



# JUSTICE FOR ALL

VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION NEWSLETTER

FALL 2018

*New name, same commitment to closing the justice gap*

## LEGAL ACCESS ALAMEDA

NOTICE: As of January 1, 2019 the Alameda County Bar Association Volunteer Legal Services Corporation will become “Legal Access Alameda”

Thank you to the VLSC Board and especially the rebranding sub-committee for all their hard work in leading us through the renaming process! You can see our new logo above, and please keep an eye out for our new logo and rebranded website.

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VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

# Justice for All: Celebrating Pro Bono

MAY 17, 2018  
5:30 P.M. - 7:30 P.M.  
1544 Broadway, Oakland

## THE EVENT

VLSC held its annual Justice for All event on May 17th at 1544 Broadway in Oakland. We had an evening filled with fun, chicken and waffles, and auctions.

This year's event raised over \$45,000! A big thank you to our Justice for All sponsors, Guardians of Justice, and wonderful donors who made the evening a night to remember!

## VLSC AWARD RECIPIENTS

### 2018 PRO BONO LEADERSHIP AWARD

Margaret Roisman and Richard Roisman

### 2018 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Stephanie Vollmer



## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

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Wortham Briscoe, Andrew Wolff, Tony Ruch, and Christopher Wolcott



Cheryl Hicks and Joy Ricardo



Jonathan Rizzardi and Glen Olson



Jennifer Shin, Christine Kalvass and Bishwanie Sookhai



Judge Brad Seligman, Penny Righthand, Michael Loeb, and Justice James Lambden



Judge Wynne Carvill and Judge Marshall Whitley



VLSC Board President Janice Cho



Judge Tara Flanagan and Judge George Hernandez



Judicial Officers Thomas Nixon, Nikki Clark & Stephen Pulido bidding in the silent auction



Judge Michael Markman, Judge George Hernandez, and Justice James Lambden



Judge Scott Jackson, Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte, and Judge Marshall Whitley



Jonathan Wong pledging to support VLSC



Judge Brad Seligman, Michael Loeb, and Judge John True



Vincent Tong and Casey Williams



Michael Johnson and Justice James Lambden



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: VALERY POLYAKOV



*Valery Polyakov*  
*Solo Attorney*

*Valery is a regular volunteer at our Low-Income Landlord clinic. He is a great asset to the program and now also serves as a Supervising Attorney for the clinic.*

### **Why do you volunteer with VLSC?**

I initially started to volunteer because I wanted to get some experience practicing law just after passing the bar exam. Later, I realized that helping others is a tremendously rewarding experience and this is what keeps me going.

### **Do you have a particularly memorable volunteer experience or VLSC client?**

One client became an owner of a home full of non-paying and not well behaving tenants in Oakland. He tried all sorts of ways to convince them to pay rent with no success. The client was desperate and in danger of losing his house due to foreclosure. This was his only source of income. With our help, one-by-one, he was able to evict all of the freeloaders. He is doing really well now!

### **What other community activities are you involved in?**

I participate in the housing negotiation project with SF Bar.

### **How does having the opportunity to work with an attorney help the clients/litigants?**

Landlord-tenant law is very technical and any, no matter how small mistake, is fatal. The whole case will be thrown

out of court. It is almost impossible for a lay landlord to evict anyone without attorney's help.

### **What are you listening to on your iPhone right now?**

Patent law lectures from YouTube.

### **What is one thing you wish our donors and supporters knew about VLSC?**

That we are indispensable and unique. There are a lot of free clinics in the area that help tenants, but no one helps indigent landlords and master tenants.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: PAMELA ROSS, JR.

