
New York State Courts Access to Justice Program

**Delivering Cost Effective Legal Services and
Information in Challenging Economic Times**



2015

**Report to the Chief Judge and the
Chief Administrative Judge
of the
State of New York**

New York State Courts

Access to Justice Program

2015 Report

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Our Mission: To ensure access to justice in civil and criminal matters for New Yorkers of all incomes, backgrounds and special needs, by using every resource, including self-help services, *pro bono* programs, and technological tools, and by securing stable and adequate non-profit and government funding for civil and criminal legal services programs.

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MESSAGE FROM JUSTICE FISHER



I am pleased to present the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program's 2015 Report to our new Chief Judge. This annual Report details our continuing efforts to increase equal access to justice for the estimated 1.8 million litigants who must navigate the court system each year without the assistance of counsel. Though gaining momentum, Civil Gideon has yet to be realized. With no right to counsel in civil legal matters, the Access to Justice Program takes a multi-faceted approach to the delivery of legal services, assistance and information to provide an array of court, community and internet-based programs and services, such as the CourtHelp website, DIY Form document assembly programs, Court Help Centers, and court-based volunteer lawyer and non-lawyer programs.

To meet the demand for legal services, the Access to Justice Program's court-based volunteer lawyer programs are designed to meet the needs of as many litigants as possible. In this vein, these programs primarily deliver limited scope services, which has proven to be extremely valuable for litigants and the court system as a means to lessen to justice gap. I am most proud of the "Law a la Carte" conference that my office and the New York State Bar Association held in October 2015, in an effort to further the use of limited scope practice for low and moderate income New Yorkers. For the first time in New York, this conference brought together national experts, bar leaders, legal services attorneys, law firm *pro bono* coordinators, private practitioners, law school faculty and judges and provided a forum to discuss this timely issue.

The Access to Justice Program has operated with a non-personnel yearly budget of less than \$75,000 since the severe judiciary budget cuts of 2011. In light of our limited financial resources, it should be clear that the Access to Justice Program could not have accomplished all that is set forth in the pages of this Report without the untiring efforts of hundreds of dedicated volunteers. I am grateful to each and every one of them, as well as my capable and zealous staff, and the partners, friends, and judicial and non-judicial employees throughout the state who help us further our goals. I strongly believe that nothing is more essential to the constitutional mandate of the courts than providing equal access to justice for all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fern A. Fisher".

Fern A. Fisher
January 2016

NYS COURTS ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROGRAM GOALS

Finding long-term solutions to chronic lack of civil legal assistance for people of low-income and modest means in New York including finding a permanent public funding stream for civil legal services.

Improving and increasing the availability of criminal defense representation to people facing criminal charges.

Gathering and reviewing statewide data on legal services delivery and needs towards increasing and improving civil and criminal legal assistance.

Coordinating efforts between courts, legal aid organizations and other legal and non-legal organizations, administrative agencies and lawmaking bodies to expand access to justice.

Analyzing, recommending and promoting proposed legislation, court rules, codes of conduct, policies and systemic changes that will open greater access to the courts.

Analyzing and addressing the collateral consequences of criminal convictions.

Fostering the development of new low-income and modest means income *pro bono* programs and supporting and improving the quality of existing *pro bono* programs both court-based, and outside the court, using lawyers, law students and other professionals.

Testing and developing delivery of legal assistance models both court-based and non-court-based, including limited scope representation delivery systems to improve and increase availability of assistance.

Expanding access to justice for unrepresented litigants by increasing the availability of self-help tools using a variety of methods including, but not limited to, technology, plain language forms and signs, and informational materials.

Providing cultural competent access to justice for litigants of diverse backgrounds and languages.

Addressing access to justice for individuals with special needs or social services needs by expanding social work and social services in the court system.

Providing more opportunities for justice via community empowerment using outreach, education and training of government officials and offices, neighborhood agencies and community members.

Fostering awareness of the needs of unrepresented litigants and litigants of diverse backgrounds and special needs and insuring high quality service by both judicial and non-judicial personnel via education, training and literature.

2015 HIGHLIGHTS

★ DELIVERY OF LEGAL SERVICES

- Advocate Family Offense Petition Program won Legal Tech West Innovation Award
- Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program Consumer Debt reached milestone: 20,000 litigants served
- Uncontested Divorce Program expanded to Richmond County

★ DELIVERY OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

- CourtHelp website expanded with new features and topics
- E-filing Unrepresented litigant website created
- Statewide Child Name Change DIY Form program launched
- LawHelpNY's LiveHelp assistance added to CourtHelp's foreclosure pages
- New Court Help Center opened in Columbia County
- Court Help Centers assisted over 200,000 unrepresented litigants

★ DELIVERY OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

- New York City Housing Court Judge survey conducted to explore replication of the GAL Program outside New York City
- Poverty Simulation training held for Touro Law Center 1L class and New York City Civil and Housing Judges

★ TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Law a la Carte: Limited Scope Practice for Low and Moderate Income Clients Conference Held
- More than 90 public presentations and trainings and 25 personnel trainings conducted

**Please read further for all of the Access to Justice Program's
2015 accomplishments**

INTRODUCTION

Meeting the civil legal services needs of low-income and modest means New Yorkers in today's challenging economic times is a never ending task. Past Annual Reports have described the numerous paths that the Access to Justice Program has forged for the delivery of legal services, assistance and information to litigants navigating the New York State court system without an attorney. Many of these methods have effectively assisted hundreds of thousands of unrepresented litigants with their legal matters and removed barriers that litigants often face when accessing the legal system. As always, this annual Report describes the basics and highlights of the Access to Justice Program's initiatives, programs and services, however, this year's Report also includes the staffing needs and costs associated with each project. These descriptions of the resources required for the various projects are intended to provide an overall picture of how the Access to Justice Program successfully delivers cost effective statewide legal services and information while working within the confines of a limited budget.

Part I of this Report, entitled "**Delivery of *Pro Bono* Legal Services,**" sets forth the various methods employed by the Access to Justice Program to deliver legal services through its volunteer lawyer court-based programs. The programs primarily offer free limited legal services for finite tasks, such as legal advice, court form preparation assistance or one day of courtroom representation. This Part of the Report supports that there are many cost effective solutions that improve access to the justice system which fall short of full service representation. When traditional legal representation is unavailable, in certain types of case, there are litigants that can greatly benefit from unbundled legal services. The advantages of each delivery method are set forth in each section, as well as the resources expended. An overview of the Access to Justice Program's "Law a la Carte: Limited Scope Practicing for Low and Moderate Income Clients," conference is also included in this Part.

Part I also summarizes the Access to Justice Program's efforts utilizing law students, law graduates, newly admitted and retired attorneys through various partnerships, initiatives and the Attorney *Emeritus* Program. Targeting new and seasoned attorneys in *pro bono* programs is a key inexpensive strategy to bridge the justice gap. In 2015, students from every area New York law school participated in Access to Justice Programs and nearly every area law school pledged to continue partnering and facilitating student participation in 2016. With the 50-hour *pro bono* rule firmly in place, law students, law graduates and new lawyers are an ideal group to recruit and train to expand the pool of volunteers. Veteran attorneys are also ideal for *pro bono* recruitment, as unprecedented numbers of lawyers continue to reach retirement age each year. The increased life expectancy of this group, coupled with their generally improved health, means that many experienced, able lawyers are available to provide urgently needed legal representation to those in need.

Access to Justice means more than guaranteeing legal representation. There is no access to justice where people do not have information or knowledge of their rights. Part II of this Report, entitled “[Delivery of Legal Information and Assistance](#),” describes the non-lawyer assistance that the Access to Justice Program offers unrepresented litigants. This Part is separated into three sections divided by where the services are provided: over the internet, in the courthouse or in the community. Providing assistance over the internet is an important low-cost means to reach people who may not be able to avail themselves of any other delivery method. Through technology, the Access to Justice Program offers self-help assistance via the Access to Justice Program’s CourtHelp website, DIY Form programs and social media websites. Delivery of assistance at the courthouse is ideal because litigants can benefit from resources they did not know existed and were not necessarily looking to find. Through the Court Help Centers, Court Navigator Program, and even via resources on the courthouse walls, litigants can find a path to information that increases procedural and substantive justice. The last section of Part II relays the importance of bringing assistance into the communities. The Mobile Legal Help Center is able to drive the courtroom right into a community’s backyard and enhance physical access to justice. Community camaraderie can greatly facilitate a person’s path to assistance. While the non-lawyer services and self-help tools described in Part II may not provide the access every litigant needs, furnishing the information, resources and tools can help a litigant feel more prepared, confident, less intimidated and better prepared to face the challenges in his or her case.

Providing legal services and information is only part of providing equal access to the courts. Part III of this Report, entitled “[Delivery of Services for Persons with Diverse Needs](#),” segregates the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives and services directed at those litigants who may not be able to take the paths to assistance described in Parts I and II. Cognizant of the needs of New York’s more vulnerable litigants, the Guardian Ad Litem Program, Assigned Counsel Project and Poverty Simulations Program endeavor to ensure equal access to justice to all New Yorkers.

Part IV of this Report, entitled “[Trainings, Presentations & Publications](#),” illustrates the importance that the Access to Justice Program places on education and training as a means to improve access to justice. In 2015, as detailed in Appendices “A” and “C,” despite limited staff and resources, the Access to Justice Program staff and guest speakers conducted over 115 trainings and presentations for the public, program volunteers, court personnel and the civil justice community. In addition, the Access to Justice Program published and/or updated three written resources, including a Best Practices Guide for Court Help Centers. The Access to Justice Program believes that heightening awareness through education and training on the inequalities that exist in accessing our justice system is an important pathway to change.

Clearly, the Access to Justice Program receives tremendous support. Parts I-IV of this Report explain how the Access to Justice Program’s annual non-personnel operating budget of approximately \$73,000 is utilized to provide quality, necessary legal services,

information and assistance. Paramount to the Access to Justice Program's success are the multitude of volunteers, partners, friends, and court personnel that assisted the Access to Justice Program in 2015. Without their dedication and generosity, there would be little to Report. Part V of this Report, entitled "[Recognition](#)," and the "[Partners, Friends and Volunteers](#)," section at the back of this Report, provide a small acknowledgement of this considerable group. Appendix "F," entitled "[Access to Justice Efforts throughout New York State](#)," reports the impressive additional contributions that the Judicial Districts outside New York City and the New York City Courts made in 2015 to improve access to justice. Only through outside funding, partnerships, volunteers and the remarkable talents of numerous court system personnel is the Access to Justice Program able to execute effective solutions aimed at equalizing the justice system. While supporting the search for a permanent funding stream for civil legal services, the Access to Justice Program remains dedicated to improving access to justice for the estimated 1.8 million unrepresented New Yorkers who navigate the New York State court system each year.

PART I: DELIVERY OF *PRO BONO* LEGAL SERVICES

In the absence of a right to counsel in civil cases, the Access to Justice Program strives to improve equal access to the court system through the delivery of free attorney services to otherwise unrepresented New Yorkers. Accordingly, a significant fraction of the Access to Justice Program’s work is dedicated to recruiting, training, and overseeing volunteer lawyer programs that help litigants with their cases in the New York State Courts. The majority of these programs are based in the New York City counties, with an eye toward expanding services through remote delivery methods. The court-based programs provide “unbundled” legal services, which has proven to be beneficial for unrepresented litigants, the court system and the volunteer lawyers who generously devote their time and expertise.

The Access to Justice Program seeks participation from all New York attorneys. Along with the Feerick Center for Social Justice, the Access to Justice Program furthers retired lawyer participation in the Attorney *Emeritus* Program (AEP). Through Appellate Division Student Practice Orders and partnerships and participation from all area law schools, the Access to Justice Program utilizes and encourages law student *pro bono* contributions. An award ceremony is held each year during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week to thank the many devoted volunteers who go above and beyond by providing legal services, and training program volunteers. These attorneys are recognized in Part V and in the Partners, Friends and Volunteers section in the back pages of this Report.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program, along with the New York State Bar Association, hosted a conference aimed at fostering discussion of unbundled legal services in litigated matters by legal services providers and the private bar. The conference successfully brought together national experts, judges, practitioners, and legal service providers to explore this legal service delivery method as a means to increase legal assistance to the public.

LAW A LA CARTE: LIMITED SCOPE PRACTICE CONFERENCE

Unbundled legal services, also known as limited scope, is a practice where the lawyer performs only the agreed upon tasks, rather than the whole “bundle” of the work required in traditional full service representation. The litigant then performs the remaining tasks on his or her own. In New York, unbundled transactional legal services is commonly employed by the private bar; however, unbundled legal services in litigated matters is mainly limited to volunteer lawyer programs. Although numerous states have facilitated unbundling in the courts, and the American Bar Association has expressly advocated its use, New York courts have failed to embrace this method of legal services delivery.

In an effort to explore how unbundled legal services can be used to close the justice gap, the Access to Justice Program hosted an all-day conference on unbundled legal services at the New York City Civil Court. The conference, entitled, “Law a la Carte: Limited Scope Practicing for Low and Moderate Income Clients,” was co-sponsored by the NYS Bar Association, and simulcast to the New York State Bar in Albany. The conference provided six hours of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits for presentations that discussed views from the bench, practitioners’ experiences, volunteer lawyer program experiences, and best practices. Topics included ethics, advice, ghostwriting, document preparation, and courtroom representation. An interactive lunch session gave the audience a chance to ask questions and brainstorm.

The event brought together national and New York experts, including James Sandman, President, Legal Services Corporation, William Hornsby, Counsel, ABA Standing Committee on Delivery of Legal Services, Hon. Dina Fein, Special Advisor, Access to Justice Initiatives, Massachusetts Courts, NYS Bar Association President-elect, Claire Gutekunst, and William Russell, NYS Bar Association’s President’s Committee on Access to Justice. A total of 22 presenters addressed the more than one hundred bar leaders, legal services attorneys, law firm *pro bono* coordinators, private practitioners, law school faculty and judges who attended the conference to discuss this timely issue. The conference agenda, materials and videos are posted at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/LawALaCarte/materials.shtml>.

COURT-BASED VOLUNTEER LAWYER PROGRAMS

The Access to Justice Program primarily concentrates its limited resources on providing court-based volunteer lawyer legal service programs in three categories of unbundled assistance: advice only consultations, document preparation assistance and limited representation in the courtroom. Providing unbundled legal services programs enables the Access to Justice Program to assist many more litigants than would otherwise be possible with traditional full service legal representation.

The Access to Justice Program’s volunteer lawyer programs concentrate on case types where a large volume of litigants navigate the justice system on their own. This includes family, housing, consumer debt and divorce cases. The outcomes in these types of cases often impact the most basic necessities of life, threatening the loss of homes and livelihoods. Unrepresented litigants face a represented adversary in the overwhelming majority of these cases. Providing unbundled legal services helps to level the playing field. Unlike most legal services and legal aid programs, the Access to Justice Program’s court-based volunteer programs do not income screen. The only threshold requirement for assistance is that the unrepresented litigant has a case in the New York State Courts. This enables the Access to Justice Program to assist litigants of modest means who do not qualify for legal aid, but do not have the wherewithal to afford traditional legal services.

All of the volunteer lawyers who participate in the unbundled court-based programs are required to attend substantive training. The ethics of providing unbundled representation is included in every training course. The Access to Justice Program is an Accredited CLE Provider. Every training offers CLE credits in exchange for minimum volunteer hours in the program. Additionally, all volunteer lawyers are eligible to receive *pro bono* CLE credit for their service hours in the court-based unbundled programs. All speakers who present at the CLE trainings are drawn from a pool of local experts and/or court staff, including judges and court attorneys. They generously donate their time to participate as presenters and panelists free of charge. CLE teaching credits are awarded to the attorneys who present.

