Chicago Volunteer Legal Services
Because equal access to justice is everyone’s fight.

Upcoming Events

November 10 - New Volunteer Orientation, 12:15 - 1:15 p.m., CVLS offices

November 11 - Veteran’s Day, CVLS offices closed

November 16 - Bond Immigration Hearing training 12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m., CVLS offices

November 24 - 25 - CVLS offices closed for Thanksgiving holiday

December 7 - New Volunteer Orientation, 12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m., CVLS offices

December 25 - CVLS offices closed for Christmas Holiday

What you make possible

Thank you to everyone who came to Vino + Van Gogh last month. This year’s event was bigger and better than ever, with a record-breaking attendance and a more robust cadre of raffle items. Over 300 members of Chicago’s legal community came to the National Hellenic Museum on October 14 to enjoy hors d’oeuvres from Honey Butter Fried Chicken, music by a Chicago jazz trio, drinks and contemporary works by local artists. This year Vino + Van Gogh saw a bigger and better raffle than in previous years, with major prizes including an Apple Watch, autographed baseball, and Cubs tickets.

This is the seventh year the Junior Board has hosted Vino + Van Gogh, which raises funds to support Chicago Volunteer Legal Services’ mission of providing totally free civil legal aid to Chicagoans who could not otherwise afford it.

Vino + Van Gogh creates a unique opportunity for Chicago’s professionals to mingle, make new connections, support creative opportunities and help eliminate the barriers that limit access to justice.
Spotlight on: Melissa Petrovic

Melissa Petrovic first came to CVLS early in 2016 during a short rotation as part of the social work degree she is working to obtain from the University of Chicago. Later, she was able to return to CVLS on a fellowship through The Mission Continues, an organization that helps Veterans find meaningful work within their communities.

“When I was here I thought ‘They really should have a social worker’,” CVLS partnered with The Mission Continues to give Melissa the opportunity to find resources that would help alleviate some of the problems in client’s lives while the attorney on the case helps solve the legal problem that brought them to CVLS.

After she left the Marines in 2006, Melissa worked at a Veteran’s Affairs hospital, and Thresholds, where she learned to advocate for her clients and help them obtain resources for housing, medical care, cover transportation costs and other unforeseen needs.

In her role at CVLS she interviews parties involved with 90% of CVLS’ adult guardianship cases. While also compiling a resource directory for future social workers, she helps CVLS’ clients by providing a sympathetic ear. In one case Melissa was able to assist a father whose adult daughter has severe disabilities and had to move into a full time care facility. On top of that, he lost his wife in late 2015 and after retiring, had a weakened social structure to rely on. Melissa and the client’s father had several warm phone calls during the time CVLS was helping his family. Her role as a social worker, and not as an attorney, gives her the freedom and flexibility to let client’s bend her ear in a way the client may not be able to with their attorney. “He just wanted to hear someone … he was just so grateful to have someone check in on him.”

Melissa said pro-bono work presents a win-win opportunity for the client, the attorney and the social worker.

Why is Pro Bono important to you?

“I think, from a social work aspect, pro bono is important because people aren’t aware of the resources that are available to them. I can humanize the situation by asking the question that lawyers don’t think to ask. I’m able to get to what exactly they need in order to get out of the situation, versus what the lawyer, who is just trying to get them out of the situation legally, can do.”

-Melissa Petrovic, Social Worker

Case Notes

Ms. G needed assistance transferring the deed of her parent’s home into her name. Her CVLS volunteer attorney prepared the deed and was ready to record it but, Ms G’s water bill was overdue and would need to be paid in full first. Ms G told Melissa that she had previously set up a payment plan for her water bill with the City of Chicago. The payment plan she described to Melissa was unlikely to allow her to pay off the bill in full while also accumulating new charges.

CVLS Social Worker Melissa Petrovic, got on the case. First, she called several organizations to see if they could assist in helping pay this bill. After discovering that many organizations only assist with electric and gas bills, she kept working and, eventually, contacted All Chicago, an organization that manages an Emergency Fund for low-income Chicagoans. Ms. G qualified for emergency funding and was able to pay her water bill in full. That cleared the path for her attorney to record the deed.

After Mr. F, a veteran who lives with his two minor children, moved out of his apartment this summer, his landlord resisted returning the security deposit. They traded a number of texts about alleged damages and unpaid water bills, but then the landlord stopped responding to him. He came to CVLS for help.

After meeting Mr. F at the LegalPrep Clinic in September, CVLS volunteer Ann F. Pille, of Reed Smith, sent a demand for the return of the security deposit and damages. The landlord responded claiming Mr. F owed over $2,000 in unpaid water bills and late fees, plus an additional $500 for damages to the apartment floor.

Then, when Ann sent another letter, citing Mr. F’s rights under the Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance, his landlord called to see if he could settle the claims that night. The landlord and Mr. F agreed to the repayment of the full $1,500 security deposit, plus an additional $1,000 in damages. Mr. F received the check from his former landlord that weekend.

Step into the spotlight

We love highlighting the excellent work our volunteers do. If you’ve successfully handled a difficult case, came up with a creative solution, or heard some nice words from a grateful client, please let Development Associate Lindsay Welbers know by sending an email to lwelbers@cvls.org to be highlighted in a future newsletter.
November 2016

Vino + Van Gogh
CVLS is creating a pro bono bankruptcy panel to help low-income Chicagoans put themselves on a path to financial stability and independence. CVLS has helped people obtain Chapter 7 bankruptcies in the past, but this new panel will enable us to greatly expand our capacity.

