

# VOLUNTEER LAWYERS NETWORK CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE - Annual Report 2010 - 2011



# Recipient of the 2011 Bernard P. Becker Award

Last year, client by client, we worked together and showed that volunteer lawyers are true champions of justice when it comes to addressing the critical legal issues of those in need.

As compared to 2008, we increased total services provided by 23%, which amounts to an additional 1,613 services provided last year. At the same time, the number of our higher level services (beyond advice alone) doubled.

Despite the depressed economy, we met our goal to establish a threemonth operating reserve four years ahead of schedule. This enables us to weather storms, like a government shutdown, without a disruption in service.

Thanks to you – our volunteers, board and donors – for speaking for those without a voice, for standing between them and hunger, homelessness and abuse, for working with us to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake at equality and justice.

Suzanne Pontinen Executive Director

 TOTAL SERVICES PROVIDED

 2008-09
 2009-10
 2010-11

 Advice
 5,881
 5,585
 5,919

 Brief Services
 873
 1,699
 2,232

 Full Representation
 340
 301
 556

 VLN more than doubled its brief services since 2008-09.

As many of you know, this has been a difficult year to be in legal services. But as you'll see in this report, VLN volunteers once again stepped up, serving more clients last year than ever before.

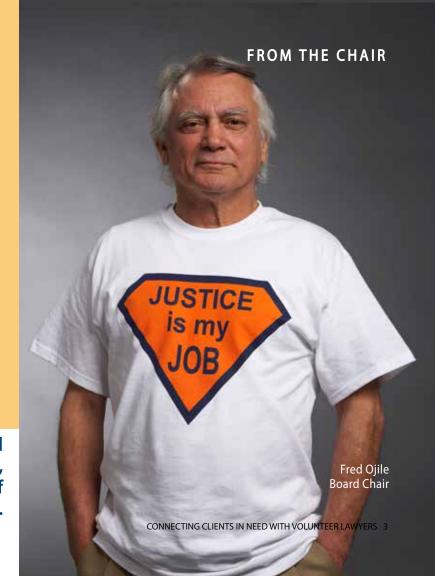
Having worked closely with the staff for the past several years (and as a volunteer myself for the past 26 years), I can tell you that they could not be more dedicated in ensuring the right cases get to the right volunteers. They provide the resources to make the most efficient use of our time and are devoted to results. VLN has made even greater strides in measuring outcomes, focusing our capacity where it will have the greatest impact.

Last year, we upgraded our technology to provide clearer information on the effectiveness of each of our programs and better statistics to our funders and partners.

With your continued generous donations of time and money, we will provide dignity, hope and justice to even more people in our community.

Fred Ojile Board Chair

For over 40 years, VLN's core value has remained the same – everyone deserves access to experienced, competent legal representation – regardless of economic or social standing.

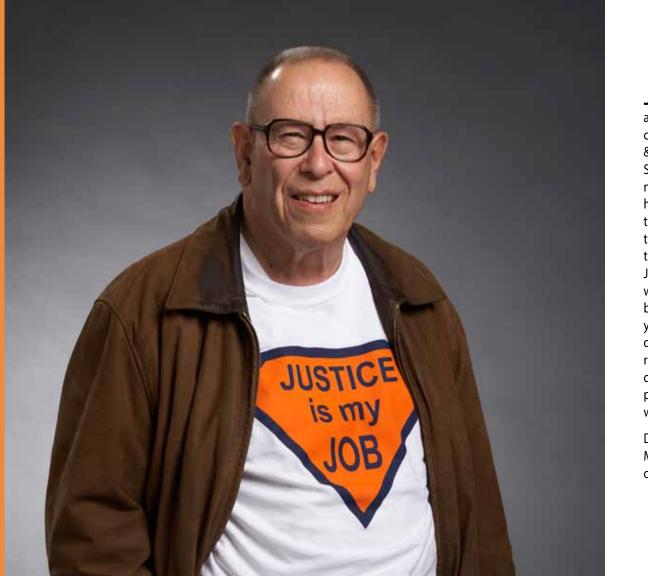


# DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

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Justice means a fair shake. Justice means that an individual will not be railroaded by those with more power, money or legal know-how. It means that regardless of who you are, you have the right to equality. This is what VLN does best. **Jerrold Bergfalk** 

Jerrold Bergfalk Lindquist & Vennum PLLP (Retired)



**J**errold Bergfalk is a homegrown hero. Born and raised in Minneapolis, he began his law career as a general practitioner with Lindquist & Vennum PLLP after serving in the military. Since that time he has become a household name in the Minnesota law community and has represented a multitude of clients. "I spent the first 20 years of my practice unaware of the inequality that existed, I felt I needed to volunteer more of my time in some way." Jerry's desire to volunteer came during a time when the pro bono legal community was just beginning to flourish. Over the ensuing 24 years, Jerry has donated countless hours to the disadvantaged through his committee service, recruitment and training efforts, and the direct legal representation and advice he has provided to hundreds of low-income clients with family law problems.