Every program has an experienced supervising attorney available on-site to oversee the volunteers and answer questions. The training and supervision ensure the quality of the legal services provided. The supervision also extends the court's indemnity to the volunteer lawyers. See http://nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/vap/pdfs/NYAG_VLPopinion.pdf. The necessity to have appropriate on-site supervision is each program's prime operating cost. Programs cannot expand without additional supervisory personnel. Due to budget limitations, the majority of the programs that the Access to Justice Program runs are located in the New York City counties.

Below is an overview of the Access to Justice Program's *pro bono* volunteer lawyer programs that assisted over 15,500 litigants in 2015. Additional information can be found at: <http://nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/vap/index.shtml>.

ADVICE ONLY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

The Access to Justice Program oversees several unbundled volunteer lawyer programs that provide legal advice to unrepresented litigants in New York City Civil, Family and Housing Courts. The Access to Justice Program recruits, trains and places admitted attorneys, law graduates, and law student volunteers in Court Help Centers where they assist unrepresented litigants with pending court cases. Volunteers provide critical support without cost to thousands of individuals and families in order to help them preserve their homes, protect their rights as consumers and assist families with domestic controversies. Volunteer lawyers are supervised on site by experienced Help Center personnel.



Although Help Center court personnel are available to provide legal information to unrepresented litigants, they are not permitted to give legal advice. Court personnel must remain neutral and cannot interpret the law or recommend a specific course of action. To the contrary, the volunteer lawyers provide legal advice, spend time reviewing court papers, notices, contracts, records, and other court-related documents, and are able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the case. The volunteers explain how the court process works, the legal implications of a settlement, what options

the unrepresented litigants have and how they should prepare and proceed with their cases. Volunteer lawyers also help fill out court forms and instruct the litigants how to serve and file court forms and what to expect on the court date. These programs are limited to advice only. The volunteer lawyers do not file legal papers or represent litigants in the courtroom.

In each program, the scope of the unbundled service is carefully explained to the litigant at the start of the meeting with the volunteer lawyer. The litigant is informed that the lawyer is not his or her attorney and will not represent him or her on the legal matter discussed. The litigant is reminded that he or she is responsible for all filing deadlines and appearances. When it is clear that the litigant understands and consents to the services offered, the litigant signs a statement to that effect and the consultation with the volunteer lawyer begins.

Providing advice only, as opposed to full representation, allows these volunteer lawyer programs to assist a greater number of litigants who are representing themselves in court. Litigants can walk-in to the courthouse Help Center without an appointment and obtain legal advice about their pending cases and learn how to proceed so that they are empowered to continue on their own. A litigant is welcome to return to the Help Center at any time for additional advice. Litigants greatly benefit from the program by being better prepared for their day in court.

Better prepared litigants are a benefit to the Judge and the adversary because proceedings are conducted more efficiently. The advice provided by the volunteer lawyers spares Court Clerks from fending off requests for legal advice that they are prohibited from answering. Clerks benefit from having a valuable instant resource available to send a litigant in need. The Court also benefits because the litigant's awareness that free legal advice is available in the courthouse encourages the litigants' trust and confidence in the justice system.

The advice-only programs are an extremely attractive volunteer opportunity for lawyers because of the flexible time commitment. Lawyers can schedule volunteer hours at their convenience and volunteer at their own pleasure. At the same time, a volunteer lawyer is able to learn a new area of the law at a free CLE course and receive practical supervised experience while helping some of the hundreds of thousands of unrepresented litigants seeking advice in the New York City Civil, Family and Housing Courts.

Volunteer Lawyers Program - Consumer Debt

After completing the mandatory training program, volunteer lawyers provide legal advice and information to unrepresented litigants with consumer debt cases in the Civil Court Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP), which operates in the Civil Court Help Centers in Kings and New York Counties. The volunteers are trained to demystify the legal process for unrepresented litigants who are confused and overwhelmed. Many have

already had their bank accounts frozen and their wages garnished. Volunteers assist with court forms and advise litigants on how best to represent themselves in court, providing unrepresented litigants with information about their legal rights and options. Volunteers utilize the Access to Justice Program's Consumer Debt Advocate document assembly program to prepare papers to vacate default judgments. Litigants learn about their rights in the areas of debt collection, credit reports and identity theft.

The staffing costs for this program include the equivalent of 10% of the time of one Access to Justice Special Counsel who provides oversight, recruitment and training for the Program, plus the equivalent of 15% of an administrative assistant's time. Two Civil Court Help Center attorneys spend a small percentage of their time supervising the volunteers. Other than personnel costs, the VLP - Consumer Debt's operating costs are minimal, averaging less than \$300 per year spent on training incidentals, office supplies and promotional materials. The VLP - Consumer Debt operates out of the Court Help Centers so volunteers are provided with office furniture, computers and printers by the New York City Civil Court. Similarly, expenses for informational written materials and basic office supplies to support the program are shared with the New York City Civil Court.

"This summer while working at the Kings County Help Center I was able to help pro se litigants learn about the court system and its processes. Litigants came to us for guidance on a plethora of legal issues including housing, small claims, and consumer debt... A typical day could include explaining what could and couldn't be considered evidence for a small claims issue, to explaining the difference between an original debtor and a 3rd party debt buyer."

*VLP Consumer Debt Volunteer, Kings Co.,
Nov. 2015*

In 2015, the VLP - Consumer Debt was offered in Kings and New York Counties at least three days per week. More than 400 unrepresented litigants received advice and assistance from the volunteer lawyers. Sixteen trainings were held and a total of 112 attorneys and law students were recruited and trained (see Appendix "A").

The VLP - Consumer Debt maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/vlp.shtml> and for unrepresented litigants at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/vlpselfrep.shtml>.

Volunteer Lawyers Program - Housing

The Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) - Housing provides free legal information and advice to owners and tenants who do not have attorneys as they represent themselves in landlord-tenant proceedings. The VLP - Housing runs five days a week during regular Help Center hours in the five counties in New York City, including the Harlem Community Justice Center.

Under the supervision of experienced Help Center Court Attorneys, volunteers spend full or parts of days in a Help Center. Litigants can visit the VLP - Housing's website calendar to see when a volunteer will be available. Consultations are on a first come first serve basis. Volunteers provide assistance by explaining what the court process entails, how to prepare for a court appearance in a Resolution Part, or how to handle a hearing or a trial. They guide litigants in preparing court forms needed to start or answer proceedings. Volunteers also help by instructing unrepresented litigants on how to file orders to show cause to ask the court for appropriate relief.

"[The Volunteer Lawyers Program] helped me understand what my options are w/the lack of hot water/heat in apt. This info. will help me proceed."

VLP Housing litigant, N.Y. Co., Oct. 2015

The VLP - Housing's staffing costs include the equivalent of 20% of an Access to Justice Program supervising attorney's time to recruit, schedule, train, and supervise the Program, plus the equivalent of 50% of administrative assistant's time. The equivalent of seven full-time Civil Court Court Help Center Attorneys also devote a small percentage of their time to supervise the volunteers. Other than staff costs, the VLP - Housing's operating costs are minimal, averaging less than \$500 per year. Training costs include light refreshments provided to attendees and ink, toner and paper for printing posters, brochures and postcards to advertise the training sessions. To save expenses, training materials are published and circulated digitally and training sessions are promoted on the Access to Justice Program's and the Civil Court's websites, via email, and social media through Twitter and Facebook. Presenters at trainings are not compensated. The VLP - Housing operates out of the Court Help Centers so volunteers are provided with office furniture, computers and printers by the New York City Civil Court. Expenses for literature to handout to Help Center visitors, VLP - Housing Intake forms and basic office supplies expenses are shared with the New York City Civil Court.

In 2015, the VLP - Housing offered six basic prerequisite CLE training programs including two live Bridge-the-Gap sessions. There were five supplemental optional trainings held for volunteers participating in the VLFD/VLP initiatives, including two new live sessions on: Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization, and Traverse Hearings 101, and three video replays of: Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS), NYCHA Administrative Hearings and Article 78 Proceedings, and the recently recorded Legal Issues Arising

"The Volunteer Lawyers Program is a great opportunity for attorneys to learn about Landlord and Tenant Law in New York City. If a potential volunteer attorney is willing to commit many hours in volunteering for this program, he or she will likely be surprised by how much he or she has learned about Landlord and Tenant Law in New York City in a short period of time. I am happy to say that I experienced it."

VLP Housing Volunteer, N.Y. Co., Sept. 2015

out of Rent Stabilization (see Appendix "A").

A total of 172 volunteer lawyers were recruited and trained, and contributed over 3,400 *pro bono* hours to the VLP - Housing and were able to help approximately 3,830 unrepresented litigants. The VLP - Housing maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlp.shtml> and for unrepresented litigants at: <http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlpselfrep.shtml>.

Volunteer Attorney Program - Family Court

The Access to Justice Program oversees the Family Court's Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP). Volunteer attorneys assist with initial pleadings in support, paternity, custody, visitation, family offense and guardianship matters. The availability of such services helps reduce delays, helps ensure a more efficient and fair outcome for unrepresented litigants and empowers litigants to pursue their cases to final resolution. Given the complexity of Family Court cases and the critical rights involved, the program is important to ensure that unrepresented litigants understand their rights. Better preparedness and fewer delays motivate litigants to pursue their cases to final resolution rather than abandoning their actions in frustration and confusion as so many do.

"The Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program addresses a serious discrepancy in the justice system, where the dollar amounts are often too small to retain counsel, but the cases are crucial to the security and livelihood of litigants' families. I am proud to volunteer with the program, and would recommend the clinic to any attorney who wants to make a big difference with whatever time they have to give."

VAP Volunteer, Bx. Co., Nov. 2015

Volunteer attorneys provide assistance to unrepresented litigants in the New York City Family Court Help Centers as follows: Thursday and Friday in Bronx County; Tuesday and Wednesday in Kings County; Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in New York County; Thursday in Queens County; and Monday in Richmond County. The VAP also provides legal assistance to unrepresented litigants in Ontario County via video conference one morning a week. In addition to solo practitioners, VAP participants include many large law firms that have agreed to send associates on a regular basis. These firms include: Alston & Bird LLP; Arent Fox LLP; Bank of America; Barclays; Blank Rome; BNP Paribas; Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP; Citigroup; Colgate-Palmolive Company; Cooley LLP; Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP; Debevoise & Plimpton LLP; Dechert LLP; DLA Piper LLP (US); Duane Morris LLP; Greenberg Traurig LLP; HSBC; Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP; JPMorgan Chase; Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP; Kroub, Silbersher & Kolmykov PLLC; McCarter & English; Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C.; Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP; Morrison & Foerster LLP; Norton Rose Fulbright LLP; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison

LLP; Pfizer Inc.; Proskauer Rose LLP; Ropes & Gray LLP; Shearman & Sterling LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP; Thompson Hine LLP; UBS Financial Services; Watson, Farley & Williams LLP; White & Case LLP.

The costs to run the VAP are mainly for the court attorney staff to supervise the volunteer attorneys. Unlike the New York City Civil and Housing Court Help Centers, Family Court Help Centers are not staffed by Court Attorneys. Accordingly, two full-time Court Attorneys are employed to oversee the participating volunteer attorneys onsite. One Court Attorney spends 100% of her time supervising volunteers in Bronx County Family Court two days a week and New York County Family Court three days a week, as well as supervising the video conferencing to Ontario. Another Court Attorney spends 100% of her time covering supervision of volunteers in Richmond County, Kings County, and Queens County four days a week and assisting with training and recruitment of law firms for the program. The Access to Justice Program Supervising Attorney devotes 5% of her time overseeing this program, with an additional 10% of administrative staff support. Other operating costs are minimal. Many of the training sessions take place at participating law firms that pick up the expenses of materials and refreshments. For training sessions that do not take place at participating firms, materials are digital and circulated on-line. Training presenters are not compensated. The program operates out of Court Help Centers so volunteers are provided with office space, computers and printers by the New York City Family Court.

In 2015, the VAP continued to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants outside New York City via video conference to Ontario County Family Court. Video conferences take place on Tuesday mornings through a coordination between court staff in Ontario and New York City. A Court Attorney takes care of client sign-in and intake and then the volunteer attorney conducts a video consultation from the New York County Family Court.

More than 3,000 litigants were assisted by volunteer attorneys in the Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program in 2015. The VAP offered nine CLE trainings (see Appendix "A") and numerous additional trainings by DVD. A total of 180 volunteer attorneys were recruited and trained to provide assistance to unrepresented Family Court litigants in need.

Lunchtime Assistance Program – Supreme Court

The Lunchtime Assistance Program was created through a partnership between the Access to Justice Program, the Kings County Supreme Court, Brooklyn Law School and the Kings County Law Library Board of Trustees to assist unrepresented litigants when the Kings County Supreme Court Help Center is closed.

"I can tell you the program is so rewarding for me because the people are so appreciative of our help."

*Lunchtime Assistance Program
Volunteer, Kings Co., Dec. 2015*

On Mondays and Fridays from 12-2:00 pm, volunteer attorneys and law students provide the public with advice and information on matrimonial issues, Article 78 concerns, and 201-A lien law. Volunteer attorneys also advise litigants how to represent themselves in court, explain rights and options, and assist in filling out court forms. Volunteer law students assist with initial intake and triage, explaining court procedure and giving out legal information. In addition, they provide referrals to helpful resources.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program conducted two trainings for the Lunchtime Assistance Program (see Appendix “A”), training a total of 35 lawyers and law students. Volunteers provided an estimated 80 hours and assisted more than 787 unrepresented litigants.

LIMITED REPRESENTATION IN THE COURTROOM PROGRAMS

The Access to Justice Program offers unbundled representation in the courtroom through its Volunteer Lawyer for the Day (VLFD) Programs established in both consumer debt and landlord-tenant proceedings. The VLFD Program recruits, trains, and supervises volunteer lawyers in New York City Housing and Civil Courts. Unlike the advice only programs, the volunteer attorneys, law graduates and law students who participate in the VLFD programs meet their clients for the first time on the morning of the court appearance and sign limited retainer agreements. The scope of the unbundled service is carefully explained to the litigant at the start of the meeting with the volunteer lawyer. Litigants understand that the representation begins and ends the same day. If a particular case is not resolved in a single appearance, the Program provides representation on adjourned dates by the same volunteer or by a different volunteer depending on availability. At each appearance, the volunteer and the client execute a new retainer agreement. The volunteer lawyer also signs and files a limited notice of appearance, which is honored by the Judges that preside in the courtrooms where the VLFD Programs operate. (Copies of the VLFD Programs’ limited scope retainer agreements and notices of appearance can be found at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/LawALaCarte/materials.shtml>.)



New York City residents sued in debt collection cases and housing nonpayment cases are overwhelmingly unrepresented by counsel and face major substantive and procedural obstacles to the fair adjudication of their cases. Unbundled representation during the settlement conference helps even the negotiating positions of the parties. Moreover, unrepresented litigants benefit from having assistance in discerning possible defenses and counterclaims that may never have been heard in court without the Program's involvement. Through the representation, litigants are provided with information about their case, educated about their rights, and, where applicable, referred to services to seek further assistance. The volunteer lawyer helps the litigant raise issues and assists the litigant in preparing to continue the case on their own, if necessary. Litigants feel empowered through the brief services they receive. The

VLFD Program contributes to improving access to justice by providing free legal and practical support to litigants who would otherwise navigate the Court on their own. Not only does the volunteer enhance the litigant's understanding of the proceeding by breaking down the legalese and addressing any language difficulties, but the volunteer attorney also alleviates the litigant's nervousness by negotiating with the adversary in what is a typically adversarial and contentious exchange, communicating with court staff more effectively and by deftly arguing points of law and fact before the judge.

