

# Growing for the Future



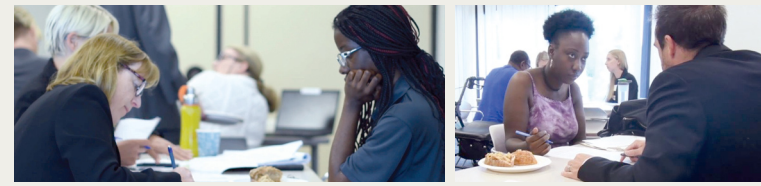
Volunteer Lawyers Network  
uses the power of volunteers  
to protect and enforce the  
legal rights of low-income  
Minnesotans.



annual report  
FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018



A VLN client smiles as she works with a volunteer attorney to clear her eviction record, enabling her to find safer and more affordable housing.



*“I was treated just as a paying customer—with dignity and respect.”*  
—VLN pro bono client

600 Nicollet Mall, Suite 390A  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
t: 612-752-6655 • f: 612-752-6656  
VLN@vlnmn.org

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Tom Walsh  
Executive Director

Yaima Couso  
Program Director / Resource Attorney / Program Manager

Maisa Al-Wahaibi  
Case Coordinator

Colleen Beebe  
Resource Attorney / Program Manager

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Intake Coordinator

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Student Resident

Kristen Nelson  
Fellow Attorney

Tierra Peterson  
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Greg Rachwal  
Case Coordinator

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## The Power of Change

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus is credited with saying, “There is nothing as permanent as change.” Heraclitus’s words certainly applied to VLN this past year. In December 2017, after almost seven years in our current location, VLN moved into shared office space with the Hennepin County Bar Association and the Minnesota State Bar Association. In February 2018, after eighteen years with the organization, the last eight as executive director, Sue Pontinen retired from VLN. In addition to Sue, several longtime employees departed, their years of service amounting to well over 50 years of work experience at VLN. By the end of the year, many of us at VLN had our fill of change.

Through all the internal changes at VLN, we remind ourselves that what has not changed is the need for Volunteer Lawyers Network and the services provided by our hundreds of volunteer attorneys. Our community depends on the commitment and dedication of VLN’s volunteers to prevent families from losing homes to evictions, provide a fresh start to working-class families through bankruptcy, help new Americans become citizens, and remove barriers to employment and opportunity caused by court records.

VLN and our volunteers can take pride in the accomplishments of the past year. As you read the stories in this report, you will see how the work of our volunteers empowered clients to change and transform their clients. And I, for one, cannot wait to reflect on the change caused by our volunteers in 2018-19.



Thank you, Thomas Walsh, VLN Executive Director

*“Without my  
volunteer attorney’s  
help, I would not  
have the ability to  
exit homelessness.”*

—VLN pro bono client

VLN’s Eviction Expungement Clinics were created in partnership with the Corporate Pro Bono Council and the Greater Twin Cities United Way. During the first five clinics, volunteer lawyers helped 48 clients clear their eviction records.



## Mother and Daughter Find a Path Home

Natasha was a client at the November 2017 eviction expungement clinic. She had one eviction on her record from her very first apartment, where she moved when she was just 20 years old. She had been living with her boyfriend, who eventually stopped contributing to the rent. The relationship went bad, and it ended with Natasha and her boyfriend being evicted from their apartment.

After her eviction, Natasha learned the devastating effect it had on her ability to find a place to live.

“I didn’t know that rental history was that important,” she explains.

After years of living with others and living in substandard housing with her young daughter, Natasha came to the eviction expungement clinic.

With the help of pro bono attorney David March, Natasha received assistance drafting her eviction expungement motion. Her motion was ultimately granted by the court.

“Having a home is really meaningful for my daughter,” says Natasha. It’s a place “for her to watch cartoons and just be a regular child. Homelessness is not something that she has to face. You wouldn’t want your child to ever face homelessness.”

As for her own personal meaning of *home*, Natasha explains, “Home is a place you can go to escape. Life is hard. I didn’t have that escape because I had to live with other people.”

But now, through the work of VLN volunteers, Natasha has a safe place called home.



Before having an eviction expunged from her record, Natasha and her daughter dealt with slum lords and finding space in shelters.

## Volunteers Help Pave the Way to Housing Opportunities

An eviction is attached to a tenant’s record the moment it is filed. It does not matter if the eviction had merit, was dismissed prior to a court hearing, or if the tenant and landlord worked out an agreement whereby the tenant continued to live on the property.