*70-80% of family law litigants in Alameda County are unrepresented. The majority of those are also lower income. VLSC is the only legal organization in Alameda County, besides the court, to offer pro bono family law services where there is no domestic violence involved. There is an incredible demand for family legal assistance and VLSC sees the unfilled need at its various family law clinics that consistently have long waiting lists and at its monthly Saturday clinic, where on average 40% of clients present with family law issues. VLSC needs more experienced family law attorneys to volunteer for its general Family Law clinics in Oakland.*

*Pamela Ross, CEO/Managing Attorney of All for the Family Legal Clinic, Inc., is a long time VLSC volunteer and legal services advocate, the 2015 VLSC Volunteer of the Year, dedicated member of the ACBA Board of Directors and current board liaison to the ACBA Family Law section. In this time of immense need for more family law volunteers, we asked Pam about why she volunteers and why helping with family law matters is so important.*

### **How did you start volunteering with VLSC?**

Around 2012, I signed up for the Day of Court training to assist pro pers with their orders. Then in 2013, I hired a second attorney for our clinic about the same time that VLSC was doing their volunteer boot camp training that was cosponsored with Bay Area Legal Aid at the time. Since she was new to family law, I asked her to do the bootcamp and I did it as well.

### **How long have you been volunteering with VLSC?**

Since 2012.

### **Why do you volunteer with VLSC?**

Even though I give back to the community everyday working for All for the Family Legal Clinic, Inc., that is my day job, I feel like every attorney should donate some of their free time to the community to fill the need for moderate means and low income families. Certain volunteer opportunities are a win-win. For example, when you are a newer attorney it gives you face time with judges to do Day of Court while allowing you to learn things at the same time you are helping the court



*Pamela Ross, Jr.  
All for the Family Legal Clinic*

and/or the individual families.

### **Why do you like working in family law?**

Family law is bittersweet. It is emotionally draining at times, but it is so rewarding to see how your work impacts the day to day lives of the clients.

### **Why is it important to volunteer to help people with their family law matters?**

So many pro pers have no idea what they are supposed to be doing. Many think that after filing their Petition six months later they are magically divorced. Volunteering is important so that they are educated on their rights. This is especially true since Self Help has some limits to the types of assets that the person can have and still get assistance with their paperwork.

It is my personal goal that every attorney in Alameda County that I come in contact with dedicate 4 hours a year giving back to the community, whether that is through VLSC or otherwise. If you can't find the time – then donate to community organizations.

**If you are interested in being a VLSC family law volunteer, please contact Amarilis Medrano at [amarilis@acbanet.org](mailto:amarilis@acbanet.org).**

## START SMALL BAY AREA

### CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: MY FASHION DESIGN KIT

*In 2017, VLSC partnered with Start Small Think Big, a New York nonprofit, to create Start Small Bay Area, a program offering free legal assistance to low- and middle-income entrepreneurs. Focusing on community economic development and business resiliency, SSBA has helped nearly 100 clients since its formation. Here is the story of one of those clients.*

With a background in apparel product development, Marissa Lucero has spent the last few years cultivating her business, *My Fashion Design Kit*. The business' mission is to utilize fashion design to promote STEM education and to empower girls, minorities, creative learners, and those with learning disabilities to think clearly and radiate confidence.

Marissa says that she grew up valuing offering help to others without expecting anything in return. As a result, she initially under-charged for her services, until she realized that this was not a sustainable business model. With support from Start Small and other organizations, Marissa has sharpened her business acumen and come to appreciate the value she brings to her business. Marissa has been working with SSBA for almost one year. She said, "when emotions and the fear of not having enough money to access the help I needed clouded my judgment, Start Small was there to support me."

With Start Small's help, Marissa's business is currently focused on expanding its programs to additional Bay Area schools and building out its training programs.

**For more information on the Start Small Bay Area (SSBA) program, please contact Mauna Minegar, Start Small Bay Area Program Manager at [mauna@acbanet.org](mailto:mauna@acbanet.org).**



**FASHION DESIGN  
CLASSES  
TAILORED  
FOR  
YOUNG  
MAKERS**

## NEW CLINIC SPOTLIGHT: FAMILY LAW STATUS CONFERENCE CLINIC

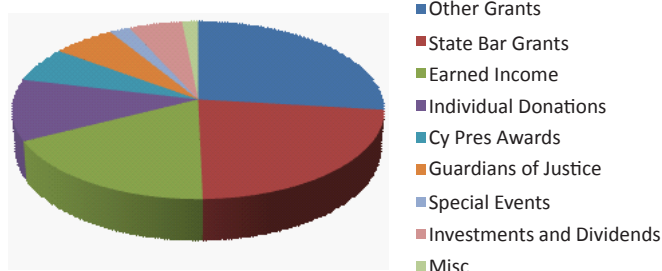
We are excited to announce a new clinic! VLSC will be receiving a new grant to assist Self-Represented Litigants at their Family Law Status Conferences. The need for this type of assistance became clear during our existing Family Law Day of Court Clinic and VLSC worked in partnership with Court Self-Help staff to develop the program and secure funding.

