



# Renewing *our Commitment*

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



annual report  
FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023



above: VLN Housing attorney Sebastian Ellefson advises tenants during a rent escrow clinic about their rights and how to file a rent escrow action in order to get their landlord to make repairs.

inset (l-r): Criminal Expungement Program Manager Elizabeth Fowlds and Immigration Program Manager Colleen Beebe Purisaca share a conversation during the 2023 Riverfront Celebration.

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## staff 2022-2023

**Tom Walsh**  
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**Colleen Beebe**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Immigration

**Barb Cruz**  
 Housing Clinic Coordinator

**Glen Drew**  
 Program Director

**Lillith Duquette**  
 Case Coordinator: Criminal Expungement

**Sebastian Ellefson**  
 Housing Project Attorney

**Elizabeth Fowlds**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Housing

**Michael Greer**  
 Case Coordinator: Civil

**Luce Guillén-Givins**  
 Intake Specialist/Case Coordinator: SIJS

**Jeanette Hopson**  
 Housing Clinic Coordinator

**Heidi Huber**  
 Volunteer Liaison / Data Manager / Case Coordinator: Employment, Letters to Creditors

**Nancy Johnson**  
 Administrative Director

**Kelsey Kienholz**  
 Case Coordinator: Immigration

**Chris Kramer**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Bankruptcy

**Muria Kruger**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Housing

**Kaelah Mastenbrook**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Civil

**Joe McMurtrey**  
 Intake Coordinator

**Kara Rieke**  
 Resource Attorney/Program Manager: Family

**Kait Ripley**  
 Case Coordinator: Housing

**Helen Sabrowsky**  
 Case Coordinator: Afghan Legal Clinic

**Patti Streeer**  
 Administrative and Development Assistant

**Zoe Thurin**  
 Case Coordinator: Family

**John Weber**  
 Immigration Project Attorney

**Sonja Woodward**  
 Housing Project Attorney

## The New Normal

Last year felt like we transitioned from operating in a pandemic to a post-pandemic world. In-person services through walk-ins and scheduled clinics surged as we re-opened programs suspended due to the pandemic and began new projects. More staff began working from the office. In-person meetings became a *thing* again (I never thought I would miss in-person meetings).

The theme of this past year's Riverfront Celebration and this annual report is "Renewing Our Commitment," which acknowledges that transition. As we looked to create the "new normal," we believed it was a good time to recommit ourselves to our clients and our mission.

Throughout the year, our volunteers demonstrated their renewed commitment to improving our community and the lives of our clients. One example is our work to help tenants in need. In January 2023, the long-anticipated eviction surge finally arrived. The number of eviction filings would increase dramatically and outstrip our ability to help every tenant needing



l-r: VLN Housing Program staff Muria Kruger, Barb Cruz, Kait Ripley, and Sebastian Ellefson pose at the 2023 Annual Housing Law Seminar.



Scott Kreighbaum of Allianz and Referee Ngoc Nguyen of Minnesota 4th Judicial District speak at the 2023 Annual Housing Law Seminar.

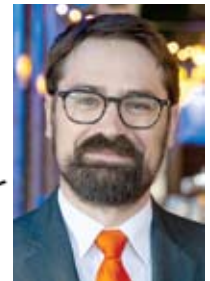
access to a lawyer. Seeing the need to recruit many new volunteers, our board responded by issuing a Call to Action to sound the alarm and recruit volunteers. Nearly 40 volunteers were recruited or re-recruited as a part of the call, many of whom still volunteer despite the abatement of the surge. As a result, tenants facing eviction and needing help had access to pro bono advice and representation.

As we look ahead, our collective commitment remains steadfast. We are resolute in our mission to improve our community and uplift the lives of our clients. Together, we'll continue to create positive change for those in need.

With thanks,

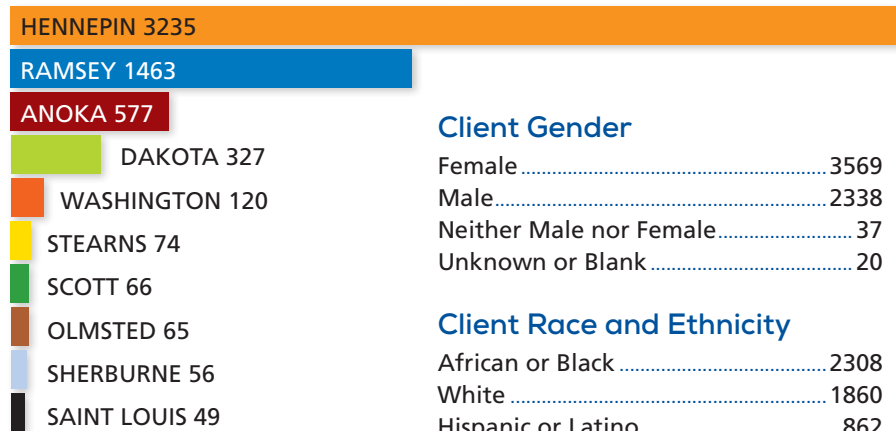


Thomas Walsh  
 VLN Executive Director



*497 attorneys* took a new case during FY22-23: *6,759 services* were provided, including *2,576* provided at clinics and events, and *3,761* provided via telephone legal advice.

