

pro bono press

WINTER 2010



Welcoming Sheila Hubbard

The VLP Board unanimously chose Sheila Hubbard to become VLP's next Executive Director, effective February 1, 2010. Sheila brings significant leadership experience, a deep understanding of the needs of our clients, and a passion to make a difference in their lives. A graduate of Yale, Sheila has been a resident of Boston since she graduated from Harvard Law School. Sheila began her professional career with the Department of Social Services as a homeless specialist. From there she went to work as a policy analyst for Mayor Raymond Flynn, and later served as Boston's director of the Minority and Women Business Enterprise Office. She quickly built the infrastructure to carry out the mandate that 15 percent of city contracts be awarded to minority-owned businesses and 5 percent to women-owned businesses. Ms. Hubbard was also involved in the formation of what is now the Boston Lawyers Group, an organization of large Boston law firms and corporations that strives to hire and retain minority lawyers throughout the city.

Sheila went from City Hall to the State House, where she worked on Governor Weld's legal staff. Governor Weld appointed her the head of the Massachusetts Parole Board, where for seven years. She supervised 240 employees responsible for 5,000 parolees

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James Prendergast, Lisa Wood, William Tyler, Albert Wallis, Stephen Oleskey, Stuart Rossman, all past chairs. in front, Meg and Kathleen McGrath, current chair.

Celebrating Meg Connolly

As many of you may know, Meg Connolly retired from VLP at the end of 2009 after having served as its Executive Director for almost 25 years. Meg is looking forward to a new stage in her professional life and will consult with legal services organizations across the country. VLP held a reception on December 8, 2009 to honor Meg and her impressive contribution to VLP and the larger legal services community. Over 150 people attended the event. Speakers included Chief Justice Margaret Marshall, Judge Edward Ginsburg (Ret.) of Senior Partners for Justice and Kathleen McGrath, VLP board chair. It was a memorable event made more so by the attendance of many of Meg's friends, family and former VLP staff members from near and far. We know you share in our wishes for great success in all of Meg's future efforts and our deepest gratitude for her service to VLP and our clients. She will be dearly missed.

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The clients you have helped...

1 Several months ago, a disabled gentleman facing eviction contacted VLP. The client was disabled in the '80s and was living in the first floor unit of a two family home in Dorchester that had been his parents' home. The client's father had conveyed the house jointly to his daughter and son, the client. The client's share was to be held in trust for the client with the client's sister as the trustee. The sister died; however, before her death, she conveyed the house to her son, the client's nephew and the nephew was attempting to evict the VLP client.

Two VLP pro bono panel members agreed to represent the client: Stanley Meyer at Nutter McLennan and Fish and Jacob Baron of Proskauer Rose. Through their collective efforts, a settlement was negotiated whereby \$212,000 was placed in a trust for the benefit of the client. Our deepest thanks to both attorneys for their perseverance on the client's behalf.

2 An elderly Boston resident found herself in a Catch 22 situation. The client lives in one unit of a two family home and rents out the second unit to cover her mortgages and expenses. She owned the home until a few years ago when she transferred ownership to a family trust that included each of her children. Recently, a potential tenant filed a discrimination complaint against her because she refused to rent to a family with two children because of lead paint in the apartment. When the client attempted to get assistance for lead paint removal, she was told that she did not qualify for the programs to assist elders because the house was in a family trust and not in her name.


Attorney Andrew Cohn of Wilmer Hale agreed to help. Within days he had assisted in dissolving the trust and getting the children to convey their interest back to their mother. Now, the client is accessing the city program that will allow her to de-lead the apartment, rent to a qualified renter and have sufficient income to keep her home. VLP thanks Attorney Cohn for his terrific work!

3 Recently, two victories exemplify how small ripples can lead to large results. In October, Attorney Stephanie Bruce of Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP and Attorney Jonathan Zschau won unemployment insurance benefits for their clients, and thereby curtailed eviction proceedings initiated against their clients in Housing Court for nonpayment of rent. In both cases, the clients were originally denied unemployment benefits

for allegedly violating employer policies. Terminated from his employment as a homeless counselor for unknowingly driving on the job with a suspended license, Attorney Bruce's client feared ending up on the streets himself upon receiving a notice to quit for nonpayment of October rent.


Similarly, Attorney Zschau's client was faced with an eviction proceeding for nonpayment of rent after he was fired from his job at a residential home for allegedly failing to comply with company policy on physically restraining residents. Due to the excellent representation of Attorney Bruce and Attorney Zschau in arguing that their clients should not have been disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits, the Division of Unemployment Assistance reversed the original denials and granted benefits to each client. Since the victories, the eviction proceedings have been dropped, and the clients, now able to afford their rents, have been able to remain in their apartments. VLP thanks Attorney Bruce and Attorney Zschau for securing basic necessities for their clients through their zealous advocacy!

