Our 50th Anniversary Gala Was A Success!

Thank you for helping CVLS net nearly $130,000 at our 50th Anniversary Gala! Your support means CVLS will handle more cases and that more people—the poor and working poor of Chicago—will be able to get the legal help they could not otherwise afford.

Turnout at our Gala was fantastic. Two-thirds of past board presidents joined dozens of former board members. Scores of volunteers, some new, many from years back, all mingled and swapped stories. The crowd was treated to performances by comedian Pat McGann of Zanies Comedy Club and an ensemble from the Second City performing a selection of skits. Several of our founders and notable supporters were honored for their contributions to CVLS’ success.

- CVLS’ founder, John M. Ferren, now a judge in the D.C. Court of Appeals, received our Founders Award along with fellow original CVLS volunteers John Morrison and Cameron Avery.
- The Honorable Hubert Will was honored posthumously for providing CVLS with cy pres funding as seed money that continues to serve as a base of financial support. Judge Will’s family attended the event and graciously accepted the award.
- Wesley Walton, one of CVLS’ first board presidents, received our Leaders Award for providing a steady hand during those early, rocky days.
- Deputy Director Phil Mohr and Board of Directors president Folarin Dosunmu recognized Margaret Benson for her efforts as CVLS’ Executive Director.

Our silent auction alone raised nearly $15,000. A basket of items made by some of CVLS’ talented staff turned out to be the most popular item with 18 bids. Thank you to volunteer and occasional CVLS newsletter contributor Costa Nikolaides, winner of these eclectic treats.

Other popular silent auction items included the Books & Brunch package of gift cards to Open Books and Wildberry, an autographed Patrick Kane jersey, a Kindle, a night out at the Wit hotel and a cooking class from Chopping Block.

This event would not have been possible without the generous support of our 50th Anniversary sponsors, our silent auction donors, artists, performers, volunteers and of course, all the event’s attendees!

We are proud to continue the mission John Ferren started when he founded CVLS 50 years ago - to fight for equal access to justice.

If you missed the event, you can still support CVLS! Please consider making a donation: cvls.org/donate
**Familiar “Face of Justice”**

Meg Featured!

This month, Illinois Legal Aid Online featured Executive Director Margaret Benson as one of its Faces of Justice!

Meg’s “Faces of Justice” video, filmed in conjunction with Justice Michael B. Hyman, helped ILAO launch the 10th Annual Pro Bono Week celebration of pro bono and increasing equal access to justice for all.

Watch Meg discuss the importance of pro bono: http://bit.ly/1rS7LWt

**Rebekah Speaks to Female Leaders for State Department Program**


On Thursday, September 25, CVLS GAL for Minors Program Director Rebekah Rashidfarokhi spoke with the group of 18 women, from 18 different countries, about CVLS and our work to provide pro bono civil legal aid services to the poor and working poor of Chicago.

**Janice: “Why I Volunteer for CVLS”**

Volunteer Janice recently took on her first CVLS case (congratulations, Janice!) ... and lived to tell the tale! Below is her account of her guardianship case:

I took a deep breath and selected an adult guardianship case, my first real case. These were real people with a real legal problem. I was going to have to go before a real judge. Gulp!

I was really scared. I had heard horror stories from former law school classmates telling me how they had to figure everything out on their own. In addition to partners at their law firms yelling at them, they were yelled at by judges and teased by the clerks. They made fools of themselves in front of their clients.

Eventually, they learned. Those days were behind them.

I mentally prepared myself for this situation. I told myself that I am a volunteer, not a paid attorney. I should not hope to have more support than paid attorneys get.

But, CVLS surprised me with their high level of support. They gave me videos and manuals to learn about the guardianship process. I had access to administrative support to ensure that letters were mailed and documents were printed and filed.

I also had supervising attorneys willing, in fact eager, to review my documents before I went to court.

I was well prepared for court and successfully acquired guardianship for my client! The judge was even impressed with the neatness of my order. This was the first time I felt like a real lawyer.

I appreciated CVLS’ willingness to accept me into their organization and their confidence in my abilities to handle cases for them.

I look forward to continuing my volunteer work with CVLS!
Divorce Helps Client Start Her Own Life

Tara came to CVLS for help ending the seven-year marriage her father had arranged for her when she was just eighteen. She had only met her husband three times—he lived in Saudi Arabia. Tara had dreams of going to college and becoming a career woman, while his dreams involved her staying at home.

