

VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER 2016

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center extends its gratitude to the pro bono legal community in Connecticut. Volunteers act as a powerful force multiplier for CVLC’s small staff, leveraging CVLC’s existing resources to provide expert legal representation to many more veterans. More than 900 volunteers from corporations and law firms across the state have offered their free legal assistance to veterans who face legal barriers to healthcare, housing and income. **Since 2009, volunteer attorneys in partnership with CVLC have resolved 609 legal issues.**

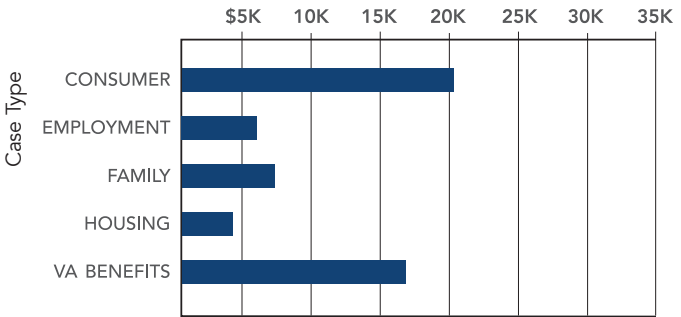
Volunteers have a transformative impact on the lives of the veterans they represent. In the past six years, CVLC’s volunteer attorneys have won over \$725,000 in lump sum and retroactive payments for veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness. In the past year alone, volunteers donated an estimated \$805,000 in time on 272 cases. **In CVLC’s lifetime, the total amount of donated time exceeds \$2.3 million.**



Monte Frank, President-elect of the Connecticut Bar Association, and longtime volunteer attorney Donald Tutson at CVLC’s November 2015 Saluting Service event.

PRO BONO SUCCESS

Average Amount Returned to Veteran when Lump Sum Received



In 2015, volunteer attorneys handled 31 housing cases and prevailed in **83%** of them. Since 2009, volunteers have resolved 138 housing issues on behalf of veterans.



Why Volunteer?

“It was a real treat for me to work with [my clients], honestly. It was a pleasure trying to help them, and the folks at CVLC are always so supportive. My stepfather is retired from the Navy, so there’s a special place in my heart for veterans, and I really do believe in the work CVLC is doing. I’m happy to be a part of it, if only a small part of it.” - DENA CASTICONE, MURTHA LAW

Volunteer Spotlight: Martha Royston, Halloran & Sage LLP



Mr. Joseph Arisco served his country for fourteen years, all over the world – ranging from places around the United States to Vietnam to Germany. After completing his service honorably, Mr. Arisco had trouble adjusting to civilian life and ran into legal trouble after a series of charges for driving under the influence. After a guilty plea, the court placed Mr. Arisco on probation and ordered him to perform 100 hours of community service and make a charitable contribution in the amount of \$2,000.

Mr. Arisco found that escorting fellow veterans at the Newington VA Hospital to medical appointments was a fun and rewarding volunteer position, and he completed his volunteer hours easily. In fact, Mr. Arisco volunteered 685 additional hours – far above and beyond what the court required.

When it came to the court-ordered \$2,000 contribution, however, Mr. Arisco was unsure how he would come up with the money given his limited fixed income. Mr. Arisco's clinician referred him to CVLC for legal assistance, and CVLC connected him with volunteer attorney Martha Royston of Halloran & Sage LLP.

Attorney Royston sought to modify the terms of Mr. Arisco's probation. After meeting with Mr. Arisco at the Newington VA and gathering relevant information, Attorney Royston argued in court that Mr. Arisco should be permitted to complete additional community service hours in lieu of making a \$2,000 charitable contribution. Based on her presentation, the court found that Mr. Arisco had already gone above and beyond the court's requirements and did not have to pay the contribution.

"Mr. Arisco had been really stressed out about this impending financial burden and was worried that he was going to violate the terms of his probation and potentially end up back in jail," explained Attorney Royston. "I think he was really satisfied

with the result and I learned a lot too. It doesn't have to take a ton of heavy lifting to get a great legal outcome."

Attorney Royston was right – Mr. Arisco was very satisfied with the result. As he explains, "She was outstanding, she really was. Nobody else has helped me out as much as she did – she's the best. I didn't even have to go to court, because she took care of everything for me. It worked out excellent for me. I give her five stars!"