During the 1990's, many of the firms in Minnesota began the development of their own pro bono departments, which evolved in connection with organizations such as VLN. VLN acts as liaison between those in need and those who are in the position to provide assistance. "So many people don't have access to legal assistance with regard to civil issues - bankruptcy, divorce, creditor/debtor issues those things that plague us all. Unfortunately, there are no public defenders for such things; so it's up to us." Throughout his extensive career, Jerry has dedicated his life and practice to the pursuit of justice - for everyone.

"Justice means a fair shake. Justice means that an individual will not be railroaded by those with more power, money or legal know-how. It means that regardless of who you are, you have the right to equality. This is what VLN does best." Jerry's service to his community spans a lifetime and speaks volumes to the capacity of human generosity. His story illustrates the extent to which lawyers can heal and strengthen our community.

Today, with over

active volunteers, VLN is one of the largest independent pro bono organizations in the country and recognized as a national leader in program development and best practices.

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

Volunteer Lawyers Network's pro bono volunteers provided

8,707

services during 2010-2011, protecting their basic human rights and giving them fair access to the law's protections. Specific legal services included:

- Bankruptcies, as losses of jobs and health insurance rise
- Evictions and preventing homelessness
- Criminal expungements so struggling individuals can obtain housing and employment
- Answering Summons and Complaints, so cases are not determined by default
- Child custody issues, promoting child safety and care

In Minnesota, about one million – one in four Minnesotans – are considered "near poor" with incomes less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold.

(http://www.minnpost.com)



Those in poverty often have no access to an attorney to help them with their legal issues, but they need the help more acutely because they are living so close to the edge.

VLN handled approximately

16,000

2,160

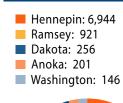
expert referrals to other agencies when VLN could not assist the caller.

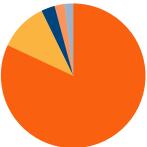
Within days of the tornado disaster in North Minneapolis, VLN was prepared to offer assistance. In the two months that followed, VLN provided

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tornado victims with landlord/tenant, real estate, construction and insurance legal assistance.

# TOP COUNTIES SERVED





# AREAS OF LAW

Administrative

Bankruptcy

Civil

Criminal Expungement

Debtor/Creditor

**Employment** 

Family (Adoption, Custody, Divorce)

Immigration

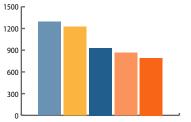
Landlord/Tenant

Real Estate

**Unemployment Compensation** 

# **TOP AREAS OF LAW**





# **VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**

VLN serves the working poor, especially in its limited-scope service clinics.

**S**am Glover has been an active participant with Volunteer Lawyers Network since he graduated from law school in 2003. Since then, he has started "One of the most impressive things about VLN is his own practice, been named a Super Lawyers Rising Star, continued his extensive advocacy for consumer rights, and currently serves on VLN's board of directors.

For the first few years of his practice, Sam focused his work around the ever-changing field of creditor/debtor issues. At VLN, he applied his extensive knowledge to increasing the resources necessary to deliver quality brief services. "One of the things I'm really excited to see grow is the brief legal services." Sam was instrumental in the development of VLN's consumer protection workshop. The workshop provides a structure for volunteer attorneys to complete court paperwork for clients responding to lawsuits. VLN arms

volunteers with the tools necessary to offer a full range of options with efficiency and confidence. how it is able to take a small office of people and leverage it into an army of volunteers. VLN does an enormous amount of good."

Sam Glover's sustained contribution to the Minnesota legal community and to VLN has done much to enrich the quality and availability of legal services for those in need. What does justice mean to Sam? "I think justice boils down to something very simple, and that's just getting a fair deal. Like it or not, the system is stacked against those who cannot afford lawyers versus those who can afford good lawyers. VLN does a lot to balance the scale, by getting good lawyers to people who otherwise wouldn't have access to them."



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One of the most impressive things about VLN is how it is able to take a small office of people and leverage it into an army of volunteers. VLN does an enormous amount of good. Sam Glover

Sam Glover The Glover Law Firm, LLC **DIVORCE SERVICES** 

718 clients received legal advice.

257 clients received brief services.

165 clients received full representation.

