specialized outreach to provide them with access to legal services.

To try to reach these clients, VLP partners with the Legal Aid Bureau, Neighborhood Legal Services, The Center for Elder Law & Justice, The Western New York Law Center, Journey's End Refugee Services, and Jericho Road Community Health Center to run the Coordinated Refugee/Asylee Legal Services Project (CRLS). The CRLS Project provides culturally and linguistically appropriate legal services to refugee and asylee communities and provides civil legal services for income qualified refugees, asylees, and asylum seekers. At VLP, our CRLS work does not represent a particular case type or subject matter. Rather, it encompasses all types of cases that VLP handles.

CRLS was originally funded by the John R. Oishei Foundation. Although that funding has ended, the partner organizations have found ways to continue the CRLS effort, although on a temporary and more limited scale. In 2016, VLP handled 285 CRLS cases for refugees and asylees.

SPOTLIGHT ON CRLS

VLP represented an immigrant 14-year-old girl, raised by her aunt and uncle since the age of one. She had been abandoned by both parents due to their substance abuse. When her aunt and uncle emigrated to the United States, they were both eligible to obtain green cards. Unfortunately, our client could not be part of their immigration case as their niece. We recruited a volunteer attorney to obtain an order from Surrogate's Court, confirming her parents' abandonment and that it would be in our client's best interest to continue living in the United States with her aunt and uncle. Next, we applied for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and a green card, on our young client's behalf. She is now happily continuing her life with the only guardians she has ever known.



CRLS Coordinator, Jerry Owassi (far left), with Burmese refugees



DIVORCE

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON DIVORCE

 Our client came to VLP in a desperate financial situation, in danger of homelessness through foreclosure and unable to afford all but the most basic of necessities. The problem stemmed from years of an unresolved post-divorce issue. After 35 years of marriage, the client's spouse moved to Nevada, retired, and filed for Divorce in Nevada. The former spouse had retired from a job that participated in the NYS Retirement Plan. The Nevada Court ruled in the divorce that our client was to receive an equitable share of that pension. However, the pension plan required the former spouse to sign a consent form. The former spouse refused to sign the consent form and years went by. Meanwhile, our client was unable to meet her fixed expenses and faced foreclosure. In 2016, our volunteer attorney brought the matter to the NYS Supreme Court. By the end of the year, our volunteer attorney reported that our client is now receiving \$1,600.00 per month from the Pension Plan. Additionally, arrears were awarded to our client and efforts are underway to collect those funds. Our client is now financially secure, self-sufficient and no longer in need of volunteer services.

"[VLP] showed me that there are people who still care."

VLP has a long history of representing plaintiffs and defendants in divorce actions. We always have a long list of divorce clients waiting on the availability of a pro bono attorney. VLP has a group of attorneys committed to handling pro bono divorces. Clients are provided assistance in commencing and defending divorces to ensure a fair resolution. We also provide counsel to secure post-divorce matters in the equitable distribution of retirement benefits.

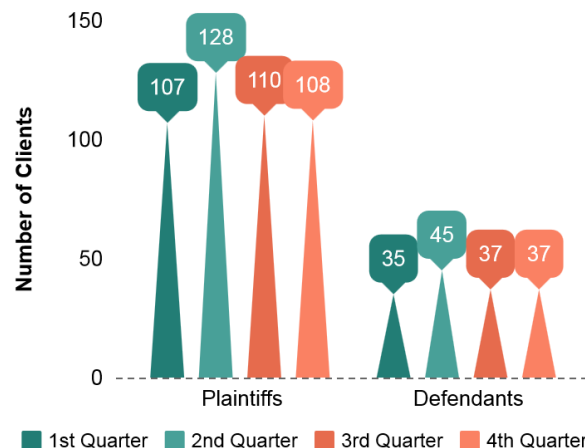
Clients who wish to file for divorce first meet with VLP staff. An outline of the legal issues is reviewed and advice is provided on what to expect in matters of custody, support, visitation and equitable distribution.