The court-sponsored VLFD Program is also beneficial to the court system. It promotes public confidence by improving perceptions of fairness and accessibility to justice. It demonstrates to the public the court's investment and concern about hearing and resolving the problems of ordinary litigants. The simple involvement of a volunteer often alleviates stress levels and contributes to a fairer or better experience with an adversary or the overall process. The VLFD Program also improves court efficiency. Due to the high volume and legal complexity of cases scheduled on the court's calendar, it is difficult for court personnel to conference every single matter. Volunteer lawyers free up the court staff's time to attend to other cases and reduce courtroom employees' time required to answer litigants' questions or explain procedures. Having both sides of the case represented, also makes it easier and faster for the Judge to get to the facts and issues of the case.

As the Program is an unbundled legal service, which begins and ends the same day, it is an attractive *pro bono* opportunity for volunteers who are not willing to make the more substantial time commitment often required to follow a proceeding through to its conclusion. The volunteer's commitment is finite and manageable as delineated in the limited retainer agreement and notice of appearance. The Program provides an opportunity for non-litigators or volunteers interested in a new area of the law to learn new skills under the guidance of a seasoned attorney sanctioned by the court and for those who merely desire to earn CLE credit or do *pro bono* work it gives them a way to do so without getting stuck in protracted litigation from which they would not be able to withdraw. The VLFD Program is also a wonderful opportunity for transactional lawyers to experience what it is like to appear in court.

The foregoing structure has allowed the Access to Justice Program to train hundreds of volunteers and offer free CLE credit in return for a manageable *pro bono* commitment. Through leveraging volunteer resources to support this effort, the VLFD Program provides a cost-effective invaluable community service at a difficult time for many New Yorkers.

Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program Consumer Debt Program

New York City residents who have been sued in debt collection cases are overwhelmingly unrepresented by counsel and face major substantive and procedural obstacles to the fair adjudication of their cases. The defenses available to debtors can be complex and the gross disparity in representation often means that defendants never

raise the overwhelming majority of legitimate defenses. Creditors are able to obtain judgments against defendant debtors without ever needing to submit proof of the debt or amount owed. Many valid defenses are lost because the unrepresented often do not present evidence or understand the law. The VLFD Consumer Debt Program has a huge impact in assisting clients to favorably resolve these problems.

Civil Court consumer credit cases are particularly amenable to a lawyer for the day approach. Lawyers are able to achieve dismissals, both with and without prejudice, and settlements in approximately 55% of cases on the same day of representation. In these situations, the representation for the day is essentially equivalent to full representation. In the remainder of the cases, lawyers request discovery on behalf of clients or take other steps to both put the clients in a better position to defend themselves or at least provide clients with a better sense of their options.

The VLFD Consumer Debt Program runs four days a week in most counties and is conducted in partnership with: New York County Lawyers Association - operating in the New York County Civil Court; NYLAG - operating in Bronx, Richmond and Queens County Civil Court; and the Brooklyn Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program – operating in Kings County Civil Court. In late 2015, the program expanded its services in Richmond County to two days a week. Partnerships with Cardozo Law School in the New York County program, St. John's University School of Law in the Queens County program and CUNY School of Law in the Kings and Queens County Programs have further expanded the services provided (see Law Student, Law Graduate and New Lawyer Initiatives infra.). Judiciary Legal Services funding received by program partners enabled the program to continue and expand its services in 2015.

“I’m grateful I had someone to help me through it. I was very nervous.”

VLFD Consumer Debt Program Litigant, Queens Co., Sept. 2015

Staffing costs for this program include a Special Counsel from the Access to Justice Program’s staff who devotes 35% of her time recruiting, training and overseeing the program. The equivalent of 40% of an administrative assistant’s time is required to support the program. The major costs of operating the VLFD Consumer Debt Program are borne by the project partners who supply the on-site supervisory staff. Other operating costs are minimal and average under \$250 per year. Training and recruitment costs include light refreshments and paper and ink for color flyers. All materials are digital and circulated on-line and training presenters are not compensated. The program operates in the New York City Civil Court courthouses. The Civil Court provides space for volunteers to meet with clients and the use of a computer for the project partners’ coordinating attorneys.

In 2015, the VLFD Consumer Debt Program offered 16 CLE training programs and recruited and trained a total of 112 volunteer attorneys and law students to provide limited representation to 4,321 unrepresented consumer debtors in the Civil Courts of Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York and Richmond Counties. Using the lowest rate per

case received by local legal services organizations, at \$1,200 per case, yearly value of legal services provided by the volunteers in 2015 was in excess of five million dollars. To date, the VLFD Consumer Debt Program has assisted over 20,000 litigants. The Program celebrated this milestone of 20,000 consumer debt defendants served by honoring program partners at a reception hosted at the New York County City Civil Court (see Part V). The VLFD Consumer Debt Program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/vlfd_civil.shtml.

Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program Housing Program

The Housing Court VLFD Program helps prevent the eviction of hundreds of New Yorkers every year with the *pro bono* help of volunteers who step in to represent New York City rent stabilized tenants who have been sued in nonpayment proceedings. In 2015, the Program operated in Kings and New York Counties. Volunteer lawyers assisted unrepresented litigants for the day in New York County on Mondays and in Kings County on Mondays and Wednesdays. In Kings County the Program operates in partnership with CUNY School of Law's Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN) and with the participation of dedicated LaunchPad for Justice Fellows, as well as other volunteers recruited and trained by the Access to Justice Program. This collaboration between the Access to Justice Program and CLRN dates back to 2009.

"I have been able to empower my clients with the knowledge of the law, help them access valuable resources and develop practical strategies to meet their individual needs."

*VLFD Housing Program
Volunteer, N.Y. & Kings Co., Oct.
2015*

The VLFD Housing Program focuses on nonpayment cases involving rent-stabilized apartments. In these matters, the overwhelming majority of tenants are not represented by counsel. They lack a fundamental understanding of their legal rights and defenses and often fail to raise issues that should be heard in court including legitimate defenses and claims relating to repair problems or the legality of their rent. Tenants are also typically inexperienced at negotiating and unschooled in settlement procedures, which can result in detrimental consequences to them when they agree to bargains they cannot uphold and fail to understand the legal implications of a Stipulation of Settlement. The VLFD Housing Program has a positive impact in these cases. Litigants are taken on by the Program when the tenant comes to answer the petition in person in the Landlord-Tenant Clerk's Office. Volunteers meet with the tenants, conduct intake and assist the tenant with the oral answer form. By raising appropriate defenses and claims in the answer, then negotiating fair agreements and avoiding the pitfalls of judgments where possible, the tenants are able to achieve more favorable outcomes. Volunteer lawyers help tenants set themselves up to succeed in honoring settlements they can afford. In the event no agreement can be reached, the Program assists them in preparing for the trial.

Landlord-tenant proceedings in the New York City Housing Court are ideal for the lawyer for the day approach for a number of reasons. With no discovery as a right, the volunteer lawyer can read the Notice of Petition and Petition and Answer, interview the litigant and quickly ready him or her for the court appearance in the Resolution Part. Every case is calendared in a Resolution Part to see if it can be settled. The majority of cases in Housing Court are settled in the Resolution Part and matters are often resolved during a first appearance. Accordingly, the litigant may never have to go to court unrepresented. In the event the next court appearance requires preparation, the client is advised on what steps need to be taken.

The cost of operating the VLFD Housing Program has been challenging. The Program requires an experienced Coordinating Attorney present at the courthouse to supervise the volunteers. In 2014, the Program ceased to operate in Bronx and Queens Counties due to lack of funding to employ the Coordinating Attorneys. In 2015, thanks to another generous grant from the New York State Judiciary Civil Legal Services Fund, CLRN hired a part-time Coordinating Attorney to mentor the volunteers in Kings County Housing Court. These monies enabled the VLFD Program to not only provide guidance through the Coordinating Attorney to the LaunchPad Fellows, but also the other volunteers recruited by the Access to Justice Program on a bi-weekly basis. In New York County where the Program operates once a week, a Special Counsel from the Access to Justice Program's staff devotes 20% of her time supervising the volunteers. Overall supervision of both counties is provided by the Access to Justice Program's Special Counsel for Housing Court Initiatives, who devotes 35% of her time recruiting, training and overseeing the Program.

The VLFD Housing Program's other operating costs are minimal. The equivalent of 45% of an administrative assistant's time is required to support this Program. Other costs, average less than \$250 per year. Training costs include light refreshments provided to attendees and ink, toner and paper for printing posters, brochures and postcards to advertise the training sessions. To save expenses, training materials are published and circulated digitally and training sessions are promoted on the Access to Justice Program and the Civil Court's websites, via email, and social media through Twitter and Facebook. Presenters at trainings are not compensated. The VLFD Housing Program operates at the courthouse in the Clerk's Offices, courtrooms and hallways, so office overhead expenses are not incurred. The Civil Court provides space for the volunteers to meet with the Coordinating Attorney. Basic office supplies are provided to Supervising and Coordinating Attorneys and volunteers, including e.g., manila folders and pens.

In 2015, the program offered six basic prerequisite CLE training programs, including two live Bridge-the-Gap sessions, and one training at the law firm of Paul Hastings LLP where for the first time the entire class of first year associates attended the CLE along with other attorneys. There were five supplemental optional trainings held for volunteers participating in the VLFD/VLP initiatives, including two new live sessions on: Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization, and Traverse Hearings 101 and three

video replays of: Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS), NYCHA Administrative Hearings and Article 78 Proceedings, and the recently recorded Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization. (See Appendix "A" for further information about the trainings). The 196 volunteers who were trained served approximately 3,740 hours and represented approximately 525 litigants in 2015. The Program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlfd_housing.shtml.

DOCUMENT PREPARATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Our legal system is built around written legal papers. Every action and proceeding is commenced with legal papers, relief is sought and granted based on legal papers and cases are resolved and finalized on legal papers. Unrepresented litigants face a myriad of challenges when completing legal papers for court, including language and comprehension difficulties. Accordingly, assistance with legal papers is one of the most requested and needed services for unrepresented litigants.

To combat these challenges, the Access to Justice Program offers assistance for litigants with the preparation of their court documents by creating on-line self-help court form programs (described in Part II of this Report), as well as legal services programs that provide live assistance with form completion. Document assembly technology is employed for trained lawyers and advocates assisting unrepresented litigants with completing complicated court forms. With an advocate document assembly program, a trained lawyer or advocate assists the otherwise unrepresented litigants with the preparation of court papers and is available to ensure that a *prima facie* pleading is produced and terms and concepts are explained. Currently, the Access to Justice Program oversees three document preparation assistance programs in areas which have a high volume of unrepresented litigants: divorce, domestic violence and consumer debt. Two of these programs utilize document assembly programs created by the Access to Justice Program using HotDocs software. The third program licenses vendor software for use in court-based clinics.

The attorneys appreciate the document assembly programs because they provide a much faster method of interviewing a litigant and producing court papers. The document assembly programs can produce one or multiple court forms for the litigant, depending on which forms the advocate deems are required. Information only has to be input once regardless of how many times it may appear in the papers produced.

This type of service delivery method is a sizable time saver for the court, the litigant and the advocate. When unrepresented litigants are assisted with document preparation the court papers produced are more complete and accurate, the unrepresented litigants are better advised of their rights and court procedures and are more prepared for court, and there is less rejection of papers. The programs greatly improve access to justice as well as court efficiency.

Uncontested Divorce Program

The Access to Justice Program's Uncontested Divorce Program helps unrepresented litigants with the preparation of uncontested divorce forms at clinics in the Supreme Courts of Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond and Westchester Counties. Thousands of New Yorkers file uncontested divorces each year without an attorney. The divorce forms and court process are complex and bewildering. The Program helps ensure that the divorce process is simply explained and the documents that litigants submit are complete and accurately prepared. The Program recruits, trains and supervises volunteer attorneys to assist unrepresented litigants. The Access to Justice Program licenses a document assembly program that generates legal documents and simplifies the drafting process, producing personalized court forms for litigants that are ready to be served and filed in the Supreme Court. Unrepresented litigants receive free assistance from the volunteer attorneys with the preparation of all the documents required for an uncontested divorce where the parties have no children or where the parties have a current Family Court order of custody, support or visitation. Appointments are made through Court Help Centers and if there is space, walk-ins are sent to the Program.

"Thank you for making my volunteer work at the Kings County Supreme Court Uncontested Divorce Program so rewarding. Everyone working there are so nice and helpful."

*Uncontested Divorce Program
Volunteer, Kings Co., Nov. 2015*

In 2015, the Uncontested Divorce Program ran on Tuesdays in New York and Queens Counties, Wednesdays in Westchester County, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in Kings County and Thursdays (evenings) in Bronx County. Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School students also staffed Tuesday and Wednesday day-time hours in the Bronx County Supreme Court during the first quarter of 2015. In addition to attorney volunteers, CUNY law graduate fellows helped staff the Kings County and Queens County programs. The Program operated one additional day and one additional night in Queens County Supreme Court in partnership with St. John's Law School. These additional hours enabled unrepresented litigants to complete their forms after working hours. In cooperation with the Richmond County Women's Bar Association, in the summer of 2015, the program expanded to Richmond County Supreme Court where it operates one day every other week.

Staffing costs to run the Uncontested Divorce Program include a Special Counsel from the Access to Justice Program's staff who devotes 30% of her time recruiting, training and overseeing the program. The equivalent of 40% of an administrative assistant's time is required to support the program. Four Supreme Court Help Center attorneys devote a percentage of their time supervising volunteers during the operating hours of the Uncontested Divorce Programs. The Bronx program is conducted in partnership with the Bronx County Bar Association which funds the attorney who supervises volunteers for that program. The attorneys who supervise the law school programs are

funded by a judiciary civil legal services grant. Other operating costs are minimal and average under \$250 per year for promotional flyers and light refreshments provided at trainings. All training materials are digital and circulated on-line and training presenters are not compensated. The program operates in the Supreme Court courthouses. The Supreme Court Help Centers provide space for volunteers to meet with clients and the use of a computer for the law school project partners' coordinating attorneys.

In 2015, the Uncontested Divorce Program conducted five trainings and trained 120 attorneys and law students who were recruited to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants. A total of 2,673 unrepresented litigants were assisted with their uncontested divorce proceedings.

Advocate Family Offense Petition Program

Hundreds of thousands of Family Offense Petitions are filed in New York State Courts each year seeking orders of protection. Domestic violence has serious ramifications and the victims are in great need of advice and information to protect their safety. The New York State court system's Family Offense Advocate Petition Program allows trained domestic violence advocates and legal services providers to deliver the guidance required in these delicate scenarios and easily assist unrepresented litigants with completing the Family Offense Petition and Address Confidentiality Affidavit, if needed. The document assembly program is available to any domestic violence advocacy group and legal services provider once they have been trained and approved by New York State court system personnel. Access to the program is only available through Pro Bono Net's Family Justice/DV practice area (http://www.probono.net/ny/family/fop_project/ membership and password required). Advocates must also join LawHelp Interactive to use the program, which is free. The program is not available for self-help to ensure that domestic violence victims get the support they need due to domestic violence's inherent safety dangers.