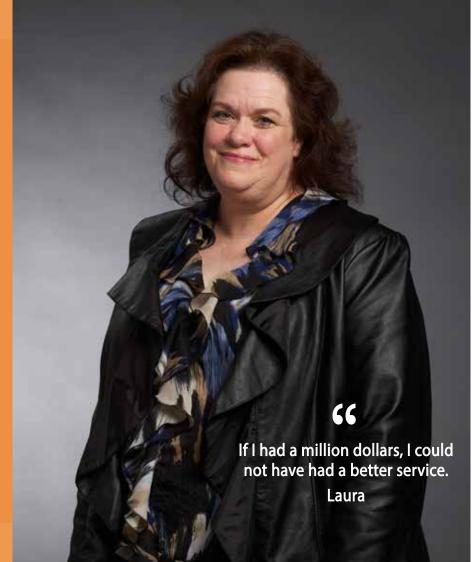
# **Champions of Justice Restore Hope**

After struggling for years in an unhappy marriage, Laura decided to leave her husband. But when her husband hired a lawyer and she couldn't, she thought she'd lose everything, including the home she'd purchased before the marriage. When she heard about Volunteer Lawyers Network and called, she felt like people cared and would help her. Then she talked with Ray Lazar, her volunteer attorney.

"Before I met Ray, I felt hopeless.
Everything in my life had fallen
apart. And I was going to be
homeless." Ray started immediately
and helped Laura get spousal
maintenance and keep her home.
As a result, Laura is now able to care
for her family, including her special
needs son. Laura could not believe

the high level of service she received. "Ray and his staff treated me like a full paying client. They were intelligent, welcoming, and supportive. If I had a million dollars, I could not have had a better service." Now, instead of homelessness, Laura is re-building her life and plans to go back to college.

Ray is just one of the over 790 volunteers at VLN who protect the basic human rights of clients in need. They deliver our courts' vision of equal justice under the law. And, as Ray says, it feels good to make a concrete difference in someone's life. "VLN gave me an opportunity to help someone where my skills and experience really made a difference. I am proud every day to be a VLN volunteer and supporter."



# Concrete Results from VLN Clinics

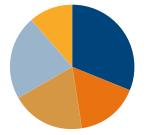
James came to Legal Access Point (LAP) for advice about being wrongly named in a lawsuit. His drivers' license was suspended for an uninsured motor vehicle accident in which he was not involved. The volunteer attorney at LAP was unable to reach plaintiff's counsel to notify them of the mistaken identity. However, the consultation armed James with the knowledge and confidence to call plaintiff's counsel himself, resulting in him being removed from the lawsuit. His drivers' license was reinstated, restoring his independence and ability to get to his job.

In 2010-11, VLN volunteers provided 2,232 brief services, such as a phone call or writing a letter, many of which ended in concrete results for the clients.

VLN's volunteer attorneys staff several legal clinics in Minneapolis in the areas of civil, consumer, landlord/tenant, family, real estate and youth law. LAP is VLN's largest legal clinic.

# TOTAL SERVED AT VLN'S FIVE LARGEST LEGAL CLINICS

- Legal Access Point: 1,276
  Housing Court: 894
- Family Justice Center: 787
  Park Avenue Methodist: 673
- Conciliation Court: 458



# SPANISH LEGAL SERVICES

TOTAL SERVICES PROVIDED AT SLS

**Brief Services:** 560

**Advice:** 1,086

The purpose of a U visa is to give victims of certain serious crimes legal status and work eligiblity in the United States.

his past year the Spanish Legal Services Program (SLS), formally known as Línea Legal Latina, served hundreds more clients due to the dedicated volunteer attorneys, law students and staff. The SLS program has increased the brief services and pro bono representation to clients due to one volunteer attorney in particular. Michelle Egan Burke has begun to call the St. Paul SLS clinic her home every Thursday advising clients on immigration issues. Michelle has provided legal advice and pro bono representation to many victims of domestic abuse and U visa applicants.

Rosario, like many others who have come to SLS's clinic seeking a divorce, found that she could be eligible for a U visa. She was a single mother of two children who was struggling to make a new life. With two children, one of whom requires significant medical care due to her special needs, she was not able to afford an attorney. Rosario was a victim of domestic abuse and now, several years after separating from her husband, she was seeking a divorce to begin her life anew. During the

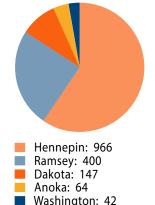
process of her consultation, she discovered she

might be eligible for the U visa. A law student

assisted her in obtaining copies of the numerous police reports from her past to review with a volunteer attorney. After meeting with Michelle, Rosario found that she could apply for the U visa. The volunteers at the SLS clinic drafted a letter to the Minneapolis Police Department to request approval of the U visa certification. A few months later Rosario sent in her application for the U visa and is now awaiting her approval. Rosario is a client, like many others, who would otherwise not have access to legal advice. Thankfully, with the assistance of Michelle, Rosario and her children will no longer live in fear of being forced to return to Mexico where her abusive spouse resides. They may soon confidently call the United States their home.