Divorce defendants are given priority, as those cases have already been filed and a court date is usually scheduled. If we cannot immediately find a volunteer attorney to take the case, VLP communicates with the court and opposing counsel to secure an adjournment of the court date. This assures the client's case will not result in a "default" divorce due to non-appearance. The matrimonial bar continues to be very gracious in routinely granting VLP extension requests. In appropriate cases, Judges have ruled favorably where VLP volunteer attorneys make fee applications when they represent the non-monied spouse. This allows a volunteer to potentially do even more volunteer work and benefits the entire system overall by fostering an atmosphere that encourages attorneys to participate in the program.

The Court system also allows volunteer attorneys to apply for compensation at the Assigned Counsel rate for certain issues. Services provided to an indigent party to resolve issues of custody or visitation within a divorce action are compensable. This creates a "hybrid" case, where the volunteer is providing pro bono services for the divorce, but being paid for time as assigned counsel for the custody and visitation issues.

Often, attorneys who already represent a client in Family Court, agree to volunteer through VLP when a divorce is filed. This provides continuity in representation.

Divorce Inbound Calls




IMMIGRATION PROGRAM


2016 ANNUAL REPORT


SPOTLIGHT ON IMMIGRATION


VLP's Immigration Program has obtained the release from detention of countless asylum seekers from all over the world, including this one:

 Our attorneys won asylum for a detained transgender Mexican woman who had been viciously persecuted since the age of 13 by the cartels who wanted to press her into prostitution.

VLP also saved the lawful permanent residency for people in deportation hearings like these:

 A young man from Haiti was legally admitted to the U.S.A. as a child, raised in New York State, and was the spouse of a U.S. citizen. VLP obtained a bond for the client so he could be released from detention in time to attend his college graduation, and so he could be present for the birth of his first child. He had been placed in removal proceedings for a nonviolent misdemeanor that occurred years ago.

 A 21-year-old from Upstate NY had been admitted at the age of eight as a refugee from Somalia. He had suffered much trauma during his childhood in his native country—including a 12-year separation from his parents, and neglect by the aunt who was supposed to raise him. He had been placed into removal proceedings for a few petit larceny convictions foolishly incurred as a teen.

 A Burmese man was admitted as a refugee. He had a single conviction but was a valued employee whose employer supported his quest to remain in the U.S.A.



HOW ATTORNEYS CAN GET INVOLVED

We can accommodate pro bono attorneys with varying levels of experience and different interests. We handle a wide array of immigration matters, as shown on the next page of this report. Additionally, if an experienced immigration attorney identifies a case that s/he would like to handle, but the client is low-income and cannot afford to pay, the attorney may approach us about handling the case under our auspices. However, we are particularly interested in referring cases to volunteer attorneys for non-citizens in removal proceedings.

Every fall, we hold an annual CLE to train attorneys on representing noncitizens in removal proceedings. A video of our 2015 training is available to attorneys handling pro bono cases. Our staff attorneys can also provide limited amounts of mentoring to attorneys handling VLP cases.

WHAT WE DO

Since 1999, the Immigration Program of the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) has served an array of the non-citizen community present in New York State and other parts of the country, through diverse projects generously funded by several sources.

We currently operate with a staff of six immigration attorneys and two paralegals from our office in Buffalo, NY, with a sub-office in Batavia, NY, and we always seek pro bono attorneys to handle matters ranging from naturalization to asylum, before the Citizenship and Immigration Services or the Immigration Courts in Buffalo and Batavia.



IMMIGRATION PROGRAM

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

WNY IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE CENTER

The Supreme Court ruling in *Padilla v. Kentucky*, 559 U.S. 356 (2010) now requires criminal defense attorneys to advise noncitizen clients as to the potential immigration consequences of a criminal conviction before taking a plea.

Through a grant from the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services and in collaboration with The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, New York, we provide training, technical assistance and other legal support to attorneys in the 7th and 8th Judicial Districts of New York who provide mandated representation to noncitizens in criminal and family court proceedings, so they can fully advise their noncitizen clients as to the immigration consequences of their particular case.

THE LEGAL ORIENTATION PROGRAM (LOP)

The Legal Orientation Program (LOP) has been a mainstay of our immigration work. We are currently funded through a contract with the Vera Institute of Justice in New York, New York.