The data collected in the document assembly program is electronically transferred to the Family Court's Universal Case Management System. The petition is not filed until the litigant or the advocate brings the signed Family Offense Petition into court. The electronic transfer of data directly into the Family Court's case management system is a major improvement in courthouse efficiency and eliminates hours of data entry time for Court Clerks and wait time for litigants.

In 2015, the NYS court system's Advocate Family Offense Petition Program received the LegalTech West Innovative Use of Technology in a *Pro bono* Project award. The online program enables domestic violence advocates and legal services attorneys to assist victims with the preparation of their court papers seeking a temporary order of protection in the Family Court. The project was nominated for the award by Pro Bono Net.

During Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, the program was updated to include Spanish instructions. If chosen, the instructions will print in both Spanish and English for the litigant. Twelve new domestic advocacy organizations were approved to use the program making for a total of 141 approved organizations at the end of 2015. In just the first nine months of 2015, 4,836 petitions were successfully e-filed and docketed throughout New York State.

Advocate Consumer Debt Vacate Default Judgment Program

The Access to Justice Program's advocate document assembly program is a HotDocs version of the Consumer Debt Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form program which prepares papers seeking to vacate default judgments for failure to answer or appear in consumer debt cases. However, the advocate program helps New York City consumer debt attorneys prepare pleadings much faster when assisting a litigant. The advocate program does not contain explanatory screens and allows the user to view several fields of information at once. The program is password protected to prevent litigants from using the advocate program instead of the DIY Form version.

The Advocate Consumer Debt Vacate Default Judgment Program is used by New York City consumer debt attorneys associated with consumer advocate groups in the New York City Consumer Debt Consortium, as well as the Access to Justice Program's VLP - Consumer Debt attorneys. In 2015, the program was updated to require advocates to plead additional information for the defense that the litigant does not owe the money. The program was assembled over 300 times.

ATTORNEY EMERITUS PROGRAM

The Access to Justice Program, along with Fordham Law School's Feerick Center for Social Justice, oversee the Attorney *Emeritus* Program, where volunteer retired attorneys assist litigants with an array of legal issues. The Attorney *Emeritus* Program (AEP), started by Former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman in 2010, successfully utilizes New York's experienced senior attorneys and facilitates their *pro bono* service. Lawyers over the age of 55 commit to provide 60 hours of legal services assistance to some of the many individuals unable to afford an attorney to assist them with their urgent legal matters. The approximately 300 different volunteer opportunities in AEP include a wide variety of delivery systems – one-on-one full representation, unbundled legal advice or mentoring or coaching others. The opportunities are in counties all around New York State, each in partnership with a significant civil legal services organization that provides training and supervision for every attorney. Attorneys who still actively practice law may also earn up to 15 of their 24 mandated CLE credits by doing *pro bono* work.



The costs required to sustain the administration of the AEP are minimal. The Access to Justice Program provides administrative support and oversight of the AEP. The Feerick Center for Social Justice provides administrative and programmatic support. The Feerick Center has obtained grants through the Corporation for National and Community Service and New York City Corps, which has enabled AmeriCorps VISTA and Civic Corps members to work at the Feerick Center. In 2015, three members helped support the AEP; in addition, four permanent Feerick Center staff members devote a portion of their time to the AEP, rounding out to the equivalent of one full-time employee.

In 2015, AEP volunteers continued to increase, totaling over 1,300 lawyers since the program began in 2010. Each time the 60-hour commitment is completed, recognition is provided by both the Access to Justice Program Director, Justice Fern A. Fisher and Chief Judge Lippman in the form of a personal letter of thanks for the important contribution that the lawyer has made to the effort to provide access to justice. The Access to Justice Program also recognizes AEP attorneys during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week. (See Part V). The AEP Program greatly benefitted from the involvement of law firms, which have signed "Statements of Participation" and pledged to lend logistical and staff support to AEP volunteers at their firms. These law firms include: Bond, Schoeneck and King PLLC; Chadbourne & Parke LLP; Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP; Debevoise and Plimpton LLP; Hiscock & Barclay; Hogan Lovells; Hughes Hubbard & Reed; Kaye Scholer LLP; Lavelle & Finn, LLP; Proskauer Rose LLP; Reed Smith LLP; Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; Sullivan & Cromwell; Weil, Gotshal & Manges; and, Willkie, Farr & Gallagher LLP.

"Since January, 2012, I have averaged about 90 hours per year of pro bono time and have had a variety of interesting cases, including tax, real estate, record expungement, professional accreditation and insurance disability. I very much enjoy my time doing pro bono, and it always the first thing I tell people when they ask me what I do in retirement."

AEP Volunteer, Monroe Co., Nov. 2015

The AEP maintains webpages for interested attorneys at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/emeritus/rsaa/>. Attorneys can search for opportunities by location. At the end of 2015, the AEP website was moved to a mobile platform, making it easier for attorneys to find information about *pro bono* opportunities.

LAW STUDENT, LAW GRADUATE AND NEW LAWYER INITIATIVES

The Access to Justice Program involves law students, law graduates awaiting admission to the New York Bar, and new lawyers, in public service early in their legal careers by encouraging their participation in court-based volunteer programs. The goal is to instill a life-long interest and dedication to *pro bono* work. Under this initiative, law

students and recent law graduates provide legal advice and limited scope representation to unrepresented litigants in consumer debt, landlord-tenant, uncontested divorce and family law matters in New York City’s Civil, Family and Supreme Courts. These volunteer opportunities help law students and recent law graduates make the transition from law student to law practice, while benefitting thousands of unrepresented litigants who are assisted by this energetic, enthusiastic expanded pool of volunteers.

Since 2009, law graduates and law students who have completed at least two semesters of law school are permitted to participate in the court-based volunteer programs through student practice orders of the Appellate Divisions of the First and Second Departments. Biennial renewal of both practice orders for the Access to Justice Program was granted in 2015.

The Practice Orders authorize a program of activities for law students and law graduates awaiting admission to the New York State Bar, as long as they act under the supervision of the Access to Justice Program. The Practice Orders can be found at:

http://nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/vap/pdfs/StudentPractice_1stDept.pdf and http://nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/vap/pdfs/StudentPractice_2ndDept.pdf.

“In each consultation we explained to the litigant what they could expect from the proceedings and all of their options moving forward. Meeting with such a diverse group of litigants, I was able to improve my interview and counseling skills...The skills I learned in the help center this summer continue to aid me in my legal education and its application.”

Law Student Volunteer, Kings Co., Nov. 2015

The Access to Justice Program continued to recruit individual students from New York City area law schools through social media, volunteer postings, law graduate fellowships, law student internship public service programs and law school clinical programs. In 2015, this general recruitment led to law student and law graduate participation from nine area law schools: Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Brooklyn Law School, Columbia Law School, CUNY School of Law, Fordham University School of Law School, Hofstra Law School, New York Law School, St. John’s University School of Law and Touro Law Center. The students and law graduates participated in all of the court-based unbundled programs. The Access to Justice Program also utilized foreign LLM students from New York University Law School, New York Law School and Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in its consumer debt and uncontested divorce programs.

Recruitment of recent law graduates and new lawyers was further facilitated through the Access to Justice Program’s popular Bridge-the-Gap CLE trainings in 2015 (see Appendix “A”) For the fifth year in a row, the program presented two free Bridge-the-Gap *pro bono* trainings where law graduates are able to fulfill their CLE requirements, fulfill their 50-hour *pro bono* service requirements, and obtain supervised practical legal experience assisting unrepresented litigants in New York City Housing, Civil, Family and

Supreme Court with their housing, family, consumer debt and uncontested divorce cases. Since the Bridge-the-Gap CLE trainings began over 800 recent law school graduates and newly admitted attorneys have signed up for this CLE series and provided *pro bono* service to more than 6500 litigants. All participants in the court-based volunteer programs gain invaluable experience while helping some of New York's most disadvantaged civil litigants obtain access to justice.

Through a collaboration initiated in 2015, St. John's Law School's St. Vincent De Paul Legal Program, via its Consumer Justice for the Elderly Litigation Clinic, instituted a pilot law school clinic program to provide VLFD - Consumer Debt Program services in the *pro se* motion Part in Queens County Civil Court one morning a week. St. John's law students, under clinical faculty supervision, represent low-income seniors in consumer debt cases in the courtroom. The Access to Justice Program's collaboration with Fordham Law School's Lincoln Square Legal Services clinic continued whereby law students participated in the VLFD - Consumer Debt Program one morning a week in New York County Civil Court handling *pro se* motions under the supervision of a clinic professor.

In conjunction with a 2015 judiciary civil legal services grant, the Access to Justice Program conducted special initiatives in collaboration with four New York City law schools: Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School, CUNY Law School, St. John's Law School and Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center (Touro Law Center). The purpose of the grant is to jointly develop and further expand capacity and expertise for training and supervision of law students and recent law school graduates to provide *pro bono* civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers. Legal services were provided in existing court-based programs in the areas of uncontested divorce, landlord-tenant and consumer debt law. These initiatives work with the Access to Justice Program to coordinate training, recruitment and supervision of *pro bono* efforts across law schools enlisting significant numbers of students and recent graduates, and facilitates best practices for addressing areas of unmet need that would be difficult for a single law school to match if acting in isolation.

Under the grant, students and graduates of Touro Law Center provided services in uncontested divorce and housing law, and provided services on the New York Legal Assistance Group's (NYLAG's) Mobile Legal Help Center in Suffolk County. In the first quarter of 2015, Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School students and law graduates provided assistance in uncontested divorce in Bronx County Supreme Court two days a week, and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in the New York County Civil Court one day a week. St. John's Law School students and graduates provided assistance in uncontested divorce in Queens County Supreme Court two days a week, and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in Queens County Civil Court two days a week. CUNY Law School students and graduates provided limited representation to tenants in Kings County Housing Court two days a week, provided assistance in uncontested divorce in the Queens County Supreme Court two days a

week, and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in the Kings and Queens County Civil Courts two days a week. (See trainings listed in Appendix “A”).

In 2015, during National *Pro Bono* Week, the Access to Justice Program, along with the NYS Bar Association and New York County Lawyers Association, honored law students and recent law graduates for their outstanding *pro bono* service rendered in the Courts at the annual *pro bono* awards ceremony. (See Part V).

Through participation in Access to Justice Program court-based programs, law students, law graduates and new lawyers are trained to become effective lawyers while giving back to their communities. With this hands-on experience, they also become more marketable in the workforce, and attractive to employers.

PART II: DELIVERY OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

There are many ways to assist the unrepresented public in addition to providing the services of an attorney. The Access to Justice Program engages in various methods to deliver legal information and assistance. On the spectrum, depending on the legal matter involved, there are capable litigants who can adequately represent themselves after reading a plain language self-help publication, or surfing through legal and procedural information on the court's website, or meeting with a Court Help Center employee, or receiving quiet lay assistance that empowers them to speak up when they would otherwise be too intimidated by court proceedings to assert themselves. By providing these types of assistance, greater access to the justice system is achieved.

When developing non-lawyer assistance programs and informational resources, the Access to Justice Program tries to keep in mind the varying depths of need and the varied obstacles that unrepresented litigants often face when navigating the court system. These obstacles include: the complexity of the legal system in light of the litigant's lack of knowledge, language and comprehension difficulties, financial hardships and the litigant's inability to get to the courthouse during business hours. The Access to Justice Program seeks to maximize self-help and non-lawyer assistance wherever possible through the many innovative ways it delivers legal information and assistance over the internet, at the courthouse and in the community. Although these measures come short of legal representation, an informed litigant will be better prepared to meet the challenges that come his or her way.

DELIVERY OVER THE INTERNET

The Access to Justice Program employs technology-based resources and services as a means of disseminating information and assistance to a large segment of the population. Studies show that people access the internet to search for information regardless of their demographic background. In many instances, the internet is the first place unrepresented litigants turn for answers. The internet is also ideal for litigants who cannot easily visit a courthouse or can only look for information when the courthouse is closed. With budget and time constraints, it is unrealistic for the court system to devote all available resources to services that require in-person court assistance; on-line delivery is a far more cost-effective mechanism.

Self-help internet-based resources are proven effective tools to assist the ever increasing numbers of unrepresented litigants in need of information, but are not a substitute for counsel. Rather they are part of a continuum in which some matters can be resolved effectively. The Access to Justice Program makes every effort to produce user-friendly, plain language internet-based resources that maximize a litigant's chance of success.

COURTHELP WEBSITE

The Access to Justice Program writes and manages the content for CourtHelp (www.nycourthelp.gov), the New York State court system's website for unrepresented litigants. The website is designed to assist court users who do not have an attorney and are looking for information over the internet. In 2014, the site was completely redesigned with an emphasis on providing easy to understand legal and procedural information and instructions. Main topic sections include: Going to Court; Families & Children; Problems with Money; Abuse & Harassment; Name Change; Homes & Evictions; When Someone Dies; Guardianship; Small Claims; and, After the Case is Over. CourtHelp is the main portal for the court system's DIY Form programs, as well as a place to find court forms, general court system information, and helpful links.



In 2015, the Access to Justice Program continued to add new topics and features to CourtHelp. In the spring, the Access to Justice Program rolled out two new features to improve the way users find information on CourtHelp. Every webpage now contains a search box where litigants can type in words to search within CourtHelp. A new Topics A-Z page was also created and added to the Quick Links menu on every page. These new search features greatly improve access and navigation to the site's information. The Access to Justice Program also added new content on Appeals, Judgments, Collection, and Adoption. The new content contains legal and procedural information that did not previously exist anywhere on the court system's website. In addition, new "What's There?" Links were added on the Help Center webpage listing the services provided at each Court Help Center. These links let the litigant know in advance what they can expect to find at the Help Center.

Following the spring additions to CourtHelp, several steps were taken to publicize the mobile friendly site to the public and court personnel. New CourtHelp flyers, posters and postcards were designed and distributed statewide to the courts, Help Centers and Law Libraries. A copy of the flyer is available at: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/flyers/CourtHelp_Poster.pdf. Appendix "B" contains images of the front and back of the new CourtHelp postcard. The flyers and posters contain a QR code to take unrepresented litigants directly to the website. CourtHelp promotional notepads containing the web address were offered to the public at community events and were stocked in the Help Centers and Law Libraries for staff to use when providing information or referrals to the public. This ensures that litigants go home with the web address for CourtHelp on the notepad pages.

The Access to Justice Program held webinars for court personnel to showcase the new content and features and explain how staff can use the site to assist litigants

"CourtHelp certainly is a wealth of information and guides the court litigant in the right direction."

*Court Staff Survey Comment,
May 2015*

and improve court efficiency. (See Appendix “C”). An anonymous survey was given to webinar attendees. An overwhelmingly majority of court staff stated that the CourtHelp website and new upgrades are extremely helpful to both the unrepresented litigants and court staff.