This new clinic will utilize family law attorneys to staff FLSC calendars in Hayward and help pro per litigants move their dissolutions closer to judgment. More details and volunteer recruitment coming in 2019!

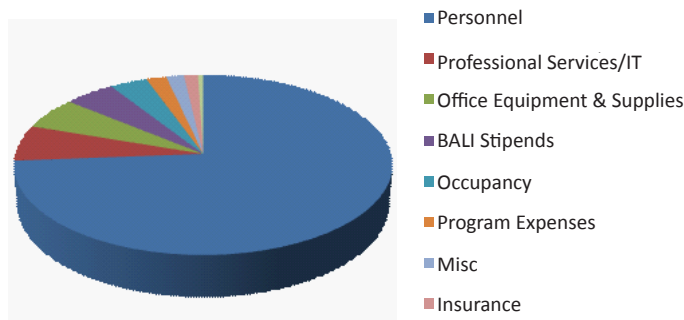
**For more information contact FLDOC Supervising Attorney Christine Knowles at [Christine@acbanet.org](mailto:Christine@acbanet.org)**

# VLSC FINANCIAL INFO

## REVENUE (2017)



## EXPENSES (2017)



In 2017,



**249**  
volunteers  
logged

**3,000** hours of  
pro bono  
legal services

helping  
**2,736**  
people

The Alameda County Bar Association Volunteer Legal Services Corporation (VLSC) provides free legal assistance to Alameda County's low-income population by mobilizing volunteer attorneys to provide pro bono service. A 501c3 tax-exempt charitable corporation, VLSC is governed by an independent board of directors.

*Please note: Due to timing of this publication, and the nature of our fiscal cycle, financial information is provided for the previous year.*

**Help us keep this momentum going!** Your donation is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The gift of justice is the perfect stocking stuffer. You can donate online at [www.vlsc-acba.org/donate](http://www.vlsc-acba.org/donate).

Every year, VLSC is audited by an independent auditor to ensure transparency and compliance with proper accounting principles. The complete 2017 audit report, and 2017 informational tax return (Form 990), is available by contacting Zeba Shariff at (510) 302-2213 or [zeba@acbanet.org](mailto:zeba@acbanet.org).

## GET TO KNOW THE NEW STAFF



*Mauna Minagar*  
Program Manager  
Start Small Bay Area  
mauna@startsmallthinkbig.org  
(415) 966-2187 ext. 119

**What is your current position?**

Program Manager at Start Small Bay Area

**What were you doing before this?**

Program Coordinator at UCSF.

**What are you working on now?**

Expanding outreach to connect with entrepreneurs and small business technical assistance providers in the Bay Area. Planning events for the market access program, including workshops and clinics, and finding volunteers to work on marketing projects with our clients.

**If you could be doing anything what would you be doing?**

I love traveling, so probably trying to learn a new language in another country.

**Where would you be working if you weren't at VLSC?**

I have always had an interest in working in social services or city planning.

**What's your favorite aspect of working at Start Small Bay Area?**

Getting to know the background and stories of the entrepreneurs we work with and how they started their businesses as well as watching their businesses grow.



*Chris Gordon*  
Coordinating J.D.  
Start Small Bay Area  
chris@startsmallthinkbig.org

**What is your current position?**

Start Small Bay Area Legal Fellow

**What were you doing before this?**

I graduated from law school in May. Before law school, I worked in China and volunteered as a teacher in the Philippines

**What are you working on now?**

I am working with clients to diagnose legal issues as well as with partner organizations to improve partnerships.