Without exceptional volunteers like Michelle, SLS would not be able to assist Spanish-speaking clients like Rosario. SLS is continuing to expand its services to the growing number of clients in need, advising clients on issues involving family, immigration, housing, consumer, and employment law.

# TOP COUNTIES SERVED AT SLS

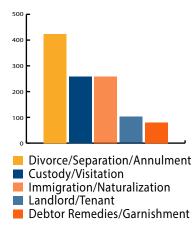


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Thank you to all who volunteer for SLS. You have preserved and protected the rights of the most vulnerable.

Diana Villella Larson Spanish Legal Services Program Manager

# TOP 5 LEGAL ISSUES AT SLS



SLS has matched clients with for six years – providing legal advice.

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Justice to me means giving everyone a fair shot at being heard.

Milca Dominguez de Corral

Milca Dominguez de Corral who now works with the Spanish Legal Services program at VLN, started at the organization as an intake volunteer. "I have always been interested in justice, so when I saw an opportunity to start volunteering at VLN, I was ecstatic." SLS works in collaboration with CLUES. the Minneapolis Hispanic Bar Association and various local law firms and legal service providers to offer legal counsel to low-income individuals. While SLS tackles a wide array of legal issues within the Spanish-speaking community, the most prevalent remain immigration and family law. Milca works to educate clients regarding the legal resources available to them, and match them with the most appropriate option. "People are always going to need help with their legal issues, and especially in this economy, they need us. The fact that we have bilingual staff on hand helps to expand our services.

We really provide a key role to the communities that we serve." It is the people Milca serves that truly motivate her. "My community inspires me. Seeing how hard immigrants work makes me want to work harder for them. I see how much they put up with on a

daily basis and yet they manage to keep going

strong." Milca's exceptional dedication to the

who potentially go overlooked or ignored. Her

contributors, allows VLN to hear and respond to

uncertainty as to their rights and distrust of the

legal system. What does justice mean to Milca?

being heard."

public and to her cause helps give a voice to those

work, along with the generosity of volunteers and

low-income Latino families who face discrimination,

"Justice to me means giving everyone a fair shot at

bi-lingual volunteer attorneys efficient advice and referrals to Spanish-speaking individuals who have little or no access to

Milca Dominguez de Corral Spanish Legal Services Program Administrator

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Central Minnesota Legal Services

Greater Twin Cities United Way

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In Honor of Keith Moheban Moheban, Mike and Lois

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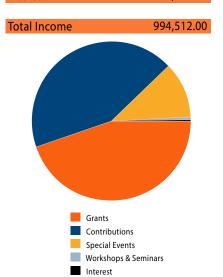
We deeply appreciate the generosity of each supporter. Every effort is made to ensure that the 2010-11 list of donors is accurate. If you made a gift between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011 and vour name is not listed or is listed incorrectly. please accept our sincere apology. Questions? Please contact Nancy at 612-752-6644.

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# FINANCIAL REPORT July 1, 2010 - June 30, 2011

2010 - 2011 Audited Financial Statement

NCOME	
Grants	446,545.00
Contributions	427,734.00
Special Events	114,476.00
Workshops & Seminars	4,357.00
nterest	1,400.00

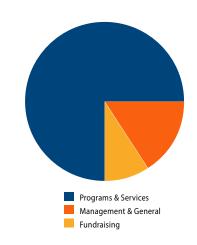


## **EXPENSES**

Total Expenses

Programs & Services	664,727.00
Management & General	140,765.00
Fundraising	80,577.00

886,069.00



#### ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	547,495.00
Accounts Receivables	125,374.00
Prepaid Expenses	7,201.00
Net Property & Equipment	63,529.00
Other Assets	4,568.00

Total Assets 748,167.00

#### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Payroll Liabilities	26,621.00
Accounts Payable	4,243.00
Deferred Revenue	34,000.00
Net Assets	683,303.00

Total Liabilities & Net Assets 748,167.00



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> I wouldn't be able to do it without the support you guys provide.

> > John Nyanjom Volunteer Attorney

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VLN's mission is to promote acce to justice and the administration justice by providing legal service to low-income people through volunteer lawyers.



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