


# pro bono press

FALL 2008

## Senior Partners Spotlight: Andrew Cornell

**VLP** thanks Andrew Cornell, a Cambridge attorney and a member of Senior Partners for Justice, for the compassionate representation that he provided to a mother seeking custody of her young son. Attorney Cornell agreed to step in on short notice and assist this client at her pre-trial hearing. He was able to obtain a Judgment for sole physical custody, a visitation schedule for the father, and a child support order.

In the process of representing the client, Attorney Cornell also helped to educate her about the court system. When the client had previously gone to court on her own, court staff had told her she could not ask for sole physical custody of her child, since at the time she was still living with the father. Because the client had only limited knowledge of the law, she was frustrated and felt the system was against her. During his representation of the client, Attorney Cornell took the time to explain to her how the process works and help her understand why problems had arisen before.

Attorney Cornell's involvement in this case was relatively limited in time, but he had a powerful impact on the client's life. She was able to resolve an emotionally charged situation and establish an independent life with her son. She also gained a sense of empowerment, thanks to Attorney Cornell's thoughtful efforts to educate her about the law. 

## VLP Orientation for New Pro Bono Attorneys

**Date and Time:** Tuesday, September 16, 2008 from 4 to 6 p.m.

**Location:** VLP, 99 Chauncy Street, 4th floor

**To register:** Contact Jessica Rubin-Wills at 617-423-0648, ext. 129 or [jrubin-wills@vlpnet.org](mailto:jrubin-wills@vlpnet.org)

**M**eet VLP staff and learn about opportunities to assist low-income clients. The session will describe the variety of pro bono cases and projects available through VLP, allowing attorneys to identify pro bono work that is appropriate to their interests and schedules. Participants also will

**This event will provide a valuable introduction to pro bono work for attorneys who are new to the practice of law or simply new to VLP.**

learn about how the VLP intake and referral process works as well as about the training and mentoring provided by VLP. In addition, staff will provide an overview of poverty law and specific practice tips for working with VLP clients. This event will provide a valuable introduction to pro bono work for attorneys who are new to the practice of law or simply new to VLP. Additional sessions will be offered in future months; please check the website, [www.vlpnet.org](http://www.vlpnet.org), for dates.

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### Training Dates

Introduction to Guardianship of Minors  
**September 9, 2008**  
4:00 - 6:00 PM

Family Law 102  
**September 18, 2008**  
**November 12, 2008**  
4:30 - 6:00 PM

Landlord/Tenant Law  
**September 22, 2008**  
**October 20, 2008**  
**November 17, 2008**  
4:00 - 5:30 PM


Defending Clients at Unemployment Benefits Hearings  
**October 2, 2008**  
4:00 - 5:30 PM

Family Law 101  
**October 15, 2008**  
**December 10, 2008**  
4:30 - 6:00 PM

To register for trainings, please email Isabel Burney at [iburney@vlpnet.org](mailto:iburney@vlpnet.org) or call 617-423-0648, ext. 150. (see page 5)

## Thank You Nixon Peabody

On June 18, 2008, Andrew I. Glincher, Managing Partner of Nixon Peabody's Boston office, presented VLP's Executive Director, Meg Connolly with a \$2500 donation. The presentation was made during Nixon Peabody's pro bono fair held at the firm for the summer associates. VLP was delighted with the unexpected gift and even more delighted with the story behind it. Every year Nixon Peabody recognizes firm attorneys who have donated a substantial number of pro bono hours. This year the firm decided to honor the members by making a gift to a pro bono program with whom the honorees worked. The honorees were asked to designate the recipient and in Boston, VLP was chosen.

Donations are always appreciated but when they come from the members of the pro bono panel, they are particularly valued. On behalf of the Board staff and clients of the Volunteer Lawyers Project, thank you Nixon Peabody. 



Jessica Rubin-Wills, VLP Referral Copordinator, Meg Connolly, VLP Executive Director, Andrew Glincher, Boston Managing Partner, Nixon Peabody, and Stacey Slater, Nixon Peabody Pro Bono Partner.