**If you could be doing anything what would you be doing?**

Yelling at the TV while watching the Warriors.

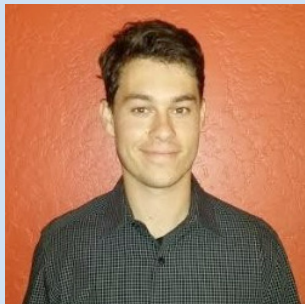
**Where would you be working if you weren't at VLSC?**

I would likely be working in the education field.

**What's your favorite aspect of working at Start Small Bay Area?**

Getting to work with entrepreneurs is my favorite aspect of working for Start Small Bay Area. My parents are both small business owners and it has been a great experience helping entrepreneurs realize their dreams.





*William Strom*  
VLSC Events and Development  
Coordinator  
william@acbnet.org  
(510) 302-2219

**What is your current position:**

Events and Development Coordinator

**What were you doing before this?**

Before working at the ACBA/VLSC I was a contractor on the Google Books Team in San Jose, where I specialized in copyright reviews. My primary responsibility was reviewing requests for literary content hosted on our site and determining the copyright status on a county by county basis.

**What are you working on now?**

Right now I am working on VLSC's End of Year fundraising campaign. Please consider donating to help support the work VLSC is doing to bridge the justice gap!

**If you could be doing anything what would you be doing?**

If I could be doing anything I would be trying to visit each one of the national parks.

**What would you be working on if you weren't here?**

If I wasn't working here I would most likely be pursuing a MPA. I have a strong interest in non-profits and local government, and feel this degree would expand my possibilities within these fields.

**What's your favorite aspect of working at VLSC?**

My favorite aspect of working at VLSC is that all the work, both directly and indirectly, contributes to making access to legal services a possibility for everyone in Alameda County.

## 2018 VLSC BOARD

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*Law Offices of Janice Cho*

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# VLSC'S LOW-INCOME LANDLORD CLINIC

by Matthew Quiring, *Fried & Williams, LLP*

Before I volunteered for VLSC, I had no understanding of the legal needs of low income landlords. Like a lot of people, my experiences as a tenant made me think of landlords as the person (or company) who took my money every month, while trying to force me to hang a flag inside my apartment as a condition of my lease, or posting a pay rent notice on my front door in front of my neighbors when I was one day late.

**But only after a couple weeks of volunteering, I was hooked.**

Not every landlord is a corporation with hundreds of units, or an investor shuttling between vacation homes. Right here, in Oakland and the East Bay, there are huge numbers of elderly, immigrant, and low-income landlords who rely on renting just a room in their house, or a cottage in their yard to make ends meet. It's true that they own property, but that may be all that they have to rely on for income, savings, or retirement.

Unfortunately, landlord-tenant laws make no distinction between corporate and low-income landlords.

Elderly landlords, or those with limited English, are expected to comply with all the rules and regulations intended to deter sophisticated landlords from gaming the system as part of their business. Furthermore, the laws vary from city to city, and even diligent landlords can be confused about what laws apply and where. My private practice clients pay me for this expertise, but the truth is not everyone can afford it.

When you have a spare room in your house, it's easy to tell someone that they can come and stay for a while. But nobody explains to the low-income landlord that they should carry wrongful eviction insurance with a lawyer on retainer. They only thought that they were aiding someone from their church, or helping a family member get back on their feet, or just renting a room to help cover the mortgage. I have seen low income landlords' humanity and generosity rewarded with the cruel irony of being forced into homelessness themselves, the tenants' threats of violence and litigation reducing their "landlord" to living in a basement, in a garage, or even in a car on the street.

I have seen low income landlords' humanity and generosity rewarded with the cruel irony of being forced into homelessness themselves

Nearly all the information about rental disputes is oriented towards tenants. Since there are more tenants than landlords, this imbalance is reasonable, but it is exacerbated by laws and regulations which require repeated disclosure of tenants' rights directly to the tenants, but with no analogous disclosure to the landlord. Our laws and society presume that any owner of property assumes the responsibility of following all laws regarding the use of that property, and without an attorney, a landlord must sink or swim.