The effect of an eviction on a tenant’s record can be devastating. In an already tight rental market, tenants searching for affordable housing with evictions on their records have even fewer options. And frequently, the options that do exist are in the hands of opportunistic landlords who know that tenants who have difficulty finding and maintaining housing are less likely to complain about inadequate living conditions.

In spring 2017, VLN, the Corporate Pro Bono Council, and the Greater Twin Cities United Way decided to join forces to assist low-income tenants in drafting motions for eviction expungement. Each partner plays an important role in this

program. The United Way reaches out to its social service provider network to publicize the services of the clinic to tenants who might not otherwise hear about these opportunities. The CPBC brings the lawyer-power. So far, 39 CPBC volunteers (lawyers and paralegals) have helped low-income tenants draft motions to expunge evictions. VLN provides technical assistance with the case workup before the clinic, then afterward places the cases for full representation. Volunteer attorneys from Faegre Baker Daniels LLP have stepped up to assist with filing and representation of clients at their eviction expungement hearing.

The eviction expungement clinic convenes quarterly in North Minneapolis, most frequently at the North Minneapolis Library. During its first five clinics, 48 clients have been served, and corporate pro bono volunteers have drafted 58 eviction expungement motions that were ultimately filed in court. Of those, 48 have been granted by the court.



## VLN Volunteers go the Extra Mile

Last year, more than 700 legal professionals provided 9,145 services to our clients. VLN honored two of these extraordinary volunteers during our annual Riverfront Celebration.

### 2018 VLN Volunteer of the Year



Noel Evans

**Noel Evans** of Thomson Reuters is a longstanding and proactive volunteer. Noel exemplifies the spirit of pro bono by protecting clients' assets through VLN's letters to creditors program, which stops and prevents debtor harassment. She is well known and appreciated among VLN staff as someone who frequently asks for more pro bono work! In fact, shortly after VLN informed Noel she was the 2018 Volunteer of the Year, she emailed asking for five more cases.

Noel received her Juris Doctorate from the University of North Dakota School of Law, where she was a member of the Law Review and Order of the Coif. Noel has worked for Thomson Reuters for over 15 years, and she has provided pro bono representation to clients on behalf of VLN and Advocates for Human Rights for at least 15 years. Noel has, in her own words, "a special passion for pro bono work, as it offers an opportunity to give back to those less fortunate and in dire need of legal representation."

### 2018 John D. Levine Pro Bono Distinguished Service Award



Kate DeVries Smith

**Kate DeVries Smith** of Pauly, DeVries Smith and Deffner L.L.C., is a true champion of VLN. Kate has honored us with her hard work and generosity since 1999. As a volunteer lawyer, she has helped in 167 cases, donating more than 800 hours of her time. Kate is also a generous donor, and she is the first to suggest VLN for new fundraising opportunities within her personal and professional circles.

Kate has also served on the Volunteer Lawyers Network board of directors since 2003, chairing the board in 2012. Kate received the Pro Bono Publico Award for Excellence for a private-sector attorney in 2012 from the Hennepin County Bar Association. Thirteen years ago, Kate was in Noel Evans's shoes, accepting the 2005 Volunteer of the Year Award.

Kate's work for Pauly, DeVries Smith and Deffner L.L.C., helps businesses of all sizes achieve their goals related to intellectual property. Before law school, Kate was a physics major, programmed computer models for theoretical atomic and molecular collisions, and had internships at Los Alamos National Laboratory and Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. These experiences honed her ability to grasp complex technologies and to work with scientists and engineers with diverse areas of expertise.

## VLN Staff Recognized for Excellence in 2018

### Hennepin County Bar Association Career Contributions to the Profession Award



Sue Pontinen

**Sue Pontinen**, VLN's former executive director, received the Career Contributions to the Profession Award as part of the Hennepin County Bar Association's Excellence Awards 2018. In the words of the HCBA, Sue was honored "for her dedication to promoting pro bono service and the expansion of legal services in the community." Sue worked for VLN for 18 years before retiring in 2018.