## Help VLP with Cases and Develop a Bankruptcy Practice

VLP needs help with bankruptcy cases, always a very busy area for VLP. Handling VLP pro bono cases is a great way to develop a new area of practice because VLP provides substantial training opportunities and support to participating attorneys through the course of the representation. VLP offers:

- Training: In July, VLP presented a new program on how to use the bankruptcy software to file a case. The program will be repeated this fall
- materials
- mentoring
- the use of VLP bankruptcy software.
- vouchers to attend MCLE courses for a nominal fee
- Cases that are screened and prepped


In Chapter 7 bankruptcy cases, VLP staff screens the cases and assembles the client's credit reports, tax returns, pay stubs, and other documentation. The attorney's job is to prepare and file the petition, attend the creditors meeting with the client, and

ensure that the case is discharged smoothly. This does not always require a large time commitment on the attorney's part, but it makes a significant difference in the lives of clients who may be facing wage garnishment, court appearances, or harassment from creditors.

For example, one client called us this spring to thank VLP for referring his case to Attorney Neil Warrenbrand. He told us that Attorney Warrenbrand was prompt and responsive to

**The attorney's job is to prepare and file the petition, attend the creditors meeting with the client, and ensure that the case is discharged smoothly.**

his needs, and he was very impressed with the skill and efficiency with which his case was handled. He expressed a great sense of relief that his debts had been discharged and the many phone calls from creditors had stopped.

For more information about joining our bankruptcy panel, taking cases, and participating in trainings, please contact Jessica Rubin-Wills at [jrubin-wills@vlpnet.org](mailto:jrubin-wills@vlpnet.org) or Caitlin Loftus at [cloftus@vlpnet.org](mailto:cloftus@vlpnet.org). 

## Comings and...

VLP is pleased to announce that MAYA EESON recently joined VLP as a staff attorney working primarily in family law. Previously, while attending Northeastern Law School, Maya worked at VLP as a COOP Law Student. After graduating from Northeastern Maya worked at Testa, Hurwitz & Thibeault as a litigation associate. She later joined South Middlesex Legal Service where she worked for

the past five years. Maya will concentrate at first on family law and the Limited Representation Project in the Probate and Family Courts.

VLP is not so pleased to announce some departures.

KIM JONES left VLP in August after three years as a paralegal working in the area of public benefits. Kim is attending Northeastern University School of Law. The

legal profession will be fortunate to have her join the ranks of Massachusetts attorneys.

JULIE DAHLSTROM and BRIAN LIPKIN are 2008 Boston College Law School graduates who worked with VLP as law students. Julie first joined VLP in 2004 as the referral coordinator. She then entered law school but continued her work at VLP as a law student. Brian came to VLP as a summer law

student in 2006 and continued working part-time through the last two year of law school. Both Brian and Julie have made outstanding contributions to VLP, our panel and our clients.

Julie has become the Managing Attorney of the Immigration Unit at Lutheran Community Services in Worcester and Brian is clerking for the Massachusetts Superior Court.

## Senior Partners for Justice GAL Project Expands to Norfolk County

In January 2008, Senior Partners for Justice launched a pro bono Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Project in Suffolk and Middlesex County Probate & Family Courts. The project was initiated partly in response to a Boston Globe series about the challenges faced by low-income "unbefriended" elders and adults with disabilities in guardianship cases. Under


**"The attorneys from Senior Partners have demonstrated extraordinary public service in helping some of the most vulnerable people who appear in the Probate and Family Court."**

the Project, Senior Partners accept pro bono appointments as GAL/Next Friend for the proposed ward in temporary guardianship proceedings where the proposed ward is not entitled to appointed counsel. These cases include, for example, a temporary guardianship for the purpose of admitting an elderly person to a nursing home. The Senior Partners GAL investigates a number of issues including the need for a guardian, the appropriate scope of the guardian's authority, and the suitability of the proposed guardian. After the investigation, the GAL reports to the court. Nearly 40 Senior Partners have volunteered for the Project and they have accepted GAL appointments in about 20 cases to date.



Based on the overwhelming success of the GAL Project in Suffolk and Middlesex Counties, Chief Justice Carey sought to expand it to other locations. In July, the Probate and Family Court announced the Project's expansion to Norfolk County. In the Court's press release, Chief Justice Carey praised the Project, saying: "The attorneys from Senior Partners have demonstrated extraordinary public service in helping some of the most vulnerable people who appear in the Probate and Family Court. The judges in our Court are enormously grateful for the help of Senior

Partners Lawyers in ensuring that the best information possible is available to judges before they make the important decision of whether a guardianship is necessary."

Senior Partners looks forward to continuing our work with the Courts in this important endeavor. Attorneys interested in volunteering for the Project should contact Attorney Barbara Siegel, Project Manager, Senior Partners for Justice at (617) 423-0648, ext. 123 or bsiegel@vlpnet.org. Training materials, sample reports, and mentoring by experienced practitioners are available. 