At the end of 2015, an exciting enhancement to improve user experience was integrated into a sector of CourtHelp. LawHelpNY’s successful bilingual online chat LiveHelp service was added to the Foreclosure



pages to assist CourtHelp visitors. LiveHelp engages more than 100 law students each year to assist close to 6,000 LawHelpNY.org website visitors in finding essential resources and services through the LawHelp website. Funded by a Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant awarded to the Legal Assistance of Western New York, the Access to Justice Program worked with LawHelpNY and Pro Bono Net to install the LiveHelp coding, develop the LiveHelp operator scripts and train LawHelpNY’s LiveHelp operators (see November listing in Appendix “A”) to provide similar assistance to homeowners and tenants with foreclosure questions on the CourtHelp website. The Foreclosure section was chosen to pilot the LiveHelp feature on the CourtHelp website given its manageable number of webpages, significant unique website visits (roughly 80,000 per year), seriousness of the topic due to the potential impact on the foreclosure families, and the need for legal assistance of the visitors to the pages. The overwhelming number of foreclosure defendants appear in court without counsel while 100% of the plaintiffs are represented. The green LiveHelp button is available on eight foreclosure related webpages on CourtHelp. See e.g.: <http://nycourts.gov/courthelp//Homes/foreclosures.shtml>. Media release: <http://www.probono.net/library/attachment.276136>.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program devoted the equivalent of 50% of one attorney’s time from primarily three staff members to write, post, maintain, conduct trainings and promote the CourtHelp website. A volunteer attorney, retired 1st Deputy of the New York City Civil Court Ernesto Belzaguy, also contributed a significant amount of time assisting with the site’s content. Less than \$3,000 was spent on creating and disseminating CourtHelp promotional materials. The resources spent on this information delivery method are well used and an excellent cost effective measure given the amount of traffic that the site generates.

The site had almost one million unique visitors who averaged around 20 minutes per visit. There were approximately 40 million page views of the CourtHelp pages. Top pages included the entry pages for DIY Forms programs, in particular, the DIY Uncontested Divorce Program, the DIY Small Estate Affidavit Program, and the DIY Support Modification Program. In total, the DIY Forms Program entry pages accounted for 1.5 million page views. The most popular legal topic pages were for divorce and name changes.

DIY FORM PROGRAMS

Access to the justice system requires a litigant to prepare and file court forms. This requirement creates a myriad of difficulties for unrepresented litigants who have no familiarity with law and procedure. Litigants who use the wrong form or cannot find the form they need will not obtain the relief they seek; litigants who leave out necessary information will not prevail; and litigants who do not know what to do after completing the form or are overwhelmed by the paperwork may just give up and never access the justice they seek. Litigants need information provided in a non-intimidating format to assist with language difficulties and comprehension, to know if they are using the correct form; to help properly complete the form, to locate missing information, and to understand next steps. The Access to Justice Program produces attractive, user-friendly document assembly programs, known as DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Forms that address *pro se* needs and alleviate many of these challenges unrepresented litigants face when creating their court papers.

NYS DIY Forms
DO-IT-YOURSELF

DIY Forms are designed as a free and easy method for unrepresented litigants to prepare the court forms and instructions they need to proceed in court. The programs ask the litigant questions then use the answers to generate a completed personalized court form, which is ready to print, serve and file. The DIY Form programs are available to unrepresented litigants over the internet and in many courthouse Clerks' Offices and Help Centers throughout the state. DIY Form programs are available for litigants in Family, Supreme, County, Surrogate's, District, City, Town, Village, New York City Civil and New York City Housing Courts. A list of the 26 available DIY Form programs can be found on the CourtHelp website: <http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/DIY/index.shtml>.

The Access to Justice Program develops document assembly programs for unrepresented litigants by using a combination of A2J Author (free download) and HotDocs software. The Access to Justice Program contracts with Pro Bono Net to host completed programs on the LawHelp Interactive (LHI) website. The overall design of the DIY Form program makes the litigant's experience far less intimidating. Every program has the same attractive graphic appearance of a guide walking a litigant step by step along a path that leads to the courthouse. Keeping low literacy users in mind, a limited amount of information is presented on each screen. The experience is personalized by having the litigant choose a gender and then placing him or her on the path with the guide. The programs also address the litigant by his or her first name once this information has been collected.

DIY Form programs maximize an unrepresented litigant's chances of succeeding at the courthouse in a variety of ways. "Pop-ups" explain terms and "Learn More" buttons provide additional information to help the litigant understand the question. To ensure that the litigant does not omit a necessary element of the application, programs prompt the litigant to enter information if the litigant attempts to continue without completing a mandatory screen. DIY Form programs screen litigants for eligibility and exit them out

of the programs if they do not qualify. Litigants do not see questions unless they apply to their situation and do not need to repeatedly input information as is required when completing paper forms. The programs generate as many court forms as the program determines are needed based upon the litigant's responses to the questions in the guided interview. This includes any proposed orders, supplemental pleadings and affidavits of service. Thus, the litigant does not need to worry about choosing the correct court form to complete. Personalized instructions and information are generated which can include: filing and service instructions; courthouse locations and hours; court costs and fee waiver information; courtroom procedures; what the adversary may do next; what to do if there is a default; and where to find additional required documents, information or low-cost legal assistance.

DIY Form programs also assist users with language and comprehension difficulties. Some programs provide pop-up text in other languages or audio to make it easier for users who do not read well or who understand better through listening. Some programs offer graphics or hyperlinks for additional assistance. All programs are sent to a plain language specialist to simplify the text for readers with poor reading ability.

Court forms prepared using this type of document assembly program offer an unrepresented litigant far better assistance than a paper form or a fillable court form. The Access to Justice Program has found that DIY Form programs are an immensely helpful tool for increasing access to justice. At the same time, the DIY Form programs have benefitted the court system by increasing court efficiency. The impact of the DIY Form programs on the NYS court system is delineated in a 2014 article, entitled "The Case for Court-Based Document Assembly Programs: A review of the New York State Court System's "DIY" Forms" published in the Fordham Urban Law Journal, available at: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nyaj/pdfs/RochelleKlempner_Court-BasedDIYForms.pdf.

More than half of the Access to Justice Program's non-personnel operating budget is spent on contracting with Pro Bono Net to host the DIY Form programs on the LHI website. Three attorneys in the Access to Justice Program devote a percentage of their time to development, implementation, maintenance, promotion and outreach of the DIY Form programs, that is equivalent to the work of one and one-quarter full-time attorneys. All programming is done by attorneys. An additional 40% of an administrative staff person's time is required to assist this initiative. Approximately \$5,000 is spent each year on printing, shipping and postage expenses to publicize the programs. An additional \$1,000 is spent on plain language review. Many court employees throughout the state dedicate time to the DIY Form program initiative by the creation of promotional materials, translations of text, data entry, providing feedback from users, testing and development of new programs, work on future e-filing programs, and implementation and promotion in their courts.

DIY Form Program Usage

The Access to Justice Programs tracks DIY Forms program usage and reviews the data to determine where and how to follow-up with program changes and personnel training and outreach. The data is primarily collected from two sources: Law Help Interactive (LHI) and DIY User Surveys.

According to the LHI statistics, for the sixth consecutive year, the New York State courts lead LHI in the number of assemblies in 2015. The DIY Forms programs account for approximately 27% of the total assemblies generated on the LHI server. There were about 115,000 assemblies from DIY Form programs.

Of particular note, 2015 was the first full year of implementation of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program which was launched in April 2014. In its first full year, there were almost 18,000 assemblies which accounted for 21% of the assemblies from all statewide DIY Forms programs. The three most used DIY programs were the Support Modification Petition Program, the Uncontested Divorce Program, and the Small Estate Affidavit Program. These three programs comprised almost 49% of all DIY assemblies in 2015.

The Access to Justice Program reviews the anonymous DIY User Survey data and uses the feedback to improve usage of the programs. A User Survey is generated every time a document is assembled from a DIY Form program and it is optional for the litigant to complete. Through December 2015, the Access to Justice Program has input data from approximately 95,573 surveys since the programs began.

The anonymous User Survey consists of nine questions, plus two optional questions about age and income. The User Surveys are programmed to provide the name of the DIY Form program used, the county and the court. The questions solicit information about the litigant's computer background, experience with the DIY Form program, how and where the litigant used the program and if the litigant has any suggestions or comments. The comments are overwhelmingly positive. Comments are used to identify problems that need to be fixed in the programs, or issues that need to be addressed in court facilities. Comments are also used to identify exemplary service by a court or individual and used to determine whether recognition with a DIY Star award is warranted (see Part V). A sampling of comments are posted on the Access to Justice website at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/diytestimonials.shtml>.

"Thank you for making this process easier. It allowed me to focus on the content of the document. The friendly prompts made this task manageable"

DIY User Survey, Tompkins Co., February 2015

In 2015, DIY User Surveys provided the following findings:

- 96% of litigants found that the DIY Form program saved them time

- 65% of litigants were referred to the DIY Form program by a court employee
- 61% of litigants use the DIY Form program in a court facility such as a Clerk's Office or Help Center
- 35% of litigants had an income of less than \$19,999
- 63% of litigants are between the ages of 25 and 34
- 85% of litigants have internet in their home.

The Access to Justice Program has been collecting surveys from DIY programs since its inception. A five-year study of the data from DIY surveys is in progress. The five-year period chosen for the study, from 2009 until 2014, held 84,648 surveys. To analyze the comments, the Access to Justice Program partnered with Chicago-Kent College of Law Illinois Institute of Technology, Center for Access to Justice & Technology. Of surveys from 2009 to 2014, 14,230 surveys contained a comment from the litigant and 9,765 comments were about the DIY program itself. The comments were categorized with tags ranging from 'time saver' to 'empowerment.'

DIY Form Program Development and Implementation

DIY Form development takes a considerable amount of time to produce legally sufficient court forms and instructions that will be accepted in any court throughout the state. The Access to Justice Program follows the practices for form development outlined in its Best Practices Guide at:

http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/BestPractices_courtsystemdocument_assemblyprograms.pdf. Before a DIY Form program is released to the public, developer groups, comprised of both judicial and non-judicial personnel, private attorneys and stakeholders in the community provide input and feedback and conduct extensive testing. In addition, DIY Form programs are sent to a specialist to put the text into plain language to help users understand the information better and avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Once a DIY Form program is launched, it is continuously maintained and updated based upon user feedback, changes in the law, and technological advances. Additional language options and features are often added where feasible and practical.

In 2015, after a long and deliberate development process, the Access to Justice Program launched a statewide Child Name Change DIY Form program. This program creates all of the court forms needed to seek a name change for one or more children in either the Supreme Court or the New York City Civil Court. Prior to this program's launch, a Child Name Change Program existed for the five New York City counties for Civil Court proceedings. The New York City Civil Court program was folded into the new statewide program and numerous changes and modifications were made. The new Child Name Change DIY Form program produces a Petition to change the name of one or more children with detailed personalized instructions about the name change process. In addition, if indicated by the litigant's responses to the questions in the A2J Author front end, the program may also produce an RJI, Consent(s) for other parent(s), Consent(s) for older children, Notice(s) to the Non-Petitioning Parent, Affidavit(s) of

Service for the Notice(s) to the Non-Petitioning Parent with instructions for the server, Proposed Order(s), and Civil Court Fee Waiver papers. The program can be used even if there are multiple children or multiple non-petitioning parents involved. A new multi-program flyer was created for the courts to post to promote the Adult and Child Name Change DIY Form programs: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/DIY/DIY-NameChange_ChildAdult.pdf.

Development of the Child Name Change DIY Form program began with the creation of a developers group with court representatives from all 62 counties. The group responded to two surveys and numerous emails that demonstrated the vast differences in procedure among the counties. Collecting the procedure was crucial to providing instructions for the litigants that would work in every Supreme Court in New York State. Many in the developers group tested the program and provided valuable feedback to the Access to Justice Program pointing out possibilities that had not been previously considered. The feedback led to many changes and additions to the programming. Many in the developers group attended a showcase and discussion of the new program conducted via Skype (see December listing in Appendix “C”). The Access to Justice Program also obtained and utilized feedback from New York City Civil Court personnel who tested the new version of the program. Prior to the statewide launch, the Erie County Help Center staff piloted the program and several litigants successfully utilized the program. The new program greatly simplifies the child name change paperwork, and will work for any type of modern blended family.

In 2015, the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program was updated with Spanish instructions. This program is for unrepresented litigants with no children seeking a divorce on the grounds of irretrievable breakdown of the relationship (no fault). Depending on the litigant’s circumstances, the program will generate an exit sheet with details of why he or she didn’t qualify to use the program; papers to initiate the uncontested divorce case, or papers to get the case on the court’s calendar. The papers that are generated are personalized for the user. When the Spanish language option is chosen, the litigant will get instructions in both Spanish and English. In addition, the program prints instructions specifically for the Defendant or the person who serves the papers for the Plaintiff. These instructions are also printed in Spanish, if requested.

The Access to Justice Program often holds webinar trainings to familiarize court staff and others with the DIY Form programs so the public can be better assisted. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program held trainings open to all court staff to showcase the Family Court DIY Form programs (see September listing in Appendix “C”). Trainings were also conducted on the Uncontested Divorce, Adult Name Change and Tenant Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form programs for staff from the Western New York Law Center and Erie County Legal Aid to assist unrepresented litigants with the DIY Form programs in the 8th JD Help Center (see May listings in Appendix “A”).

#FeedbackFriday was started on Twitter to share litigants' experiences with the DIY Form programs. Most of the tweets embed a comment from the DIY User Survey and reach a large audience. For example, a November tweet about the Small Property Owners Nonpayment Petition Program garnered more than 2,000 impressions and five retweets. The tweets are an excellent means to promote awareness and encourage usage of the DIY Form programs by other unrepresented litigants.

[#FeedbackFriday](#) Ask 4 rent, save \$ & sanity w the FREE DIY [#NYC](#) Nonpayment Prgrm
http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/int_smallproperty.shtml
[@A2JAuthor](#)
pic.twitter.com/qDt0nQwMTV.”

Tweet, November 2015

E-FILING UNREPRESENTED LITIGANT WEBSITE

Over the past decade, the New York State court system has been working on establishing a statewide electronic filing system, known as “NYSCEF,” New York State Courts Electronic Filing. Presently, NYSCEF permits the filing of legal papers by electronic means in certain courts, case types and counties. (See <https://iappscontent.courts.state.ny.us/NYSCEF/live/authorizedForEfiling.htm>). An attorney’s use of the NYSCEF system is either mandatory or consensual depending on the county. An attorney served with notice of an e-filed case must either decline or consent. Unrepresented litigants are automatically exempt from e-filing. Attorneys can earn CLE by attending e-filing training classes and can set-up accounts to regularly e-file all their cases through the NYSCEF system available at www.nycourts.gov/efile. Unrepresented litigants must set-up a new account to e-file in each case. Attorneys and unrepresented litigants can use the NYSCEF system for free.

NYSCEF was initially implemented in case types where both sides are generally represented by attorneys, e.g., no-fault, tax certiorari and commercial cases. In 2014, NYSCEF was expanded to additional case types where parties are often not represented by an attorney, e.g., foreclosure, and consumer debt. This expansion is part of the court system’s future plans to extend e-filing to all courts and case types. With this in mind, the Access to Justice Program worked with NYSCEF and the Department of Technology to create an e-filing website for unrepresented litigants. The purpose of the e-filing unrepresented litigant track is it to streamline the process and explain the e-filing procedure in simple terms that non-attorneys can better understand. Other than personnel time, there was no additional cost to the Access to Justice Program required to create the website. NYSCEF and the Department of Technology personnel also devoted a small percentage of their time to this initiative.

The new website explains the basics of e-filing to help a litigant decide whether e-filing is right for him or her. The website clarifies the procedure for setting up an account to start a case or e-file in an existing case. In addition, the website contains content explaining what is needed before logging in, including information about motions, fee

waivers and document redaction. The website also contains helpful links to explain terms, find forms and find live assistance. The e-filing website for unrepresented litigants will be launched and evaluated in early 2016: www.nycourts.gov/efile-unrepresented.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a cost effective, simple and easy means to disseminate information and reach thousands of people in a matter of moments. The Access to Justice Program began using social media tools in 2010 by establishing a Twitter page (www.twitter.com/NYCcourtsA2J), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NYCourtVLP) and YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/NYCcourtsA2J). The Access to Justice Program does not have a dedicated social media department or staff person to oversee these sites. Rather, all Access to Justice Program staff members subsumed use of the tools into their responsibilities and utilize them as time and need permit. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program set-up an Instagram account (<https://instagram.com/nycourtsa2j/>), but did not begin to utilize the tool.