### Hennepin County Bar Association Improving Access to Justice Award

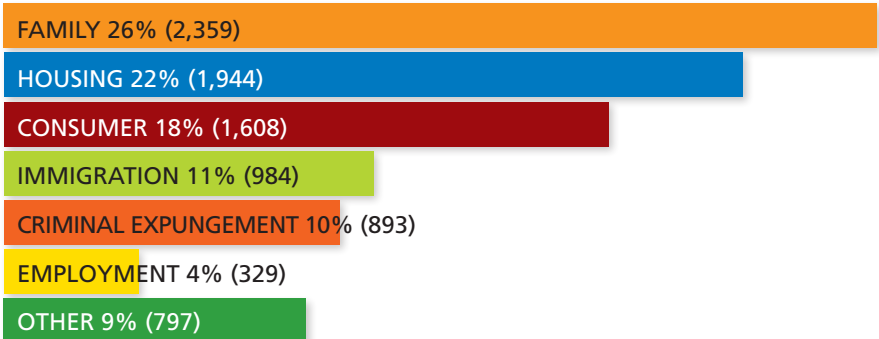


Yaima Couso

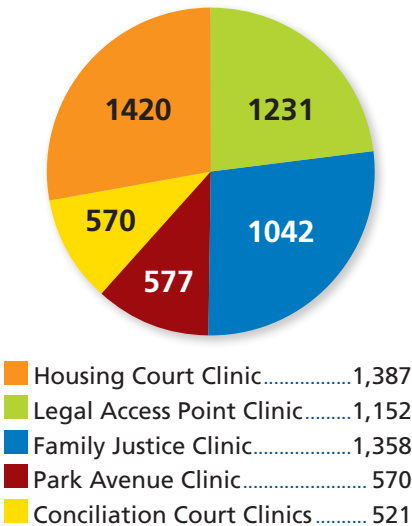
**Yaima Couso**, VLN's Program Director and Criminal Expungement Resource Attorney, was given an Improving Access to Justice Award as part of the Hennepin County Bar Association's Excellence Awards 2018. In the words of the HCBA, Yaima was honored "for developing resources related to expunging criminal records." Regarding the award, Yaima responded, "Some of my most cherished moments have come from when individuals we have helped in the past, even if briefly, return to one of [our] community locations just to say thank you."

*692 attorneys took a new case during FY17-18: 8,914 services were provided, including 6,111 provided at clinics and events, and 1,693 provided via telephone legal advice.*

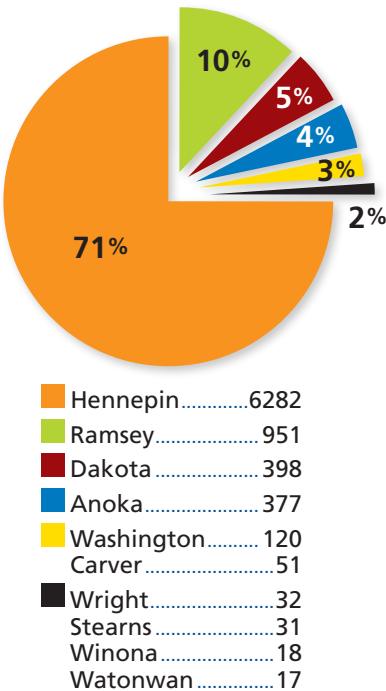
### Services Provided by Category of Law



### Number of Services Provided at Major Clinics



### Top 10 Counties Served



## Areas of Law Covered During Services

<b>CONSUMER</b> ..... 1,608	<b>HOUSING</b> ..... 1,944
Bankruptcy / Debtor Relief ..... 753	Fed Subsidized Housing ..... 5
Collect / Repo / Def / Garnsh ..... 382	Homeownership / Real Prop..... 105
Collection Practices / Creditor Harassment..... 93	Housing Discrimination..... 2
Contracts / Warranties ..... 157	Mobile Homes..... 4
Loans / Installment Purch ..... 6	Mort Foreclosure not Pred Lending ... 5
Other Consumer / Finance..... 75	Other Housing ..... 5
Public Utilities..... 2	Private Landlord / Tenant ..... 1,782
Unfair Sales Practices..... 140	Public Housing ..... 36
<b>CRIMINAL RECORD EXPUNGEMENT ... 893</b>	<b>IMMIGRATION / NATURALIZATION ... 984</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b> ..... 329	<b>INCOME MAINTENANCE</b> ..... 51
Employment Discrimination ..... 23	Food Stamps / Commodities..... 1
Employ Rights..... 154	Other Income Maintenance..... 5
Other Employment..... 72	Social Security (Not SSDI)..... 8
Sex Discrimination / Job ..... 1	SSDI ..... 3
Taxes Not EITC..... 8	SSI..... 6
Wage Claims & FLSA ..... 71	State & Local Income Maint ..... 1
	Unemployment Compensation..... 27
<b>FAMILY</b> ..... 2,359	<b>INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS</b> ..... 102
Adoption ..... 28	Civil Rights ..... 26
Adult Guardianship..... 1	Other Individual Rights ..... 76
Custody / Visitation..... 930	<b>JUVENILE</b> ..... 57
Divorce / Sep / Annul..... 588	Emancipation..... 1
Domestic Abuse..... 120	Minor Guardianship Conservatorship..... 3
Name Change..... 23	Neglected / Abused / Depend ..... 9
Other Family..... 287	Other Juvenile..... 44
Parental Rights Termin..... 16	<b>OTHER / MULTIPLE TOPICS</b> ..... 581
Paternity..... 52	Adv Directives / Powers of Attorney... 3
Support ..... 314	Criminal Referrals..... 116
	Licenses (Drivers, Occ, Others) ... 37
	Other Miscellaneous..... 161
	Torts ..... 242
	Wills & Estates..... 22
	<b>TOTAL</b> ..... 8,914