The LOP allows us to provide weekly orientations in English and Spanish, to groups of non-citizen men* detained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for removal proceedings at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility (BFDF) in Batavia. We also provide individual orientations and pro se workshops to teach the detainees how to best represent themselves before the immigration court. Our funding precludes us from offering direct representation, but we recruit, train and mentor

pro bono lawyers to provide representation in certain cases.

In our LOP work, we see men* from all over the world, some of whom are long-term lawful permanent residents of the U.S., and others who have recently arrived and are seeking asylum from persecution in their native countries. As part of our LOP work, VLP assisted 731 detained men and 100 detained women in 2016.

NEW YORK IMMIGRANT FAMILY UNITY PROGRAM (NYIFUP)

NYIFUP is also funded by the Vera Institute of Justice in New York, NY and is an attempt to create a “public defender” style program for men* detained at the BFDF in Batavia. VLP’s immigration program was initially involved in this endeavor during a pilot project funded by New York State. We represented 55 men with that initial funding. Currently, we are contracted to represent 76 detained men facing removal proceedings. Clients are selected through a “universal representation” or “public defender” model, without triaging or consideration of the merits of the case, although NYIFUP clients must meet an income eligibility requirement to qualify for services.

Because funding for this project is limited, VLP and Vera developed a staggered intake model, which only reaches a small percentage of the potential clients. Most of our clients are seeking asylum in the U.S., and in some instances, the cases are handled by pro bono attorneys.

**We can also assist detained non-citizen women with LOP and NYIFUP funding but because women are detained by DHS in county jail in Upstate New York, the logistics are more complicated and we serve far fewer women. Women are also much less frequently detained.*

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Unaccompanied children are represented by VLP when they have been placed in foster care at Catholic Family Center in Rochester, New York. Since the children must appear in Buffalo for removal proceedings, VLP staff lawyers represent them and recruit, train and mentor pro bono lawyers to represent the children. This work is also funded by VERA.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking have several options under U.S. immigration law to obtain lawful status, and our program represents them in these matters with funding from Neighborhood Legal Services.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Survivors of human trafficking are represented in their immigration cases by VLP’s Immigration Program, with a grant in partnership with the International Institute of Buffalo (IIB). IIB provides trafficking survivors with a wealth of social services, and the two organizations work collaboratively to make certain our clients’ legal, social, and health care needs are met. We seek to obtain special “T” visas for these clients, or other immigration relief, and then apply for permanent residence on their behalves.



POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

2016 ANNUAL REPORT



"[VLP] gave me peace of mind and took away my stress...stopped me from being taken advantage of. VLP had my best interest at heart and let me sleep at night. I thank you."



"Without this representation I probably wouldn't be alive."



"[VLP] made my life more comforting and easy going. I'm very satisfied with the representation....feels so good to know I have someone who's on my side."

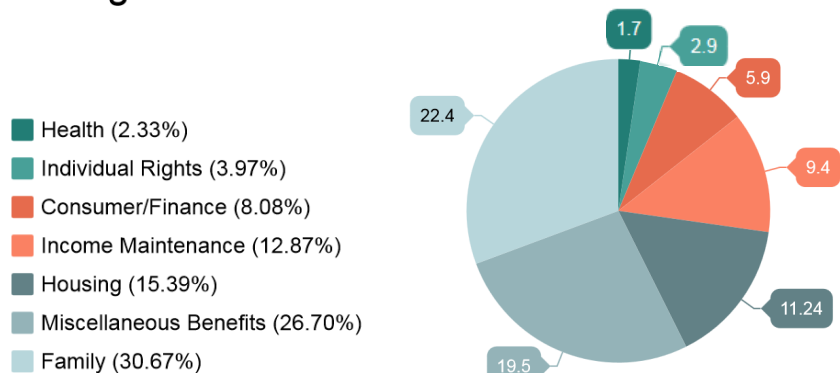
The Positive Individuals & Families Project serves people living with HIV/AIDS in all eight counties of Western New York.

Funded by the NYS Department of Health, the project has a special focus on creating end-of-life plans and care and custody plans for individuals and families impacted by HIV/AIDS. In partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services, the project also provides generalized 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.