Each social media platform has provided unrepresented litigants with a free path to information about legal services, information and assistance. These platforms reach people who may never benefit from any other delivery method. In addition, the Access to Justice Program uses social media to disseminate information beyond unrepresented litigants. It has proven an effective recruitment tool for volunteer programs. In addition, it provides an avenue for discussion of information and ideas that are important to the access to justice community. For these reasons, the Access to Justice Program heightened its use of social media tools in 2015.

Twitter

The Access to Justice Program utilizes Twitter to notify the public about available resources, tweeting a total of 1160 times since launching in May 2010. Tweet topics for the public include notifications about the availability of DIY Form programs, community events, court related videos, court closings, locations for the mobile legal help center, where to find free legal advice and information, and important changes in the law. In addition, the Access to Justice Program uses Twitter to disseminate information about volunteer opportunities and trainings in court-based programs, and to recognize and thank volunteer for their contributions.



In 2015, the Access to Justice Program stepped up its use of twitter, tweeting a total of 308 times. Followers at the year's end totaled 682, an increase of over 90% since 2014 (359 followers). The Access to Justice Program also followed a number of like-minded Access to Justice Commissions across the country. A sampling of these groups include:

- Texas Access to Justice Foundation @TxAccessJustice
- Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission @wisatj
- Mississippi Access to Justice Commission @MississippitATJ
- Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice @FlaAtcJ
- Arkansas Access to Justice Commission @ArkansasJustice
- South Carolina Access to Justice Commission @SCATJ

Following each other on Twitter is another way that the Access to Justice Program keeps abreast of, and shares, information on important access to justice developments.

The Access to Justice Program also shares and retweets information with the other New York State court system Twitter accounts. In 2015, the New York State court system created six new twitter accounts. In addition to @NYCourtsA2J, court system Twitter accounts now include:

- @NYCourtsNotice: Up-to-the-minute alerts on weather closings and other emergency notifications.
- @NYSCourtsNews: News and information on the courts and court system, including new initiatives and court rules.
- @NYCourtsCOA: Court of Appeals happenings with timely notices on decisions, arguments and other news.
- @NYAppDiv3: Third Department updates on decisions, arguments, employment opportunities and other bulletins.
- @NYAppDiv4: Fourth Department updates on decisions, arguments and other news.
- @NYCourtsCareers: Listing of job openings, career opportunities and qualifying exams.
- @NYSCEF: Information on e-filing trainings and news in the New York State Courts.

The Access to Justice Program conducted live tweeting from several conferences and events in 2015, using specific hashtags to identify the subject matter. These include: the Self-Represented Litigants Network conference (#SRLN2015); the Equal Justice Conference (#2015EJC); the 4th Annual Law School Conference on Access to Justice at Fordham Law School (#A2JLawSchools); the Law a la Carte Limited Scope conference (#lawalacarte), and the *Pro bono* Week Awards Celebration (#celebrateprobono). In addition, the Access to Justice Program utilized a number of hashtags to reach specific audiences. #celebrateprobono was used 28 times to apprise the public about *Pro Bono* Week events. #FeedbackFriday was used 16 times to promote the DIY Form programs.

A simple 144 character tweet is capable of reaching thousands. In 2015, Access to Justice Program tweets earned approximately 200,000 impressions. There is no doubt that Twitter is a powerful and cost effective mechanism for the delivery of information.

Facebook

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program's Volunteer Lawyer Program Facebook page continued its steady increase. "Likes" on the page rose to 576, up from 422 in 2014. The Access to Justice Program posted 83 times, sharing 51 links and 14 photos, including a photo gallery from the *pro bono* awards ceremony. These posts reached over 14,000 people and garnered hundreds of likes and dozens of shares. The majority of the people who like the page fall in the 25-34 age range for both male and female.



The Access to Justice Program's target audience for Facebook is much narrower than the target audience on Twitter. Facebook is primarily used as a vehicle to increase the pool of lawyers and non-lawyers available to provide volunteer services, and a means to recognize volunteer efforts. The Facebook page provides one location for posting information for volunteers in multiple programs. It is a wonderful mechanism to promote *pro bono* work in the courts and reach many more potential volunteers. For example, an April post about the Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program training reached 259 unique viewers and a June post about a Court Navigator Housing training reached 319 unique viewers.

In addition to promoting volunteerism in the Access to Justice Program, links to relevant articles about *pro bono* service, public interest job opportunities and internships, and student news are also shared on Facebook. Examples of these include a July post about Brooklyn Law School offering partial refunds to jobless graduates that reached 879 unique viewers, and a September post with a list of things to learn in law school that reached 686 unique viewers.

The Access to Justice Program also uses Facebook to acknowledge volunteer contributions. During National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the post to the reception's agenda and program reached 583 unique viewers, and the post to the photo gallery of the event reached 409 unique users. Like Twitter, it takes only seconds to write and post information on Facebook, reaping significant reward for the investment of time.

YouTube

The unprecedented reach of YouTube makes it an ideal platform to deliver legal information, especially for litigants who may have lower English reading proficiency and benefit from visual learning over printed delivery. To this end, in years past, the Access to Justice Program has made short videos to promote the DIY Form programs and explain some court procedures using volunteer court employees for all the labor. The Access to Justice Program does not otherwise have a budget for video production.



In 2015, the Access to Justice Program's existing 26 videos continued to attract thousands of new viewers. In addition, with thanks to the New York State Bar Association who generously paid for the streaming and filming of the Law a la Carte: Limited Scope Practicing for Low and Moderate Income Clients conference (see Part I), eight videos of the presentations and panel discussions were added to the Access to Justice Program's YouTube channel and a new playlist was created at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLft7H-UpAb5xdO9qG1OG5T0OI5qOrnJ4x>. The following eight new videos are aimed at educating the bar, judges, legal services providers, and the general public, about the limited scope representation:

- **Greetings and Overview of Limited Scope Practice:** <https://youtu.be/VGtlz2YCRRE>
Claire Gutekunst, New York State Bar Association; William Russell, New York State Bar Association; and Hon. Fern Fisher, Director, Access to Justice Program
- **Ethics of Limited Scope Practice:** <https://youtu.be/J9Cm-UGmrzE>
Katie Lachter, Hinshaw & Culbertson, LLP
- **Why is Limited Scope a Viable Model of Practice? Experiences with Limited Scope Practice:** <https://youtu.be/bUFBMTAhPMo>
William Hornsby, American Bar Association; Hon. Dina Fein, Massachusetts Courts; James Sandman, President, Legal Services Corporation; Laura Unflat, solo practitioner; Hon. Fern A. Fisher, Director, Access to Justice Program, moderator
- **Interactive Working Lunch:** <https://youtu.be/IFYV-purNDM>
- **View of Limited Scope Practice from the Bench:** <https://youtu.be/piZjVlyhL54>
Hon. Jean Schneider, New York City Civil Court; Hon. Peter Moulton, New York County Supreme Court; Hon. Paul Alpert, New York City Civil Court; Mike Williams, Bronx County Family Court Clerk of Court; Hon. Fern Fisher, NYS Courts Access to Justice Program, moderator
- **Advice, Ghostwriting and Document Preparation in Limited Scope Services:** https://youtu.be/TaK_UKHwh7Y
Dora Galacatos, Fordham Law School; Kwaku Agyeman, NYC Supreme Court; Tracy McNeil, Access to Justice Program; Angela Britten, NYC Family Court; Mark Weliky, Queens County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project; Rochelle Klempner, Access to Justice Program, moderator
- **Best Practices in Limited Scope Representation:** <https://youtu.be/cjbE8F8-bmY>
Sidney Cherubin, Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project; Daphne Schlick, NYLAG; Anthony Antonelli, Paul Hastings LLP; Yacine Barry-Wun, Access to Justice Program; Laurie Milder, Access to Justice Program, moderator
- **Wrap-Up:** <https://youtu.be/u7xvk0onwD4>
Hon. Fern A. Fisher

The Access to Justice Program's YouTube channels hosts a total of 34 videos. Since 2010, over 33,000 minutes have been watched. In 2015, there was an increase of over 67% in the number of views since 2014.

DELIVERY IN THE COURTHOUSE

The Access to Justice Program works on programs and resources to provide legal assistance and information at the courthouse. As the primary hub of all case activity, the courthouse is the ideal location and opportunity to offer services that assist unrepresented litigants. Going to court can be a very intimidating, bewildering and nerve-racking experience. This is especially true for anyone unfamiliar with the workings of the court system. Delivering information and assistance at the courthouse is an immediate means to address litigants' needs.

The Access to Justice Program offers one-on-one assistance at the courthouse through Court Help Centers and the Court Navigator Program. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program devoted significant attention to the Court Help Centers in an effort to expand and increase their services. In addition, the Access to Justice Program continued to explore methods for information delivery to litigants during courthouse "down time" by creating new slides and posters to take advantage of blank space on courthouse walls as a low-cost method of providing information to large numbers of litigants.

COURT HELP CENTERS

Each year, an estimated 1.8 million New Yorkers navigate their way through the justice system without an attorney. Many of these individuals have little to no legal knowledge or idea about how to proceed or where to find legal information. Many did not choose to go to court unrepresented. Rather, these are people who cannot pay their rent, or mortgage, or credit card bills, let alone afford to pay an attorney. A Court Help Center is a means to enable these unrepresented litigants to use the courts more effectively. A Court Help Center is a neutral place in or near the courthouse where unrepresented litigants can obtain free information about court procedures and the law from court staff. The Access to Justice Program oversees 27 New York State Court Help Centers located in Surrogate's, Supreme, Family, and Civil Courts. Through one-on-one consultations, referrals, document preparation assistance and other services, such as, internet for legal research, access to DIY Form programs, and consultations with volunteer attorneys, the Court Help Centers greatly increase access to justice for Help Center visitors.



The Access to Justice Program devotes approximately 54% of a Special Counsel's time to oversee the Help Centers, plus a nominal amount of time from support staff. Less than \$2,000 is spent on Help Center office support and promotion. The operational cost of each Help Center is borne by each court or judicial district and varies greatly depending on the personnel and resources assigned. Although the cost of establishing and operating a Help Center can be significant, the benefit to the court's efficiency balances the expenditure. When court users are empowered with legal tools, confidence and information they are better prepared to continue with their cases on their own. In turn, judges, court attorneys and court staff function more efficiently and

effectively. By providing a Court Help Center, a court improves its case processing systems and ability to efficiently manage its caseload and significantly improves user satisfaction.

In 2015, over 200,000 unrepresented litigants were assisted by the New York State Court Help Centers, an increase of 50% from 2014. This increase is attributed to the hard-working, dedicated Help Center personnel, as well as the Access to Justice Program's efforts toward improving inter-Help Center communication, employee training, and data collection and entry.

Unification and Education

Since Help Centers are located all over the state it is difficult for Help Center staff to support each other. Staff need to develop trust and build relationships to foster the sharing of ideas and resources. In 2015, to combat feelings of isolation and to build meaningful work connections, the Access to Justice Program focused its efforts on increasing Help Center unification. One measure was the creation of a uniform Help Center logo (shown above). Giving the Help Centers their own brand identity helps connect the individual Centers and makes all Help Center personnel part of a greater unit.

Another measure taken toward Help Center staff unification was the complete redesign of the Help Center SharePoint website on the court system's intranet. The revamped SharePoint site is much more user-friendly. This privately shared cloud-based resource allows staff to upload publications they find or create, post questions, and share ideas, contacts and resources that staff believe may be helpful to other members. All Help Center meeting and training materials and resources are posted on the SharePoint site. This tool encourages staff to work collectively.

A significant step toward greater Help Center unification was the Access to Justice Program's work on a unified on-line Help Center intake process and database. With an unceasing flow of visitors, and most courts extremely short-staffed, Help Center personnel rarely have down time to input data, let alone catch up if they fall behind. Data entry takes time away from serving the public. Building on the Housing Court database created in 2014 with the assistance of Columbia Law School's Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, the Access to Justice Program worked with the Department of Technology to create a real-time data entry experience, enabling the user to input information while talking to the litigant. A Database Developers Group was established made up of Help Center staff from various courts across the state so that realistic user feedback could be utilized. This was an integral part of the development process. The front end interface of the database was completed at the end of 2015. When the back end is completed, the new intake process will increase the ease and speed of data entry, which will allow for quicker and more accurate statistics. The intake process and database will reveal who is entering the Help Centers, what are their needs and how they are being assisted. The database will also calculate the number of litigants who

are desk triaged, given a quick referral, or given a form or written materials. It will keep track of the number of litigants turned away due to overcapacity. The Access to Justice Program showcased the new intake process and database to the Self-Represented Litigants Network's Court Administrators' working group. The New York State Courts Law Librarians Association was also given a demonstration of the database with an eye toward replication. (See Appendices "A" and "C").

The Access to Justice Program also holds quarterly Help Center staff meetings via Skype. These unifying meetings give Help Center staff a chance to voice concerns and learn about what other Help Centers are doing. These meetings provide an opportunity to brainstorm on how they can improve and make their courts more efficient. From one of these meetings came the idea to hold specially designed educational trainings on issues regularly tackled in the Help Centers, with an eye toward explaining how best to present the legal concepts to unrepresented litigants.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program held five educational trainings for the Help Center staff. Taught over Skype and in person, topics included Rent Stabilization, the Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program, and Replevin. Help Center staff played an active role in their own education and educating each other. At the request of New York City Civil Court Help Center staff, the Access to Justice Program hosted a one credit CLE live webinar on the basics of an Ejectment Action in lower Civil Court. To complement this CLE, the Access to Justice Program worked with New York City Civil Court personnel to create new forms, including Service and Ejection instruction forms. The Replevin CLE was co-taught by a Help Center Bronx County Supreme Court Clerk and Civil Court Attorney. More details about all of the Help Center trainings are set forth in Appendix "C."

The Access to Justice Program conducted trainings on the Uncontested Divorce, the Adult Name Change, and the Tenant Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form programs for attorneys from the Western New York Legal Center and Buffalo Legal Aid offices, in readiness for their volunteer service in the Erie County Help Center. The training also consisted of a review of the CourtHelp website. (See Appendix "A.").

The Access to Justice Program published a Best Practice Guide for Court Help Centers to educate New York State Court Help Center staff, as well as court administrators, on ways to improve or expand Court Help Centers. (See http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/NYSA2J_BestPracticesHelpCenter.pdf). The Guide is divided into six Parts that describe initial considerations, the services to offer, staffing and responsibilities, facility set-up, overall administration and Help Center promotion. The Best Practices guide was also written for court administrators outside New York State who may be interested in establishing a Help Center or improving an existing facility. As is detailed in Part IV, the Access to Justice Program received a number of visitors from other state court systems who came to observe and learn about the successful New York State Court Help Centers. The Best Practices Guide was shared with all visitors. In addition, visitors were escorted to the Bronx Family Court

Help Center, which is a model facility where unrepresented litigants create and file petitions, meet with volunteer attorneys, receive copies of court orders, utilize one of ten DIY Form terminals, and can even appear before a Court Referee.