Determined to make a life here, Tara and her family became United States citizens, with the aid of a CVLS volunteer.

Afterwards, Tara moved out of her parents’ home and moved in with her sister. For the first time in her life, Tara was independent and pursuing the life she had always dreamed. But there was one more chapter in Tara’s life that she needed to close—her marriage. She returned to CVLS where Czarina Powell, a Case-Western Law School Fellow, took her case.

When Czarina called Tara to let her know she was taking her case, she could sense the trepidation in Tara’s voice. Czarina met with Tara a week before the hearing to put her at ease. Tara’s main concern was for being questioned about her marriage in open court.

Czarina reassured Tara that the questions would be fact-based to establish only when the marriage took place, the date of separation, the grounds of the break-up, etc.

On the day of Tara’s divorce hearing, despite her nervousness Tara kept her composure and answered Czarina’s questions with strength and confidence. Everything went smoothly and the court granted Tara’s divorce.

Tara was ecstatic. She was so grateful to finally close that last chapter in her old life. She was beaming as she and Czarina walked out of the court, and she told Czarina that she loved her new life. With CVLS’ help, she was now both a new citizen and a new woman.

Tara couldn’t thank CVLS enough, and now her future looks bright.

Volunteer Spotlight: Jennifer Wong

The immense need for legal representation among people with low income sometimes seems overwhelming. Thankfully, CVLS has volunteers like Jennifer Lynn Wong.

Jennifer heard about CVLS while attending DePaul Law School. She thought it was “a great way to get myself out there, meet more people and try to help out.”

She attended a volunteer training session and immediately began conducting intake interviews. From landlord-tenant disputes to family law matters, Jennifer handled a variety of different interviews in a short amount of time. When not interviewing potential clients, Jennifer pitched in at gear check at this year’s Race Judicata®.

Jennifer’s enthusiasm, coupled with her litigation experience in both personal injury and family law cases, makes her a valuable asset to any organization.

Currently, Jennifer is transitioning to a new position in entertainment law, a field that combines two passions—performing arts and law. Those passions, and her interest in helping people earn a living with music, are why she also volunteers with Lawyers for the Creative Arts.

She says volunteering is important to her because she enjoys helping people, and knows that not everyone can afford an attorney. She intends to use her specialized knowledge to help those people. “It was tough to find a job, and I don’t want to just sit around and do nothing – I want to make use of my time and my JD.”

Jennifer plans to start taking cases representing CVLS clients soon. Then she’ll have come full circle from her beginnings as an intake volunteer. We’re looking forward to Jennifer bringing her passion and expertise to our clients!
Thoughts On Our 50th Anniversary Gala from Tony

Anthony “Tony” Abou-Ezzi currently works with CVLS in conjunction with the Chicago Bar Foundation’s Justice Entrepreneurs Project. He attended our 50th Anniversary Gala - here are his thoughts:

As a volunteer Attorney through the Chicago Bar Foundation’s Justice Entrepreneurs Project, I thought I knew first hand the impact that CVLS has on the Chicago community.

However, it was not until the night of the gala that I realized I was part of a caring group, a family if you will, of like-minded Attorneys, Judges, Volunteers, Staff, Donors and Attendees.

Beneath a beautiful azul colored dome, supporters bid on a variety of silent auction items ranging from autographed sports memorabilia to handcrafted art fitting of the gorgeous setting.

At the end of the night, as everyone was wrapping up for the evening, a CVLS staff member approached me. “You were paddle number 101.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement. “Yes,” I responded. “You might want to check your bank account when you get home...we used paddle number 101 to test the bidding process.”

Needless to say, but the gala proved to be a thrilling experience. I look forward to using my new credit card next year!


Volunteer Protects Benefits for Quadriplegic Client

After a car accident left her quadriplegic, Judy enrolled in graduate school and went on to receive a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. She works for a healthcare provider, where she focuses on treatment of patients with spinal-cord injuries.

Despite the extreme physical toll it takes on her body, Judy continues to work because she believes she is in a unique position to help her patients cope with the emotional devastation that can accompany their injuries.