## Attorneys Who Make a Difference

**Dan Hohler**, a litigation associate with Kenney & Sams (Framingham & Boston), recently negotiated a favorable settlement on behalf of an elderly, disabled VLP client. The client, who lives in public housing, faced eviction because her son was arrested in her apartment while the client was in the Dominican Republic and federal law holds public-housing tenants responsible for their guests' actions.

Mr. Hohler, however, crafted a new (and ultimately successful) argument: the son was not a guest, because the client had not invited him in. Only a few days after Mr. Hohler served his summary-judgment motion, the landlord offered to settle. Mr. Hohler's client continues living in her apartment, subject to a probation agreement.

Mr. Hohler volunteered his time as part of the Massachusetts Defense Lawyers Association's commitment to the Boston Housing Court Lawyer of the Day program.

**Steve Smoot** recently represented a 77-year-old Dorchester resident in buying back the three-family home she had lost to foreclosure.

Homeowner Options for Massachusetts Elders approached VLP about helping the client, whose home was foreclosed after she was unable to pay a \$425,000 adjustable-rate mortgage. Mr. Smoot negotiated with the real-estate



speculator who bought the home at auction. He secured an agreement for his client to buy back her home for only \$285,000. Homeowner Options lined up two community lenders willing to give the client fixed-rate mortgages. Thanks to Mr. Smoot's work, the client and her son continue to live in their house.

Homeowner Options selected VLP as one of the recipients of the Department of Housing and Community Development's foreclosure-prevention grants.



## VLP Needs Children's Books !!!

We have a children's area in our waiting area where children can play while we are interviewing their parents. We could definitely use some gently used books for this area. If you have any at home that you are not using, please consider donating them to the children's room. If you are able to help, please contact Lynn at ext 132 or [Lgirtan@vlpnet.org](mailto:Lgirtan@vlpnet.org). And of course, many thanks.

## Training Schedule

### Introduction to Guardianship of Minors

*Date and Time:* 9/9/2008, 4:00- 6:00 PM

This nuts and bolts training will cover all areas of handling an uncontested guardianship of a minor petition. The training will discuss the legal issues of jurisdiction and venue, completion and filing of a petition, assents, service issues, temporary and permanent guardianship, bond requirements and filing of an inventory. Guardianships are simple. This is a great area of law for new practitioners who would like experience in the Probate Courts, as well as an interesting area of law for family law practitioners who have not previously handled a guardianship of minor petition.

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### Family Law 102

*Date & Time:* 9/18/08 4:30 - 6:00 PM

A more in-depth training in Domestic Relations Law. This training will cover Temporary Orders, Pre-Trial Conferences, and how to finalize a divorce or other family law matter.

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### Landlord/Tenant Law

*Date & Time:* 9/22/2008, 4:00- 5:30 PM

A one session training on working with tenants facing eviction. Participants will learn the procedures for representing clients facing imminent eviction. Practice Guides will be provided.

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### Defending Clients at Unemployment Benefits Hearings

*Date & Time:* 10/2/08, 4:00 - 5:30 PM

The unemployment training will provide an overview of unemployment insurance benefits. Participants will learn the steps involved in representing a client at the administrative hearing. Whether you're an attorney or paralegal you will leave equipped with the resources and training to represent a client at his or her hearing.

### Family Law 101

*Date & Time:* 10/15/2008, 4:30 - 6:00 PM

This one session training will give you the basics on initiating a divorce. It will cover filing the Complaint and all the accompanying documents, and serving the opposing party.

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### Landlord/Tenant Law

*Date & Time:* 10/20/08, 4:00- 5:30 PM

A one session training on working with tenants facing eviction. Participants will learn the procedures for representing clients facing imminent eviction. Practice Guides will be provided.

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### Family Law 102

*Date & Time:* 11/12/08, 4:30 - 6:00 PM

A more in-depth training in Domestic Relations Law. This training will cover Temporary Orders, Pre-Trial Conferences, and how to finalize a divorce or other family law matter.

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### Landlord/Tenant Law

*Date & Time:* 11/17/08, 4:00 -5:30 PM

A one session training on working with tenants facing eviction. Participants will learn the procedures for representing clients facing imminent eviction. Practice Guides will be provided.

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### Family Law 101

*Date & Time:* 12/10/2008, 4:30 - 6:00 PM

An introductory training on Domestic Relations Law. This one session training will give you the basics on initiating a divorce. It will cover filing the Complaint and all the accompanying documents, and serving the opposing party.

# *pro bono press*

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Equal  
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