

EXPERIENCED TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS LEAD THE EXPANSION OF THE VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROGRAM AT THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF CLEVELAND

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Volunteer Lawyers Program mobilizes private attorneys to assist in making legal advice and representation more accessible to low income families.

Now in its second year, the focus of the VLP is to expand in three significant ways: increase the number of people served by the program by increased publicity efforts; expand the location of sites to reach different program service areas; and expand the number of firms and attorneys participating in VLP. Ann McGowan Porath, Alida Struze and Howard Strain are the Legal Aid staff leading the VLP, and because of their dedication and commitment, the VLP is well on its way to accomplishing each of its goals with growth in all three areas, exceeding last year's numbers.

Ann McGowan Porath, the managing attorney for the Volunteer Lawyers Program, has been with The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland for more than 20 years and has focused her practice in the area of elder law. Ann has devoted her professional career to providing high quality legal representation to low-income people in Northeast Ohio and it is this extensive experience that makes her uniquely qualified to manage and lead the VLP. "There has been much accomplished already in our second year, but there is much to do" notes Porath. "Cleveland

has been named the 'poorest city in the nation' and so the challenges remain and grow. VLP is essential to provide access to legal advice and assistance to as many low-income people as possible as well as making others aware of the struggles these people face."

Howard Strain joined The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland in April 2006 as the Jones Day Pro Bono Fellow. Previously an attorney with Porter, Wright, Morris & Arthur, Howard joined Cleveland Legal Aid with more than 10 years as a commercial litigator in private practice. Howard works closely with Ann to coordinate the pro bono programs offered by the VLP. "It is very exciting to be part of this vital pro bono program and the continued support of the VLP by the Cleveland area bar has been outstanding."

Of the new programs sponsored by the VLP since 2005, one example is the neighborhood Brief Advice and Referral Clinics. These clinics are held in low-income neighborhoods throughout Northeast Ohio, and the clinics allow neighborhood residents to meet with government, corporate, and private attorneys. In the first eight months of 2006, over 400 people with over 520 different legal issues sought help.

Also in 2005, VLP established monthly Evening Law Firm Clinics. At these clinics, VLP screens



Alida Struze has managed for more than 30 years the Legal Aid's One-on-One Match referral program, matching private attorneys with individuals whom Legal Aid cannot serve.



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potential clients for local law firms. Then the prospective clients come to Legal Aid's office and meet with volunteer attorneys from private law firms. The goal is for the volunteer attorneys to agree to represent the people until their problem is resolved.

These new programs build upon the success of Legal Aid's One-on-One Match referral program. With the One-on-One Match program, Legal Aid will call upon private attorneys who have agreed to represent the people whom Legal Aid cannot serve. One-on-One Match is especially useful for cases that are time sensitive. In 2007, Alida Struze – who has managed the match program for more than 30 years – will work to update and expand the program with Ann and Howard.

Increased collaboration with VLP, the Cleveland Bar Association and the Cuyahoga County Bar Association during 2006 has resulted in over 200 people having been referred to the Pro Se Divorce Clinic and more than 72 couples referred to the Dissolution Mediation Program. In 2006, VLP also expanded its involvement in the planning and delivery of both of these pro bono programs and plans to add an additional in-house Pro Se Clinic staffed by Cleveland Legal Aid Family Law attorneys and volunteer private attorneys.

Cleveland Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program is organized in collaboration with local bar associations and mobilizes private attorneys to assist in making legal advice and representation more accessible to low-income persons and families. During its inaugural year in 2005, VLP served the legal needs of more than 1,400 clients/residents in the Cleveland area with the aid of more than 700



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attorneys and the assistance of 130 law students. These attorneys' and firms' commitment was made possible by the ongoing support of the Cleveland Bar Association's *Our Commitment to our Community* initiative and the Cuyahoga County Bar Association.

Learn more about **The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland** at www.lasclev.org.

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