After taking on her current position, Judy informed Social Security that her salary would be increasing. Two years later, Social Security told Judy that she had to repay all of the disability benefits she had received since her current position began. After representing herself in an unsuccessful attempt for reconsideration, Judy sought an attorney’s help.

Numerous attorneys passed on her case before she made her way to CVLS’ Salvation Army Legal Clinic sponsored by Sidley Austin LLP. There, she met Sidley Austin associate and CVLS Junior Board member Justin From, who agreed to represent her.

Justin filed an appeal with Social Security’s Office of Disability Assessment and Review.

He argued that, although Judy’s salary was more than triple the typical eligibility threshold for disability benefits, Judy qualified for a number of significant deductions from her salary (including the cost of the attendant she pays to assist her with basic functions at work) due to the severity of her disability.

The administrative law judge who heard the appeal agreed and granted Judy a “fully favorable” decision. As a result, Judy did not have to pay back any disability benefits she had previously received, received the back benefits she had been denied, and had her benefits reinstated going forward. To date, these benefits total more than $140,000.

Judy is extremely grateful to CVLS, Sidley Austin, and Justin for providing her with access to free legal services.
When your cases involve children or your clients bring them to court, use the Children’s Advocacy Room on the 13th floor of the Daley Center.

Do not allow the children to wait in the adoption waiting room on the 17th floor unless your case is an adoption.

The Children’s Advocacy Room, offered by the Circuit Court of Cook County, is a safe and nurturing environment where children may stay while their parents or guardians attend court proceedings. It contains games, books, toys, arts and crafts along with other age-appropriate materials selected to meet a wide range of needs.

The Children’s Advocacy Room is located in room 1309 on the 13th floor and is free.

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**New Automatic Court Fee Waivers Available**

Last year, the Governor signed the Access to Justice Act which allows legal service providers to use a fee waiver for any client who meets the financial eligibility guidelines of the legal services provider. This statute includes court-sponsored pro bono programs.

If a client is financially eligible under CVLS’ guidelines, the client is eligible for a court fee waiver.

The Illinois Supreme Court amended Supreme Court Rule 298 to establish standardized state wide language to be included in fee waiver forms.

Form templates which include this language are available through Legal Server and from CVLS Staff Attorneys by request.

**CONGRATULATIONS!**

**Kristen Named to 40 Under 40**

Chicago Lawyer Magazine recently featured Board member Kristen Hudson in its 40 Under 40 list!

Kristen, in addition to sitting on our Board of Directors, chaired its Gala Planning Committee this year, helping organize our 50th Anniversary celebration.

As a CVLS volunteer, Kristen handles foreclosure, family law and GAL cases. As a partner at Schopf & Weiss, she handles insurance coverage and commercial disputes, and chairs the firm’s Pro Bono Committee.

**Czarina Passed the Bar**

Czarina passed the bar! A recent graduate of Case Western Reserve University School of Law, Czarina Powell has worked at CVLS as a Fellow since August.

A terrific attorney who handled family law cases under Deputy Director Phil Mohr’s supervision, Czarina will leave us to join the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office when her CVLS fellowship ends.

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Upcoming CVLS Events

Thursday, December 4
New Volunteer Orientation
CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM to 1:15 PM

Do you know anyone who would be interested in using their legal skills to help low-income Chicagoans? Spread the word about our upcoming volunteer orientations!

Tuesday, December 9
Training: GAL for Minors
CVLS Offices, 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM

Susan Decostanza will cover the skills required to be a successful GAL for a minor as well as the issues that may come up during the case. This training is for new GALs working with CVLS.

Wednesday, January 21
Seminar: Deconstructing the Role of a “Care-Manager”
Presented by Howard Berk, Illinois Disability Association
CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM to 1:25 PM

Howard Berk, Executive Director of the Illinois Disability Association, covers the where, when, why and how of “care-managers,” also known as case managers, within the context of guardianships.
The Illinois Disability Association serves as co-trustee with The PrivateBank of the Illinois Disability Pooled Trust (IDPT). The IDPT serves as trustee of special needs trusts for its clients, trusts which exist to enhance the quality of life of the person with disabilities through trust disbursements that supplement government benefits.

Please visit www.cvls.org/cle to register for a seminar!

Interested in getting involved with one of our clinics?
Visit www.cvls.org/clinics for information!