A training for new Help Center Administrators was introduced in the New York and Queens County Civil Court Help Centers. The training focuses on triage to insure that all members of the public who enter a Help Center are served in some matter even when at capacity. Using these techniques New York and Queens Help Centers saw their numbers more than double.

The Access to Justice Program also extended its education efforts to non-Help Center court employees by holding a webinar entitled, “Help Us Help You: All About Court Help Centers.” Several live presentations of this webinar were held for court staff who work outside the Help Centers to familiarize court personnel with the Help Center as a resource for both staff and litigants. The webinar explained what services are available in the Help Center and who to appropriately refer there (see January and February listings in Appendix “C”). It was this webinar that sparked the establishment of a new 3rd Judicial District Help Center.

Service to the Public

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program created several resources to increase public awareness of Help Center services. The new Help Center logo (shown above) was created for all Help Centers to use on all Help Center materials. The Help Center logo is a court building design with the word HELP spelled out in the center columns to suggest that assistance is available inside the courthouse. This branding is aimed at making unrepresented litigants more aware of the free court service. The Help Center logo was then incorporated into new statewide Help Center Posters to increase awareness at the courthouse. A sample poster for the Columbia County Court Help Center is contained In Appendix “D.” The Access to Justice Program also added “What’s There?” links on the Help Center page on the CourtHelp website (<http://nycourts.gov/CourtHelp/GoingToCourt/helpcenters.shtml>). The links inform litigants what services they can expect to find at each Help Center.

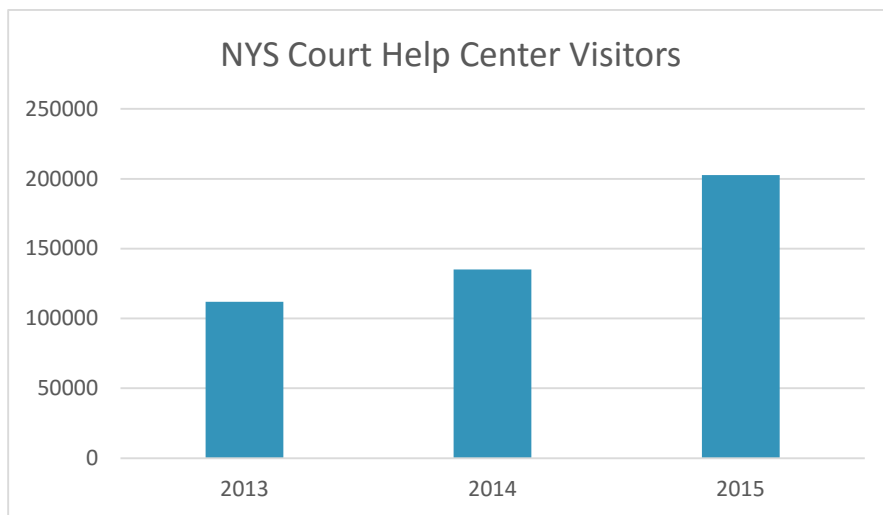
The Access to Justice Program also initiated efforts to equip all Help Centers and Public Access Law Libraries with the ability to scan and e-file documents. This project is part of the Access to Justice Program’s initiative to make e-filing more accessible to unrepresented litigants. Working with the Department of Technology, NYSCEF and the Law Librarians, the process was begun to create functional user-friendly courthouse e-filing terminals that protect a litigant’s privacy.

During National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the Access to Justice Program coordinated a number of free legal workshops at courthouses in New York City and Nassau County courtesy of the Court Help Centers. In New York City, The Help Center staff held informational seminars in each county, including Small Claims tutorials in the

New York Civil Court, Bronx County Supreme Court and Richmond County Civil Court Help Centers; Service of Process in the Kings County Housing Court Help Center; Information on Housing Court Cases in the Bronx and Queens Counties' Help Centers; and, a NYCHA seminar in the New York County Housing Court Help Center. The Richmond County event was co-hosted by retired Deputy Chief Clerk & Chief Clerk of Small Claims Joseph Gebbia and the Bronx County event was presented in English and Spanish. The Nassau County Help Center staff held an informational clinic in the Supreme Court Help Center, answering questions on a multitude of legal topics, including divorce, foreclosure, and civil judgment.

Most exciting, was the opening of a second Court Help Center in the 3rd Judicial District at the end of 2015. A Family Court Help Center was previously opened in Albany County in 2014. The 3rd Judicial District Administrative Judge Hon. Thomas A. Breslin, District Executive Beth Diebel, Supreme, County, and Family Court Chief Clerk David Cardona and the Access to Justice Program, hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Columbia County Court Help Center. Located in the Columbia County Law Library, the Help Center will focus on Family and City Court issues. Much credit for this Help Center can be attributed to Columbia County Law Librarian Laura Hankin and Surrogate's Court Chief Clerk Teresa Slemp who both attended the Access to Justice Program's January "Help Us Help You: All About Court Help Centers" webinar.

New York State Court Help Centers continued to increase the number of unrepresented litigants helped. In 2015, Help Centers assisted more than 200,000 people, representing an increase of more than 65,000 over the number of litigants assisted in 2014. These figures do not include the New York City Family Court Help Centers.



The New York City Supreme and Surrogate's Court Help Centers assisted more than 89,500 litigants. This total also represents a greater than 50% increase over 2014.

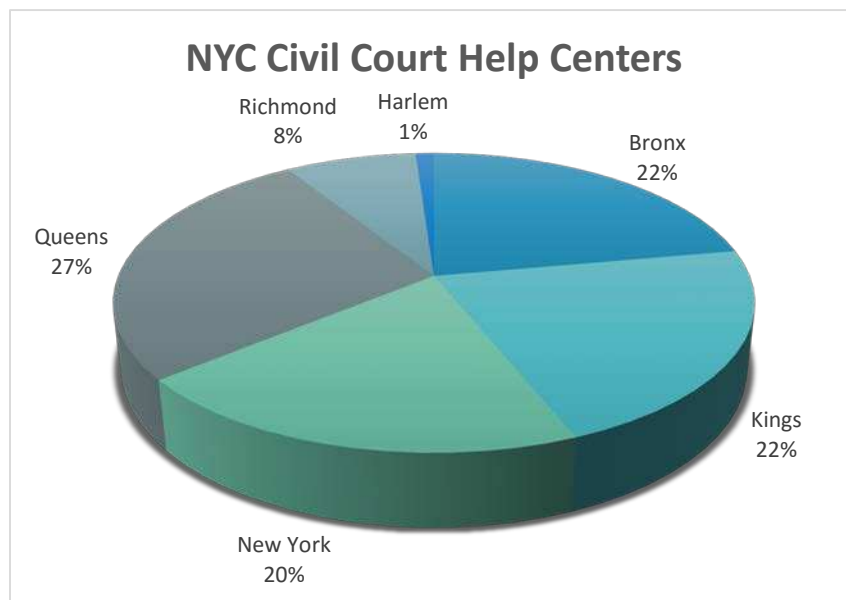
- Bronx County Supreme Court was New York City's busiest Help Center, assisting over 31,000 people.
- Kings County Supreme Court assisted over 18,750 unrepresented court users.
- An estimated 18,500 litigants visited the New York County Supreme Court Help Center.
- Queens County Supreme Court Help Center helped over 14,500 people, a 46% increase from 2014.
- Richmond County Supreme Court Help Center had 3,750 visitors, while their Surrogate's Court Help Center saw 2,990 people.

New York City Civil Court Help Centers assisted over 75,000 litigants in 2015, double the reported number of people seen in 2014. Civil Court Help Center staff review court papers, explain court orders and court procedures in civil and housing matters.

- Bronx and Kings Counties Civil Court Help Centers each saw roughly 16,500 visitors.
- Staffed by a single attorney, the Richmond County Civil Court Help Center, saw over 6,000 litigants.
- Open one day a week, the Harlem Help Center saw 843 people.
- New York County Help Center assisted 15,400 people.
- Queens County Help Center helped over 20,500.

"It is with great pleasure that I write to congratulate you on your stellar staff of professionals...whose knowledge expertise, creativity, patience and compassion combine with a highly admirable devotion to providing their clients with the finest support possible resulting in favorable resolutions and, of course, peace of mind which is priceless."

Help Center Litigant, N.Y. Co. Civil Court, August 2015



In the 7th Judicial District, the Help Center staff assisted more than 2,874 people. Located in a multi-bench courthouse, this Help Center mainly provides information on Family Court, matrimonial and landlord-tenant law. Over half of the litigants who visited this Help Center earn below \$29,000 per year, 74% of which earn less than \$19,000 per year.

The 8th Judicial District Help Center assisted 3,557 people in person, and an additional 3,750 over the phone, for a total of 7,307 people. This represents a 73% increase over the number of litigants assisted in 2014. To further serve the people of the 8th Judicial District, attorneys from Western New York Legal Center and Buffalo Legal Aid began volunteering in the Help Center following training on the DIY Form programs and the CourtHelp website.

The 9th Judicial District Supreme Court Help Center also demonstrated an increase of over 10% in its service to the unrepresented, helping an estimated of 8,740 litigants. Based in Westchester County, but serving the entire district, 46% of the litigants assisted were helped over the phone, and 53% were assisted in person. Although prepared to assist with any Supreme Court issue, 87% of the litigants were assisted with matrimonial law inquires.

In the 10th Judicial District, the Nassau County Help Center assisted over 13,300 visitors: 70% in person, 27% by phone, and 2% by mail. In Suffolk County, the Riverhead Help Center saw more than 1,890 patrons and the Central Islip Help Center assisted over 6,300 people.

A listing of the New York State Court Help Centers is available at: <http://nycourts.gov/CourtHelp/GoingToCourt/helpcenters.shtml>.

COURT NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

The Court Navigator Program (CNP), an extension of the former Resolution Assistance Program, was established in 2014 via Administrative Order of the Chief Administrative Judge (<http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/SSI/pdfs/AO-42-14.pdf>) to provide *pro bono* non-legal services to unrepresented litigants in consumer credit and housing matters. By recruiting and training non-lawyers to help litigants “navigate” the court system, the Access to Justice Program has access to a much greater pool of volunteers and can offer litigants help at the courthouse where they may need it most. Nonpayment proceedings are cases where landlords sue tenants to collect rent. In these disputes, tenants and owners or landlords face the possibility of losing their homes through eviction or foreclosure. The most common type of proceeding filed in the Housing Court is a nonpayment proceeding. Over 99% of tenants and 15% of landlords involved in such proceedings appear in court without representation. Similarly, 99% of consumer debt defendants come to court without an attorney, while 100% of plaintiff creditors are represented by counsel. Consumer debt proceedings



involve credit card companies, hospitals, banks or any other person or company that a litigant may owe money. The majority of the litigants who appear in these types of cases without an attorney are unaware of their rights, and lack knowledge of the resources available to them.

This is where CNP volunteers are most helpful and necessary; they connect the unrepresented litigants to the resources and services they need most. Specially trained and supervised non-lawyers called Court Navigators, predominantly college students, but also persons deemed appropriate by the CNP, provide general information, written materials, and one-on-one assistance to eligible unrepresented litigants. Litigants who come to court are often unfamiliar with the process and uncomfortable speaking up for themselves. Court Navigators can report any inappropriate behavior or communication by an adversary and raise awareness about available resources including places where litigants can seek free legal information and/or advice, and apply for social services. In addition, Court Navigators provide moral support to litigants, help them access and complete court forms, access interpreters, assist with keeping paperwork in order, and explain what to expect and what are the roles of each person in the courtroom. Court Navigators are also permitted to accompany unrepresented litigants into the courtroom, but cannot address the court on their own. They are able to respond to factual questions asked by the Judge. Some Court Navigators are also trained to assist litigants with the DIY Form programs.

Unrepresented litigants connect with Court Navigators once an announcement is made by court staff that volunteers are available to assist them, and litigants are then helped on a first-come first-serve basis. Court Navigators also take the initiative to approach litigants in the hallways and in the courtroom to offer their assistance and guidance.

Court Navigator Program volunteers may play an instrumental role in helping a litigant alert the court about an important point of fact or law, which may have ramifications in the outcome of the case. The Program thereby boosts public confidence in the court system by improving perceptions of fairness and accessibility to justice.

The CNP connects New Yorkers who wish to offer their time and skills to members of their community in need of assistance and support as they navigate the court system. In return, volunteers are provided with training, supervision and a unique opportunity to make contacts, and learn about courthouse procedures. College students with an interest and focus on legal, paralegal or social work studies who may want to pursue further studies or a career in that field, are particularly attracted to CNP. Students often volunteer to fulfill their school's community service or *pro bono* requirement and some serve in exchange for class credit. All

“Often, a litigant just needs someone to look them in the face and say ‘listen, I know you are really upset and I understand why. I want to help you do what you need to do,’ to be able to take a deep breath and think about the next steps they need to take.”

CNP Housing Volunteer, N.Y. Co., August 2015

participants are eligible to get a Certificate of Service in recognition and appreciation of their service and participation in the Program upon completing their 30-hour commitment. Through their participation in the Program, all participants become keenly aware of the needs of the vulnerable populations who come to Court without representation, which in turn brings light to the importance of doing *pro bono* work and sparks a greater commitment towards a deeper and longer involvement in doing volunteer service.

The CNP operates in the Bronx County Civil Court Consumer Debt Part, and the Bronx, Kings, New York and Queens County Housing Courts. The CNP maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/rap.shtml>. A Navigator Snapshot Report by the Committee on Nonlawyers and the Justice Gap, also contains additional details about the program: <https://richardzorza.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/navigator-report.pdf>.

The Public Welfare Foundation in Washington, D.C. provided a grant to the American Bar Foundation and the National Center for State Courts to carry out a social science evaluation of the Navigator program during 2014-2015. To assist with this study, the Access to Justice Program helped train summer associates and attorneys from the law firms of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Morrison & Foerster, Ropes & Gray LLP, and Kaye Scholer LLP, CNP volunteers, a CUNY School of Law Professor, social scientists and other partners from Barnard College, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the American Bar Foundation, the National Center for State Courts, and the National Center for Access to Justice, on the CNP (see Appendix "A"). The Access to Justice Program also facilitated another study of the CNP conducted by Pro Bono Net, funded by a Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant awarded to LAWNY, to assess and create technology to assist the Court Navigators. The results of these studies are expected in 2016-17.

In 2015, CNP staffing costs included the equivalent of 20% of an Access to Justice Program Special Counsel's time to recruit, schedule, train, and supervise the CNP, plus the equivalent of 45% of an administrative assistant's time. There are two non-attorney Borough Coordinators, respectively, in the Bronx County Civil Court and Bronx County Housing Court who supervise the Court Navigators at the courthouse. In the Kings, New York and Queens County Housing Courts, a Housing Court Attorney in each county devotes a small percentage of his or her time to supervise the volunteers. Other than personnel costs, the Court Navigator Program's operating costs are minimal, averaging less than \$500 per year. Training costs include light refreshments provided to attendees and ink, toner and paper for printing posters, brochures and postcards to advertise the training sessions. To save expenses, training materials are published and circulated digitally and training sessions are promoted on the Access to Justice Program and the Civil Court's websites, via email, and social media through Twitter and Facebook. No further expenses are involved since training presenters are members of

the Access to Justice Program’s staff and the Navigators work in the Court’s hallways and courtrooms.