Opportunities abound to help persons recently unemployed.

Advocates are needed to help claimants secure unemployment insurance at administrative hearings held at the Division of Unemployment Assistance. These short-term commitments provide excellent opportunities for attorneys to further develop skills in administrative advocacy and client interviewing while making a significant impact in helping a claimant secure unemployment benefits. The scope of representation includes interviewing clients, gathering documents and witnesses for the hearing, and advocating on behalf of the claimant during the hearing. These opportunities are particularly well suited for recently admitted attorneys. VLP provides free trainings on unemployment insurance law as well as mentoring throughout the case. For more information on these opportunities, contact Hsindy Chen at hchen@vlpnet.org or (617) 423-0648, ext.145. 

Senior Partners

Fall Seminar Series

This fall, Senior Partners for Justice (SPFJ) hosted a 3-part seminar series on benefits and family law. Many of the clients in our Senior Partners pro bono cases receive some form of public assistance, whether it's Section 8 housing, MassHealth, TAFDC, or another benefit. These benefits are based on need and may be affected by changes in a client's financial situation and living arrangement. Two SPFJ members, Anita Robboy and Arlene Bernstein, played a major role in creating and planning the series to introduce pro bono attorneys to the public benefits issues that may arise in family law and guardianship cases for low-income families. The trainings were well-attended this year and, with the continued efforts of Attorneys Robboy and Bernstein, Senior Partners will host another seminar series in 2010. 

Guardianship Petition Help Now Available at Suffolk Probate & Family Court Project

For nearly three years, Senior Partner for Justice has run a Limited Assistance Representation (LAR) Courtroom Lawyer for the Day Project at the Suffolk Probate and Family Court. Every Friday morning, volunteer attorneys and law students staff a mobile office—akin to a legal M.A.S.H. unit—in the hallway of the courthouse. Attorneys provide limited assistance representation to low-income litigants who have matters before the court that day.


Senior Partners recently added a new service to this court-based project: assisting petitioners complete and file guardianship of minor petitions. New rules that took effect last July have made the process of petitioning for guardianship more complicated and consequently more difficult for unrepresented petitioners to navigate on their own. Many of the petitioners are low-income grandmothers and other relatives of children whose parents are unavailable due to mental illness, incarceration, or death. The court staff, already stretched thin by budget cuts, does not have the time or resources to help these pro se petitioners. Senior Partners added guardianship petition assistance to its LAR project to meet this pressing legal need.

Every Friday at court, our volunteer lawyers and law students help clients fill out and file the 8 to 10 pages of forms required to petition for guardianship of a minor. Several recent law school graduates awaiting bar exam results volunteered for this project

throughout the fall. Although the assistance provided at the courthouse is limited, clients who seek help with service of process and representation at the hearing on the guardianship petition are contacted by VLP staff for further intake and possible referral to a VLP/Senior Partners pro bono attorney.


Guardianship petition assistance is an interesting and

“Every Friday morning, volunteer attorneys and law students staff a mobile office—akin to a legal M.A.S.H. unit—in the hallway of the courthouse. Attorneys provide limited assistance representation to low-income litigants who have matters before the court that day.”

rewarding pro bono activity, well suited to new lawyers and law students. VLP's free bi-monthly class on Introduction to Guardianship of Minors gives volunteers the training they need to participate (see training schedule on page 4). Attorneys and law students interested in volunteering for this project should contact Senior Partners project manager Barbara Siegel at 617-423-0648 ext. 123 or bsiegel@vlpnet.org. 

New Listservs Connect Family and Guardianship Attorneys

VLP and Senior Partners for Justice have created two new listservs for pro bono panel members who handle Family Law and Guardianship cases. The listservs are basically email groups that allow volunteer attorneys to share information and consult with each other about issues that arise in their pro bono cases. They are a forum in which the many experienced family and probate lawyers in Senior Partners can share their knowledge and wisdom. Just following the discussions on the listservs is a great way for new attorneys to learn about the practice of family and guardianship law.

To sign up for the listserv, go to VLP's website, www.vlpnet.org and click on "listservs" on the left side of the screen. You will need to register for the website first if you have not already done so. If you have questions, please contact Senior Partners project manager Barbara Siegel at 617-423-0648 ext. 123 or bsiegel@vlpnet.org. 