CVLC staff member Lorena Mitchell and client Abdul-Ali Muhammad.



Why Volunteer?

"Our veterans served on the front lines and kept wars off of America's shores. Our veterans kept us safe, secure, and protected our families for generations. I am so thankful for their remarkable service. If I can help veterans by providing pro bono legal services, I am truly honored to do so."

—RONALD BRIEN, LAW OFFICE OF RONALD J. BRIEN LLC



Volunteer Spotlight: Amber Sarno and Andrea Gomes, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

After serving in the Air Force during the Gulf War, Mr. Julio Santiago faced challenges adjusting to civilian life. The biggest challenge was his housing. Mr. Santiago lived in an apartment that worked well at first – he could afford the subsidized rent with his VA benefits.

However, when a new landlord took over, things changed. The new landlord raised the rent, refused to return Mr. Santiago’s old security deposit, and requested a new security deposit that Mr. Santiago couldn’t afford. Mr. Santiago got himself on the waitlist for an affordable housing development, but was concerned about his chances; “If I was going to move after getting an eviction, it would be so hard for me to get an apartment,” Mr. Santiago explains. He needed assistance.

That’s when Amber Sarno and Andrea Gomes of Shipman & Goodwin LLP came in. The landlord refused to negotiate a lower rent. “Practically speaking, Mr. Santiago didn’t have the money to negotiate staying there, and he likely would have had to go to trial,” Attorney Sarno said. “He was a good tenant. He tried to pay, and the landlord wouldn’t accept the lower rent and refused to fix horrible conditions.”

Mr. Santiago and his family decided to move in with his other family members, but it was up to Attorney Sarno and Attorney Gomes to resolve the case. When they went to court, they negotiated time for Mr. Santiago to move out. The action was withdrawn with no judgment, and his affordable housing prospects were thus still intact.

Mr. Santiago describes how Attorney Sarno helped him through a stressful time – “I understood everything. She was so nice, and it was an easy process. I’m so much less stressed, and I’m glad that it’s over. I’m thankful for everything she did. God bless her for helping veterans like me.”



Senator Richard Blumenthal and Executive Director Margaret Middleton addressing a crowd at Saluting Service.

“I’m always happy to do this type of work,” reflects Attorney Sarno. “What I did for Mr. Santiago was not a huge time commitment, but it really affected his stress levels to put this action behind him. Shelter matters. You can’t have much else if you don’t have housing – you have to start with the basics.” Attorney Gomes found the work to be rewarding as well. “It was just a really fulfilling thing to see how we made a difference in a family’s life just in a day in court, essentially. I look forward to future cases.”



CVLC CONGRATULATES

Linda Bulkovitch received one of the Connecticut Bar Association’s Honorable Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Awards for Devotion. Attorney Bulkovitch worked tirelessly on a complicated family case for a veteran, with great success. As she says, “These cases, are, in my experience, complex and complicated, and I enjoy challenges. I also enjoy the benefits of being able to wade through those complexities and make a difference in someone’s life, who finally has the right diagnosis and the right treatment.”
—LINDA BULKOVITCH, BULKOVITCH LAW LLC

SPECIAL PROJECTS

SERVICE PLEDGE

CVLC's Service Pledge strengthens the volunteer support system to address the legal issues facing disabled veterans. In 2015, CVLC held its first Service Pledge, which trained a corps of almost 50 volunteer attorneys from across Connecticut to provide expert volunteer legal representation in VA Benefit cases. CVLC will hold its second Annual Service Pledge in October 2016 to continue recruiting, training and offering on-going support to the attorneys who provide critical pro bono legal representation in this complex area of the law.

REVIEW-A-RAMA

In 2015, CVLC launched Review-A-Rama, a special nationwide pro bono initiative with UnitedHealthcare. More than 60 attorneys and paralegals from UnitedHealthcare offices across the country volunteered to review veteran medical and military personnel records to help CVLC staff advocate for their clients. UnitedHealthcare employees processed over 14,000 pages of veteran records!

UnitedHealthcare presented with CVLC at the 2016 Pro Bono Institute Conference on this remarkable volunteer initiative. CVLC and UnitedHealthcare will roll out the third iteration of Review-A-Rama this year and anticipate enlisting even more volunteers. CVLC extends a special thanks to the Hartford UnitedHealthcare Office for their collaboration.