Through a new partnership with Evergreen Health Services (EHS), the Positive Individuals & Families Project is better serving its clients by providing a seamless web of legal and supportive services. VLP's partnership with EHS gives us a unique advantage in serving those affected by HIV/AIDS in Western New York and permits us to provide holistic services to our clients.

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

Legal Problems Handled by DOH Program



SPOTLIGHT ON POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES



Shortly before Christmas, a distressed client called VLP. After years of disability payments, the Social Security Administration (SSA) was decreasing her SSI benefit and she faced living on less than \$100 per month. Our client was confused and terrified that she would be unable to pay her fixed expenses, let alone buy Christmas gifts for her son.

VLP Staff investigated the matter and found that the SSA had overpaid our client thousands of dollars in benefits. Not only were our client's monthly benefits being reduced, but she was being held responsible to return all overpayments.

With limited resources and a disability, our client would never have been able to pay back the overpayments; and, given the reduction in her SSI benefits, she would be at serious risk of homelessness.

VLP staff worked to procure a waiver of the overpayment from the SSA and our client did not have to pay back the funds. This saved our client thousands of dollars and saved her SSI benefits. As a result, she was able to maintain her basic needs and buy Christmas presents for her family.



A former client contacted VLP to represent her in a custody matter. Our client was experiencing serious health challenges and feared for her daughter's future. With VLP's representation, the Court granted joint custody of her daughter to her and her parents. Our client no longer had to worry about her daughter's well-being if she fell ill and was unable to tend to the child's day-to-day needs.

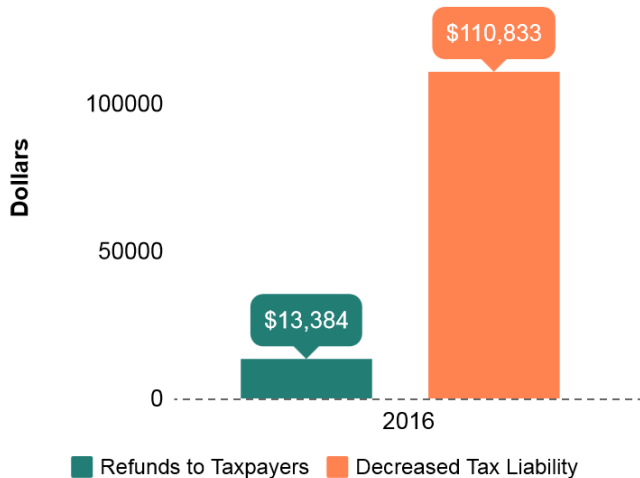


TAX

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

"[Attorney's] expertise in law and his patience totally changed my life for the better. I want to thank VLP for helping me!"

VLP provides representation and consultations to low income, refugee, and immigrant taxpayers throughout Western New York. Furthermore, the tax clinic provides educational presentations and outreach to organizations that work with targeted populations in the region.



2016 marks the first full year of VLP's very own staff tax attorney, who handles cases in-house along with the many volunteer attorneys that already represent taxpayers. Funding from the IRS allows VLP's Low Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) Program to serve 20 counties of Western New York.

VLP represents taxpayers at all stages of a federal tax controversy, from examination through court proceedings. In 2016, VLP hosted numerous taxpayer clinics on and off-site. VLP's Tax Clinic closed cases, resulting in **over \$110,000 in decreased tax liabilities**.



DID YOU KNOW?

As an added benefit, bankruptcy clients that owe income tax debt are offered an appointment with our staff tax attorney and are provided information and forms to order any necessary tax records from the IRS.

SPOTLIGHT ON TAX



A domestic violence survivor was seeking VLP assistance with her citizenship application when the IRS froze taxpayer's refund because her ex-husband/abuser filed a fraudulent joint tax return for her. The IRS decided to audit her return, and VLP represented the taxpayer in the audit, providing proof of residency for the DV survivor and her infant daughter, despite the fact that she resided in multiple places and even left the country for a short time during the tax year. The IRS issued a no change letter, indicating that the taxpayer's return was correct as filed, and released her refund of \$2,613.



A taxpayer had his refund offset due to his wife's past due student loan debt. He came to VLP seeking help in getting some of the money back. As this taxpayer was the sole income earner in the household, VLP prepared an Injured Spouse form for the taxpayer, as well as assisting him in an employment related identity theft issue. In the end, the IRS verified his ID theft claim as well as his Injured Spouse claim, and sent him a check for \$2,470.