The VLSC Low-Income Landlord Clinic is a lifeline to those landlords crushed beneath the expanding weight of their obligations. Disclosure forms, registration fees, and relocation fees keep mounting, while mere communication with tenants becomes more and more fraught with risk of claims of harassment or improper attempts at eviction. Our clients don't just need forms filled and papers printed, they need an education about what it truly means to responsibly rent property in this time and in this place.

Please consider helping low-income landlords, the people who form the very foundations of our communities and neighborhoods. The thirst for justice is great. When my clients beg to pay me, even though I cannot accept, or return to the clinic only to deliver food to myself and my fellow volunteers, I understand that these landlords are expressing a gratitude that runs so deep that words alone are insufficient. It is that experience that makes volunteering for the VLSC Low-Income Landlord Clinic so moving, meaningful, and worthwhile.

Want to give back? Support access to justice by making a donation today here.

**Interested in volunteering? Please contact our Clinics Coordinator Amarilis Medrano at [amarilis@acbanet.org](mailto:amarilis@acbanet.org).**

## DINE AROUND FOR JUSTICE



At VLSC we ended the summer with another successful Dine Around for Justice. Each Thursday in August we celebrated at a different delicious restaurant in Oakland: **Hutch, Doña Tomás, Lungomare, À Côté, and Pizzaiolo**. Each establishment graciously donated 15% of that evening's revenue to support legal services in our community.

Thank you to everyone who enjoyed a fantastic meal in support of VLSC. And a special thanks to the owners and staff at all the participating restaurants for their exceptional service, generosity, and financial support of VLSC!

## CSAA PRO BONO WEEK

This year VLSC held three volunteer events for CSAA Insurance Group's annual pro bono week in September: Family Law Day of Court Clinic, Findings and Order After Hearing Clinic, and Start Your Divorce Clinic.







**VOLUNTEER LEGAL  
SERVICES CORPORATION**

Alameda County Bar Association  
1000 Broadway, Suite 290  
Oakland, CA 94607

Tel: (510) 302-2222  
Fax: (510) 452-2224

We're on the web!  
[www.vlsc-acba.org](http://www.vlsc-acba.org)

## **VLSC STAFF**

**Tiela Chalmers**, CEO

**Christina Wiellette**, VLSC Director

**Amarilis Medrano**, Volunteer and  
Clinics Coordinator

**William Strom**, Events and  
Development Coordinator

**Christine Knowles**, FLDOC Coordinator

**Cynthia Chandler**, BALI Director

**Mauna Minagar**, Start Small Bay Area  
Program Manager

**Chris Gordon**, Start Small Bay Area,  
Coordinating J.D.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, please contact Amarilis Medrano at [amarilis@acbanet.org](mailto:amarilis@acbanet.org) or (510) 302-2219.

For more information on ways to support VLSC, please contact William Strom at: [william@acbanet.org](mailto:william@acbanet.org) or (510) 302-2209.

**Shop at AmazonSmile**  
and Amazon will make  
a donation to:



<https://smile.amazon.com/>

**amazon**smile

### **What is AmazonSmile?**

AmazonSmile is a website operated by Amazon that lets customers shop the same selection of products, prices, and shopping features as on Amazon.com. The difference is that when customers shop on AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com), the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the charitable organizations selected by customers.

### **How does AmazonSmile work?**

When first visiting AmazonSmile, you will be prompted to select a charitable organization. Search for "VLSC", select Alameda County Bar Association Volunteer Legal Services Corporation and 0.5% of your purchase will be donated to VLSC!

## **Designate Your Cy Pres to VLSC!**

If you are involved in class action matters, please consider including VLSC in your settlement or judgment. We are happy to talk with you about crafting an appropriate designation, and to help negotiate this issue with opposing counsel and the judge.

### *Questions?*

Please contact VLSC Manager Christina Wiellette with any questions at (510) 302- 2216 or [christina@acbanet.org](mailto:christina@acbanet.org).