## Services Provided at Clinics, Events, Workshops

Bankruptcy.....	133
Birth Certificate Project.....	20
Brian Coyle.....	112
Brooklyn Legal Clinic.....	54
CAPSH.....	157
Conciliation Court.....	521
Conciliation Court Appeal Clinic.....	50
Consumer Protection Workshop & Legal Service Line (discontinued February 2018).....	21
Criminal Expungement - 2nd Chance Saturday....	91
Criminal Expungement - St Paul Clinic.....	52
Criminal Expungement Screening.....	530
Criminal Expungement Workshops.....	27
Dignity Center.....	132
Family Justice Clinic.....	1,358
Family Unity Project.....	38
HAP / MNAPABA Legal Clinic.....	7
Housing Clinic - Neighborhood Hub.....	2
Housing Court Project Clinic.....	1,387
Jeremiah Clinic - Minneapolis.....	17
Khan Eviction Expungement Clinic.....	8
Legal Access Point Clinic.....	1,152
LGBTQ Clinic.....	10
MCPBC Eviction Expungement Clinic.....	8
MIWRC.....	39
Park Avenue Clinic.....	570
Real Estate.....	25
SJS (Special Immigrant Juvenile Status) Project ...	41
Spanish Legal Services (SLS) Outreach Program....	47
Spanish Legal Services (SLS) Workshop.....	50
Waite House.....	73
Youth Law Clinic.....	30
YWCA Clinic.....	1
<b>TOTAL SERVICES.....</b>	<b>6,111</b>

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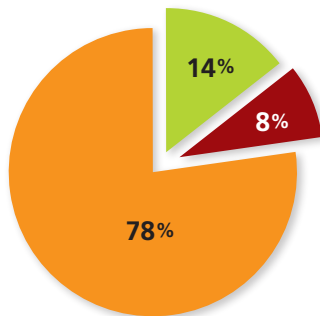
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600 Nicollet Mall, Suite 390A  
Minneapolis, MN 55402

## FINANCIAL REPORT *July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018*

### Expenses

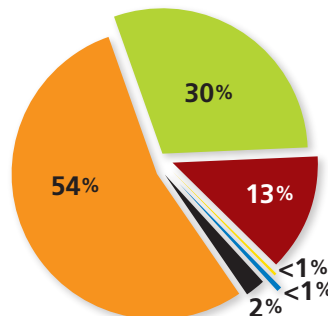


Program Services .....	1,036,621
Management & General .....	181,043
Fundraising .....	106,694
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES .....</b>	<b>\$1,324,358</b>

### Assets

Cash & Cash Equivalents .....	291,329
Certificates of Deposit .....	345,533
Contributions Receivable .....	63,500
Service Grants Receivable .....	127,317
Prepaid Expenses .....	30,465
Net Property & Equipment .....	86,026
Other Assets .....	4,568
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$948,738</b>

### Income



Contributions .....	759,492
Service Grants .....	413,968
Special Events .....	182,886
Workshops & Seminars .....	6,605
Interest .....	5,074
Other .....	30,069
<b>TOTAL INCOME .....</b>	<b>\$1,398,094</b>

### Liabilities and Net Assets

Accounts Payable .....	3,269
Accrued Compensated Absences .....	36,678
Deferred Revenue .....	5,000
Net Assets .....	903,791
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$948,738</b>

## Thank you!

Thank you for helping us fight for fairness and justice for struggling families and individuals in Minnesota who deserve a chance to thrive and achieve self-sufficiency. To help VLN, please go to [vlmn.org/donate](http://vlmn.org/donate) to make a secure tax-deductible donation.

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