TAX FORECLOSURE

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

"I appreciate everything, because this [my home] is the only thing I have. I would not have known what to do if I didn't have these services. They are great people and a great help. They help me get on the path so I can maintain my family house because everybody else is gone, it's only me, and I'm really struggling hard. It's a big help. Thank you."

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 both at the office, and at the Courthouse. VLP was able to negotiate stipulations which **saved 30 homes in 2016.**



A client and his house that VLP saved from tax foreclosure.

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 generations.

SPOTLIGHT ON TAX FORECLOSURE

 In 2015, a client's house was broken into, and completely ransacked. The client lost much of her savings. This, along with the client's reoccurring and lengthy hospital stays throughout the years 2015 and 2016 due to extensive health complications, led to the client falling behind in her bills. The client has a minor child, and her only source of income is Social Security Disability.

A Staff Attorney negotiated on the client's behalf for two consecutive days until it became apparent that the client would have to show up in order to impress the urgency of her situation upon the City. Even though she had undergone surgery two days prior, and was mostly bedridden, the client was able to procure transportation to the negotiations.


The last day of negotiations, VLP was able to obtain an affordable payment plan for the client with minimal amounts down. The judge ratified the agreement, and the client's home for the past 16 years was saved from tax foreclosure for another year.



UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

SPOTLIGHT ON UIB

 VLP represented a Claimant who voluntarily separated from employment due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (“PTSD”) triggers he experienced at his place of employment.

Our client was a ten-year U.S. Army veteran. In the military, he experienced extreme hazing, assaults, and traumatic incidents related to explosive ordinance disposal. After leaving active duty, he sought counseling and was diagnosed with PTSD. The employer was aware of our client’s diagnosis, but was “ill prepared to deal with” it. The employer perceived our client as having “severe medical issues,” “paranoid,” and “not being healthy enough to do the job.” However, our client regarded his employer as a “trigger” for his PTSD, likening him to the supervisors who hazed him while in the military. VLP successfully showed our client had good cause to leave his employment once he determined that his interaction with the employer was too much of a stressor for his PTSD. As such, our client was allowed benefits and received retroactive benefits.

“Thank God! That’s the best news I’ve heard all day.”

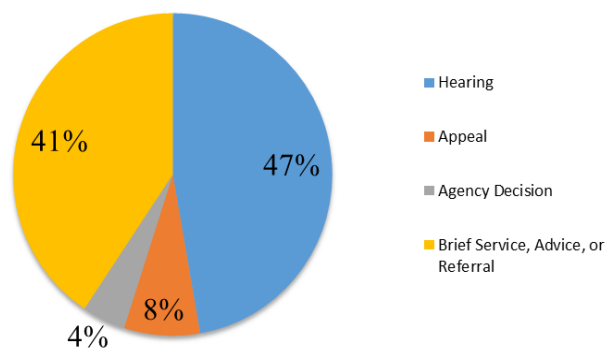
VLP’s Unemployment Insurance Benefits program serves individuals throughout Western New York in obtaining or maintaining their entitlement to receive unemployment insurance benefits (UIB). The program is primarily funded by a grant from the Office of Court Administration.

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. We also handle select unemployment appeals.

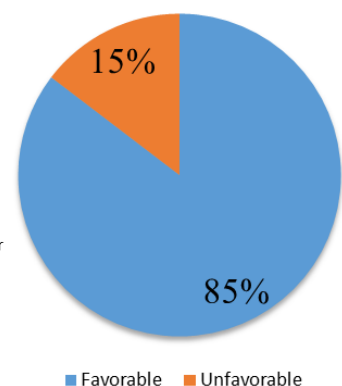
In 2016, we won **\$180,337 retroactive benefits** for our clients.

VLP’s wage and hour claims representation has continued through 2016. We provide representation to clients in obtaining unpaid wages from employers. We have been successful in obtaining **\$3,199 in unpaid wages** for our clients.

2016 Types of UIB Cases



2016 Case Outcomes



2016 VLP LAW FIRM FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGN

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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