CVLS only handles simple, no-asset Chapter 7 cases. Clients must have some income to protect but be unable to afford private counsel. A volunteer attorney can expect to receive a fully-screened case, with everything they need to get started. Cases should take between 5 to 10 hours to complete from filing to discharge. CVLS will help volunteer attorneys obtain filing privileges and will provide access to Best Case software, training, and support. This is a great opportunity for veteran bankruptcy attorneys looking to give back or for less experienced attorneys looking to expand their practice into this important area.

Any attorney who wishes to participate in CVLS’ bankruptcy panel should watch the three CLE-eligible training sessions; Part 1 - Analyzing the Case and Advising Your Client, Part 2 - Preparing the Bankruptcy Filing and Part 3 - From Filing to Discharge. Each session is hosted by veteran bankruptcy attorneys Sal Lopez and David Yen.

Attorneys who have completed all three trainings will be invited to join CVLS’s new bankruptcy panel. If you have any questions about joining CVLS’ bankruptcy panel email Staff Attorney Matt Hulstein at mhulstein@cvls.org. Even now, CVLS has bankruptcy cases ready to place.

Our Thanks

The United States Bankruptcy Court - Northern District of Illinois was generous enough to donate the moneys collected from their September Jean Friday Charity collection to Race Judicata. The employees donated a total of $370.75 to help ensure equal access to justice for those who could not otherwise afford it. Thank you sincerely to the Court and our generous donors.
The Chicago Bar Foundation’s 13th Annual Pro Bono Week gave Chicago’s legal community the opportunity to celebrate the good work we all do, calling attention to the increased need for pro bono attorneys and connect potential volunteers to organizations where they can make a difference.

On Tuesday, an evening of live storytelling where every story focused on the theme of “Justice” was held at Logan Square’s Revolution Brewing. CVLS Executive Director Margaret Benson told how her parents’ versions of justice handled a mean neighbor who wouldn’t let kids use the sidewalk in front of her house when they were growing up in Michigan.

CVLS volunteer Erik Diggs took home a prize for a story he told about one of his very first pro bono cases. Erik successfully defended a landlord, and used his skills as a fledgling attorney to help obtain the sort of justice for his client that he saw his own mother fighting for when he was a child.

On Thursday, over 40 members of Chicago’s Pro Bono community attended the Pro Bono & Community Service Fair at Kirkland & Ellis’ offices. CVLS staff members were on hand to provide information about the kind of cases we have available to any volunteer.

Pro Bono Week calls attention to the need for skilled volunteer attorneys to provide legal aid and help ensure that who cannot afford private counsel can still have access to justice through the court systems.

Last year CVLS took on more than 800 pending cases referred directly from judges; we also partner with 24 neighborhood legal clinics, and five separate court appointment programs. Our extensive panel referral network and our expansive delivery system provides multiple pathways to provide direct one-on-one legal help for low-income Chicagoans.
Upcoming Events

**November 10** - New Volunteer Orientation  
12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m., CVLS offices  
Attorneys from the Chicago Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers’ Association (AILA) will train interested attorneys to represent detained immigrants in bond hearings. This short-term pro bono opportunity asks attorneys commit to a limited scope representation of the client for the purposes of the bond hearing only. All cases are heard in downtown Chicago. All cases are pre-screened and eligible for an immigration bond. Guidance and mentorship are available during the case. No prior immigration experience required.

**November 11** - Veteran’s Day, CVLS offices closed

**November 15** - New Volunteer Orientation  
12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m., CVLS Offices  
Come to one of our new volunteer orientations and sit down with a CVLS staff attorney as they take you through the ins and outs of being a Chicago Volunteer Legal Services volunteer. Please note, you must be an attorney to sign up for one of our new volunteer orientations.

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**December 25** - CVLS offices closed for Christmas holiday

**January 1** - CVLS offices closed for New Year’s Day

**January 11** - GAL For Minors Training  
12:00 p.m. - 1 p.m., CVLS offices  
Rebekah Rashidfarokhi, CVLS staff attorney working in the Minor GAL program, 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 licensed attorneys interested in working as pro bono Guardians ad Litem for children through CVLS. No prior experience is necessary.

In 1964 a group of Chicago lawyers determined, after much discussion, that there was an unmet need in Chicago for legal assistance for the poor and working poor. They partnered with neighborhood churches and 15 attorneys launched what they called “an experiment in legal aid.” Out of a concern that effective legal assistance be provided for the underprivileged “lest our adversary system be included under the merchandiser dictum that ‘you get what you pay for’.”

Every year thousands of low-income Chicagoans struggle to navigate complex civil legal disputes without the help of a lawyer. Legal aid programs, like Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, help to meet their needs by providing totally free civil legal aid to those who could not otherwise afford it.

Visit [cvls.org/donate](http://cvls.org/donate) to help thousands of Chicagoans obtain access to justice next year.
“Yes, it is time to retire, but first find something that interests you,” my wife replied.

Good advice leading me to pro bono.

I could still practice law plus I had a sense of the goodness of the work—relieving a debt problem, caring for an aged parent, correcting a property interest and so many other issues.

One becomes filled with a sense of well-being, personal pride and respect for the importance of law to our society.

Leo Feldman
Retired attorney