### Top 10 MN Counties Served



### Client Gender

Female	3569
Male	2338
Neither Male nor Female	37
Unknown or Blank	20

### Client Race and Ethnicity

African or Black	2308
White	1860
Hispanic or Latino	862
Multiracial	324
Asian or Pacific Islander	236
Native American	113
Middle Eastern	43
Other	73
Unknown, Not Specified, or Blank	145

### Types of Services Provided

Clinic	2104
Counsel and Advice	1101
Brief Service	765
Extended/Full Representation	328
Phone Services	3557
Counsel and Advice	3475
Brief Service	82
Screening	197
Workshops/Other Paneled Svcs	72
Counsel and Advice	17
Brief Service	15
Extended/Full Representation	38
Other	96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6759</b>

### Services Provided by Category of Law

Housing	2362
Family	1673
Immigration	780
Consumer	729
Criminal Expungement	548
Other/Miscellaneous	351
Employment	316



I-r: Interpreter Sayed Amini meets with VLN Afghan Project Attorney John Weber at Park Avenue Legal Clinic for VLN's Afghan Project.

## VLN Assists Afghan Evacuees

In 2021, thousands of Afghan nationals fled their country when the Taliban took power. Many of these evacuees were employed by the U.S. Government in the nearly 20-year struggle against armed groups in the country. In 2022, VLN's Afghan Project, in partnership with the Advocates for Human Rights' Afghan Legal Clinic, began assisting hundreds of Afghans now in Minnesota eligible for an Afghan Special Immigrant Visa ("SIV"), available to those who worked for the U.S. in Afghanistan.

Evacuees who ended up in the U.S. were left with an uncertain temporary legal status and little understanding of the perilous immigration system. VLN has since assisted over 70 families (totaling nearly 250 individuals) with various immigration applications necessary to both extend their temporary statuses and pursue permanent residence via the Afghan SIV program. The project has achieved this, in no small part, due to tremendous volunteer support, as volunteer attorneys, law students, and legal professionals have all dedicated time to providing services to Afghans. Looking forward, the Afghan Project anticipates that dozens of families will obtain lawful permanent residence (green cards) through the representation that VLN has connected them with.

In Fall 2023, the project was recognized, in conjunction with the Advocates for Human Rights, by the Minnesota Department of Human Services with a Commissioner's Circle of Excellence Award for its work over the prior year.

## VLN Volunteers go the Extra Mile

Nearly 500 legal professional volunteers provided 6,759 services to our clients last year. VLN honored two of these extraordinary volunteers during our annual Riverfront Celebration on September 14, 2023.

### 2023 VLN Volunteer of the Year



**Mattie Kim**  
Perkins Coie

Mattie is an insurance recovery associate at Perkins Coie, where she helps corporate clients maximize insurance recovery by securing favorable policy language, navigating and resolving complex insurance claims, and representing policyholders in insurance

coverage litigation. She works with clients on a variety of matters related to commercial liability, catastrophic property damage, directors' and officers' liability, government investigations, product liability, kidnapping and ransom, workers' compensation, and advertising injury.

Mattie's passion for housing justice and advocacy began when she completed a full-time externship at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid's housing unit during the fall 2017 semester. Since then, Mattie has maintained a robust pro bono practice centered on housing justice and advocacy. She regularly counsels and represents low-income tenants in housing disputes including eviction actions, reasonable accommodations for tenants with disabilities, repair enforcement actions, and eviction expungement.

Mattie has served as an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and is on the board of directors for TreeHouse, a nonprofit organization that provides mentorship and support for teens. In her free time, Mattie can usually be found on her bike or eating a burrito from Yeah Yeah Taco.

### 2023 John D. Levine Pro Bono Distinguished Service Award



**Peter Goss**  
Pentair

Pete Goss is Head of Litigation for Pentair, a global manufacturer of smart, sustainable solutions for moving, improving, and enjoying water, life's most essential resource.

He began practicing litigation at Faegre & Benson in the fall of 1996 and immediately signed up with VLN as a landlord/tenant volunteer. Thanks to tremendous support from Jodi Boderman, his Pro Bono Coordinator at Faegre, he developed a thriving and varied pro bono practice, taking regular shifts at both the Housing Court Project and the Legal Access Point Clinic.

Pete joined the VLN board in 2008 and served as Board Chair from 2011-12. His Board participation and pro bono service continued through his seven years at Blackwell Burke, where Pete had a busy trial practice with the Honorable Jerry Blackwell. Pete is a proud graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and Berkeley Law.



Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison speaks during VLN's Riverfront Celebration in September 2023.

You changed **14,485 lives** during FY22-23, including **6,001 children**,  
through the delivery of pro bono legal services in Minnesota. \*

*\*approximate numbers*



VLN housing client S.A. discusses their case and experience working with VLN during a client video presented during the 2023 Riverfront Celebration.



VLN housing volunteer attorney Joshua Taylor outlines S.A.'s case. Josh utilized VLN's Habitability Fund to allow S.A. to pay back rent to the court so that the case could be heard.

## VLN Habitability Fund Helps Win Rent Escrow Case

S.A. reached out to VLN for help when the state of their home was taking a toll on their life. "I was in a crisis. And when people are in crisis, they're not easy to understand. But Josh always believed me."

Volunteer attorney Joshua Taylor took on S.A.'s case and represented them in court. "The issues in this case were numerous. The unit was in a dilapidated state, I would say. Repair issues all over the place. Structural issues, holes in the wall. The way that manifested was pests—infestations. There were mice, there were moths, there was a raccoon at one point. So, it was really not a good situation for my client."

Josh helped S.A. file a rent escrow action in order for necessary repairs to be made by the landlord. To file, S.A. would need to pay rent, including back rent, into the court—a cost they could not afford. Luckily, VLN also administers a fund called the Habitability Fund that helps tenants pay rent money into court so they can proceed with rent escrow cases. Any money returned to the tenant is then first used to replenish the fund. With support from VLN staff, Joshua Taylor, and the Habitability Fund, S.A. won their case. The referee sided with S.A. and against the landlord, awarding all the repairs to be made as well as awarding \$3,745 in back rent.

"I will always be grateful for Volunteer Lawyers Network, and Josh, and everyone involved. I'm grateful for the emergency fund that Josh worked really hard to get me," SA explains. "I feel lucky because there's a lot of people who don't get help. [...] The realities of the housing crisis in Minneapolis and beyond—people are in really vulnerable positions. I don't know if I'd be alive without Josh."



# Renewing *our* Commitment

## Many thanks to our generous donors!

Donations received July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

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*“We received a great deal of support, guidance, and kindness throughout our experience with you. [My attorney] was extremely knowledgeable and helped us beyond measure.”*

—2023 VLN Pro Bono Client

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Volunteers are honored at a 2023 VLN reception.

## VLN Volunteers Answer the Call

On April 25, 2023, VLN hosted a reception to formally thank the 37 volunteers who stepped up to answer the VLN Board of Director's call to assist with the post-pandemic surge of eviction cases in Minnesota. With their help, we were able to support 440 parties going through an eviction in Anoka, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties. Hennepin County Chief Judge Barnette also joined us to express our appreciation for their generous service.



Hennepin County  
Chief Judge  
Toddrick Barnette  
speaks to  
volunteers during  
the VLN reception.

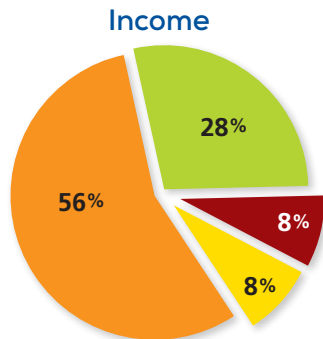
We apologize if we missed you or made an error; please let us know so we can thank you properly.



# Renewing our Commitment

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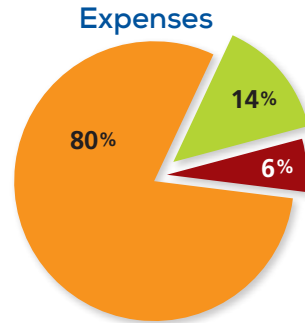
## FINANCIAL REPORT July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023



Contributions	1,005,927
Service Grants	499,000
Special Events	152,753
Other Income	148,975
Interest Income	2,570
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$1,809,225</b>

### Assets

Cash & Cash Equivalents	861,374
Contributions Receivable	55,000
Service Grants Receivable	144,877
Prepaid Expenses	30,593
Net Property & Equipment	146,775
Other Assets	4,568
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,243,187</b>



Program Services	1,420,756
Administrative & General	245,682
Fundraising	114,214
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,780,652</b>

### Liabilities

Current Portion of Operating Lease Liability	38,135
Accounts Payable	7,998
Accrued Payroll & Related Costs	25,430
Accrued Compensated Absences	38,141
Contract Liabilities	93,730
Operating Lease Liability, Net of Current Position	74,401
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$277,835</b>

### Net Assets

Without Restriction Undesignated	414,179
Board Designated for Cash Reserve Fund	475,564
With Restrictions	75,609
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$965,352</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,243,187</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. Make a secure tax-deductible donation at [VLNMN.org/donate](https://VLNMN.org/donate)

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