Training Schedule

VLP— Unemployment Benefits

February 18, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
April 28, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm

VLP— Landlord/Tenant Law

January 12, 2010	4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
February 9, 2010	4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
March 9, 2010	4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
May 4, 2010	4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
June 1, 2010	4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

VLP— Family Law 101

February 11, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
April 13, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
June 10, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm

VLP— Family Law 102

January 12, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
March 11, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
May 11, 2010	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm

VLP— Guardianship of Adults

February 23, 2009	4:00 pm - 6:00 pm
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VLP— Introduction to Guardianship of Minors

January 26, 2010	4:00 pm - 6:00 pm
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MCLE— Residential Landlord-Tenant Practice

January 25, 2010	1:00 pm - 5:00 pm
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All programs are held at VLP's offices, 99 Chauncy St., Boston, 4th Floor, unless otherwise indicated. Register on line at www.vlpnet.org or by contacting Isabel Burney at iburney@vlpnet.org.

New Talent at VLP



Caroline Stevenson is a deferred associate from Goodwin Procter spending a year at VLP. She graduated with honors from Duke University School of Law in May. During law school, Caroline spent a summer at Greater Boston Legal Services and volunteered at Duke's legal clinic for individuals with HIV/AIDS. She graduated magna cum laude from Amherst College in 2006. Caroline works primarily on housing cases and spends Thursdays at Housing Court with the Attorney for the Day project.




Emily Jarrell is originally from Portland Oregon. She graduated from Oberlin College in 2002 with a degree in biochemistry and then joined a cancer biology lab in Boston as a research assistant. After three years in Boston she decided to switch coasts and careers to go to law school at the University of Oregon School of Law, earning her JD in 2008. She is licensed to practice law in Oregon and Massachusetts. Emily joined VLP in September 2009 and works in the areas of bankruptcy and housing.



Hsindy Chen graduated from Suffolk University Law School in 2008 and the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2002 with distinction in political science. She joined VLP in September 2009 as a staff attorney working in the areas of bankruptcy and unemployment law. Prior to her position with VLP, she was a judicial clerk in the Bronx Family Court. During law school, Hsindy interned for The Innocence Project in New York City, the Wilmer Hale Legal Services Center, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Welcoming Sheila Hubbard

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and managed a \$13.1 million budget. Ms. Hubbard later served as the associate director of the Office of Public Interest Advising at Harvard Law School, working with law students and alumni who wanted to pursue public interest and legal service careers. In 2008, as Senior Program Director for the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Ala., she worked on issues of race and poverty, parole and probation, and juvenile justice. The Board and staff of VLP welcome Sheila and look forward to working with her. 

Meg's Party...

(continued from page 1)



Chief Justice
Margaret Marshall

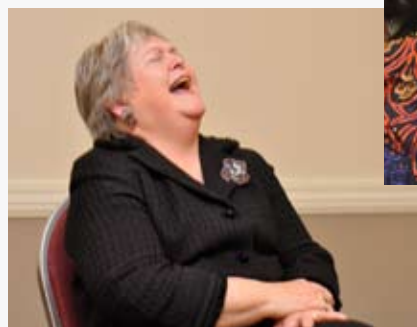
Christa von der Luft
presents roses
to Meg on behalf
of the Board



Barbara Mitchell, Leslie
Walker and Betsy Soule



Meg with Judge
Ginsburg, founder
of Senior Partners
for Justice



Meg's husband, Tom Saunders


VLP STARTS A NEW INITIATIVE:

Student Loan Disability Discharge Applications

Borrowers who are delinquent on their student loans can face wage garnishment, seizure of tax refunds and very large collection fees. If a person becomes seriously disabled after attending school, they may be eligible for a student loan disability discharge. Borrowers' disability discharge applications are often turned down for minor mistakes in the application or the doctor's letter. With a little help from an attorney, these loans may be discharged, making a huge difference in the client's life.

Completing an application and helping a borrower will take an attorney an average of 5 hours of intermittent work. This includes filling out the application, contacting the doctor, and following up with the loan holder. A student loan disability

discharge case is a great way to get involved in pro bono work without a large time commitment.

The Volunteer Lawyers Project will be holding a training for interested consumer and bankruptcy attorneys to learn the best method of getting student loans discharged. We would like to hold this training in January or early February of 2010, and we are trying to gauge interest in our panel. Once we find the approximate amount of interest in these cases, we will set a date and location for training. Please respond to Emily Jarrell, ejarrell@vlpnet.org if you would be interested in attending the training and helping VLP with student loan discharge cases. 

pro bono press

Volunteer Lawyers Project
of the Boston Bar Association
99 Chauncy Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02111

**Providing
Equal
Access to
Justice!**

PHONE: 617-423-0648

FAX: 617-423-0061

TTY: 617-338-6790

EMAIL: info@vlpnet.org

Visit us Online at www.vlpnet.org