In 2015, six Housing training programs as well as one Landlord-Tenant DIY Form Housing Program workshop were held at the New York County Housing Court. The 266 Housing Court Navigators trained contributed about 5,835 *pro bono* hours to the Program and were able to help approximately 3,300 unrepresented tenants or landlords. There were four joint Housing and Consumer Debt trainings held in Bronx County, which trained a total of 70 volunteers. The Bronx Consumer Debt Court Navigator Program assisted over 1,410 consumer litigants in the Consumer Debt Part. Training topics included, respectively, an overview of the Civil and Housing Court, basics of consumer debt cases and nonpayment proceedings, interviewing and communication skills, and using the DIY computers and LawHelp (see Appendix “A”).

The CNP operates in conjunction with the nonprofit organizations LawHelpNY, Housing Court Answers and University Settlement. In 2015, a number of area colleges and programs actively recruited their students to serve as Court Navigators, including: The City College of New York; Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies; the New York City Paralegal Association; Berkeley College; Medgar Evers College; Boricua College; Bronx Community College; The City College; College of New Rochelle; College of Mount St. Vincent; Hostos Community College; Hunter College; John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Lehman College; Manhattan College; Mercy College; the Ronald H. Brown Prep Program and Monroe College. Many college students from schools outside New York City also participate in the summer months. Court Navigators were also recognized during the National *Pro Bono* Week Awards Celebration (see Part V).

COURT TOURS AND VISITS

The Access to Justice Program oversees the Court Tours program in New York State. Court Tours are an excellent opportunity for the public to become familiar with the court system by observing the jury and trial process, learning about different types of cases and careers in the courts and by touring a courthouse. Visiting a court in session and having an opportunity to ask questions helps demystify the justice system, lessen apprehension that lay people sometimes experience, and promote public confidence in the judiciary. On a court tour, written information, instructional materials, and promotional items are distributed.

“On behalf of the Pace University Paralegal Program, I would like to again thank you and the entire night court staff for taking time to talk to the students. The experience remains a highlight each semester. The court tour is one of the events the students most look forward to, as always I thank you and the entire court personnel.”

Court Visitor, NY Co., February 2015

The Access to Justice Program spends approximately \$5500 per year on promotional items and shipping to support the Court Tours program. These items may include tote

bags, pens, key chains, flashlights and other novelty items. In addition, one Access to Justice staff member devotes 35% of her time to oversee this initiative. The various courts provides staff to conduct the tours.

In 2015, the Court Tour's program continued to receive a high volume of requests for tours from various community organizations. Thousands of student groups visited the courts, including, elementary, middle and high schools, colleges, law schools, summer youth programs, and internship programs. In addition, international groups from all over the world requested tours of the New York State Courts. In 2015, delegations visited from Denmark, Norway, Korea, The Netherlands, China, Argentina, Cambodia, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden. Information on requesting a court tour is available on the Access to Justice Program website:

http://nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/index.shtml.

SLIDESHOWS, FLYERS AND POSTERS

Litigants often have downtime while they are in the courthouse, whether they are waiting for their case to be called, to speak to Help Center staff, or on line in the Court Clerk's office. To maximize their experience in the courthouse, the Access to Justice Program creates posters, flyers, and informative slideshows to educate court visitors about court resources and procedures. Posting information on the walls of the courthouse is an excellent low cost method to deliver information in an eye catching manner. This delivery method can reach people who may be in need of information but too intimidated to ask.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program continued to expand the Housing Court slideshow created in 2013 for the New York City Housing Courts. The slideshow plays silently in the background of the Resolution Part Courtrooms and Clerk's Offices. Each slide provides small bites of information in English and Spanish, advertising the availability of various services such as interpreters and the Court Help Center. The slideshow also explains basic concepts of housing law and the roles of different courthouse personnel. A number of edits were made to the slideshow and additional slides were created and added in English and Spanish. A sampling of the new slides is annexed as a part of Appendix "D."

New CourtHelp posters and flyers were created and disseminated throughout the state to promote the new and improved website for unrepresented litigants. See: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/flyers/courthelp_poster.pdf. New Help Center posters, incorporating the new Help Center logo, were created for each Help Center and distributed to the Courts to display. See sample Columbia County Court Help Center poster annexed as a part of Appendix "D." A new statewide flyer for the Supreme and Civil Court Adult and Child Name Change DIY Form programs was also created, distributed and added to the DIY menu of flyers D available for printing: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/diyforms.shtml#flyers>.

All the posters contain a QR code (Quick Response Code), which is a machine readable optical labels that is used to convey information. The QR image of the code consists of square dots arranged in a square grid that can be read by an imaging device, like a smart phone camera. The QR codes provide shortcuts to the CourtHelp website. Litigants can scan the code on their phone for later use, rather than finding pen and paper to copy a lengthy URL address. QR codes are an excellent way to deliver access to helpful information for unrepresented litigants.

DELIVERY IN THE COMMUNITY

Bringing information and services directly into the community accommodates multitudes of litigants who cannot easily avail themselves of in-court services. This may include litigants who are homebound, disabled, have health issues, have childcare issues, cannot afford the trip to the courthouse, live too far from the courthouse, cannot benefit from information delivered over the internet, or are uncomfortable seeking assistance unless it is brought right to their front door. Holding community events in familiar surroundings helps lower anxiety levels and facilitates the litigants' ability to digest and process information. Taking these needs into account, and working with budget limitations on traveling around the state, the Access to Justice Program often seeks out partners to help deliver legal information and assistance directly into the communities it serves.

MOBILE LEGAL HELP CENTER

The Mobile Legal Help Center was created through a partnership between NYLAG and the Access to Justice Program. The Mobile Legal Help Center (MLHC) is New York's first-ever legal services office and courtroom on wheels. Aboard the MLHC, unrepresented litigants receive information, unbundled advice and counseling, assistance with document preparation, and direct representation without leaving the vehicle. The MLHC has three private meeting areas so attorneys and clients can consult in a confidential and comfortable setting. The vehicle is equipped with high-speed Internet and state-of-the-art technology. A video link with the courts enables access to judges for emergency hearings, including domestic violence and eviction cases.

"I truly believe without your assistance the outcome would have been different; you showed professionalism, courtesy, promptness and effective strategy that was definitely beneficial to my case."

MLHC Litigant, Bronx Co., October 2015

The Access to Justice Program facilitates the communication between the Courts and the MLHC by assisting with updating technology, scheduling, securing overnight parking for the MLHC, trouble shooting, and ongoing training so that court staff is readily available for any immediate assistance with interpreting, family offence petitions or procedural information. The Access to Justice Program liaison for the MLHC is

available to assist 24 hours a day, seven days a week and devotes 20% of her time to this initiative. All other costs for maintaining and staffing the MLHC are covered by NYLAG.

NYLAG and the Access to Justice Program work together to coordinate the vehicle's scheduling. In 2015, the MLHC traveled throughout the five boroughs in New York City and Nassau and Suffolk Counties, focusing on hard to reach areas with limited public transportation. In honor of National Law Day and National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the MLHC was at the Access to Justice Program's events to dispense legal and procedural information and provide legal services to the public. The MLHC, staffed by NYLAG employees, assisted over 1600 New Yorkers between January 1, 2015 and October 31, 2015. Litigants were helped with various civil legal services needs, including: consumer finance; education law; employment law; family law; health law; housing/foreclosures; income maintenance (includes social security and public benefits); immigration/naturalization; advance directives and wills; and more. Community members were provided with legal information, referrals, consultations, and full legal representation.

The Mobile Legal Help Center is publicized by community partners and through Facebook, Twitter, the NYLAG website and the Access to Justice Program's website at: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/mobilelegalhelpcenter.shtml).

COMMUNITY LAW DAY

On May 1, 1958 President Eisenhower proclaimed Law Day to honor the role of law in the creation of the United States of America. Three years later, Congress passed a joint resolution establishing May 1st as "National Law Day." In observance of National Law Day, the Access to Justice Program sponsors and hosts annual Community Law Day celebrations to offer New York residents the opportunity to receive legal advice and information from experienced attorneys and organizations, free of charge. Music, entertainment and refreshments make Community Law Day not just a legal information fair but a festive social event. More information can be found on the Access to Justice Program's website at http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/lawday.shtml.

In 2015, on Friday, May 1, the Access to Justice Program, the New York State Court Officers Association and the New York City Bar's Legal Referral Service co-sponsored Community Law Day in New York County. Balloons, music, refreshments and free giveaways made the otherwise cool and windy day a festive event. Over 20 agencies gathered at Collect Pond Park to participate in the three and a half hour event including, Safe Horizon, NYC Department for the Aging, the LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York, the Legal Aid Society, the Administration for Children's Services and Sanctuary for Families. The NYLAG Mobile Legal Help Center and the Legal Referral Service were on hand to dispense legal and procedural information and provide free

private legal consultations with experienced attorneys to assist members of the public with their legal and social needs. Hundreds of people stopped by to take advantage of the free information, literature and legal services.

PART III: DELIVERY OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

The Access to Justice Program is committed to providing justice for individuals with diverse backgrounds or special needs in a manner that is both fair and efficient. Toward this end, the Access to Justice Program oversees a number of programs and initiatives aimed at assisting litigants who, due to age, physical or mental impairments, financial or other limitations are unable to meaningfully avail themselves of court-based programs or self-help. It is the responsibility of the justice system to ensure that everyone who comes to and before the court is treated respectfully, fairly, and equally and the Access to Justice Program strives to ensure that this responsibility is sustained in every program it oversees.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Program sought to strengthen the skill set of GALs by providing numerous opportunities for added training relevant to the challenges they face in advocating for the needs of mentally and physically impaired litigants in danger of eviction. It also continued its ongoing work to assist the court in accessing GALs more efficiently, reward GALs for increased *pro bono* service, and foster relationships with outside legal providers and governmental agencies to facilitate GAL advocacy. Poverty Simulation trainings and education also remained a priority as the Access to Justice Program worked to sensitize court staff and law students to the difficulties faced by litigants living in poverty.

The programs described in this Part strive to equalize the playing field by staying mindful of the complexity of challenges these litigants face, which are often the very root of their legal troubles. By investing in a holistic approach, the Access to Justice Program aims to facilitate access to justice and meaningful assistance for the most vulnerable of litigants.

GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

The Access to Justice Program oversees the operation of the New York City Housing Court Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Program. The GAL Program recruits, trains, supervises and maintains a pool of GALs for Housing Court Judges to appoint on behalf of people facing a Housing Court proceeding who are disadvantaged due to age or disability. Such impairments place the litigant at a disadvantage when they are not able to fully participate in resolving their New York City Housing Court case. Instead, they might be more likely to enter into unrealistic agreements, forego viable defenses, agree to unfavorable terms, fail to explore all options, or may not follow through with the terms of the agreement entered into, thus heightening their risk for eviction.



Litigants who are unable to advocate for themselves due to a physical or mental impairment greatly benefit from the appointment of a GAL who can intercede and successfully resolve their case on their behalf. Once appointed, GALs attend every court appearance, work to secure One-Shot-Deals to pay for arrears owed, set-up heavy duty cleanings to render an apartment safe, reinstate lost entitlements or secure new ones, or connect the litigant to services to prevent court recidivism. Litigants who are appointed a GAL do not have to pay for these services.

Guardians Ad Litem are trained by a panel of experts in the fields of legal and social work advocacy and landlord-tenant law. Both attorneys and non-attorneys can participate in the Program. In fact, approximately 48% of the Program's current GALs are non-attorneys, yet have a wealth of social work advocacy experience. To safeguard the interests of the population served, GALs undergo a background check and successfully complete an interview and reference check before being invited to participate in the Program. This results in a highly qualified select group of people being added to the list. Guardians Ad Litem are compensated by the New York City Human Resources Administration, but also agree to accept at least three *pro bono* appointments per year in cases that do not qualify for payment because the ward is not a client of HRA's Adult Protective Services.

Since HRA covers most GAL compensation, and remaining cases are handled *pro bono*, the cost to the court system to maintain the GAL Program is minimal in light of the large number of wards assisted each year. Personnel costs include the equivalent of 80% of an Access to Justice Program Special Counsel/MSW who coordinates the Program city-wide, plus the equivalent of 50% of a program assistant to perform administrative functions that relate to the Program. The GAL Program's Special Counsel oversees the daily operations of the Program and remains a resource to judges, GALs, and members of the public in need of guidance concerning a GAL related matter. All guest speakers and trainers understand how critical the GAL Program is to the court, litigants, landlord's bar, and governmental agencies and therefore volunteer their time to provide training free of charge. Non-personnel expenses total less than \$500 per year. These include office supplies and refreshments for trainings and recruitment flyers and brochures. Recruitment of new GALs is conducted primarily via the Access to Justice Program's website, social media and other internet sites aimed at attracting volunteers. Much recruitment derives from word of mouth as judges, attorneys, and local organizations encourage people well-suited to become a GAL to apply.

Information on the GAL program for prospective and participating GALs, landlords, and tenants is available at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/GAL.shtml>.

As fully detailed in Appendix "A," in 2015, the GAL Program conducted numerous trainings. Two free CLE general trainings to become a GAL were held and a total of 30 new GALs were trained. In addition, GALs were invited to participate in six supplemental CLE workshops, two of which were facilitated in collaboration with the

VLFD/VLP Housing Program. These workshops are provided to enhance the GALs' ability to render quality services to their wards. Supplemental trainings included: "Handling Complex Cases: Dos and Don'ts for GALs," "Nuisance Holdovers 101," "Nuts and Bolts of Non-primary Residence Holdovers," "Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization," "Training to be on NYCHA GAL List," and "Traverse Hearings 101." A special 2.5 hour CLE training entitled "Domestic Violence and Courtroom Advocacy" was also offered in October in recognition of domestic violence month (see Part IV). Lay GAL trainings were also conducted for 24 family members seeking to become a GAL for their impaired loved ones, representing an increase of 118%.

The law firm of Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP generously continued its support of the Access to Justice Program's GAL Program. Two trained associates shadowed a seasoned GAL, then accepted four *pro bono* appointments, advocating on behalf of their impaired wards. Other GALs continue to lend their time and effort free of charge by exceeding the three *pro bono* appointments per year requirement. The Access to Justice Program recognized seventeen GALs with an award for their steadfast commitment to *pro bono* work and service to impaired litigants and the court (see Part V).

The GAL Program and the Department of Technology (DOT) completed expansion and refinement of the GAL FileMaker Application. The Application was expanded to Bronx Housing court, making it available city-wide. All Housing Court Judges and Court Attorneys can now immediately request and obtain GAL names from the convenience of their computers. In addition, the GAL Program can collect programmatic data on the population served and evolving trends. Refinements to the Application allow the GALs who accept more *pro bono* appointments to receive more offers for paid appointments, while still abiding by PART 36 Rules and neutrality. The Application also incorporates features that make it more efficient for Court use, thereby enhancing its benefit.

In 2015, the GAL Program began providing GALs with court IDs. These IDs not only legitimize their role when visiting with wards and outside agencies on behalf of their wards, but they also allow for GALs to enjoy preferred entry to the courthouse.

"I was appointed as guardian of a woman who was 102 years old and was being evicted from her home in Bath Beach. She was being taken care of by her son who was in his early 60s, who was also taking care of his brother who was in his late 50s and had Down syndrome. It was a very sobering event, and one of the first tastes of the awesome responsibility to be able to assist people in need."

GAL, Kings Co., September 2015

The GAL Program's Special Counsel plays an active role in advocating for GALs facing unique challenges in resolving their wards' court cases by acting as an intermediary in securing information for GALs and facilitating communication between GALs and outside organizations that play an instrumental role in the resolution of a ward's Housing

Court case. The Special Counsel's advocacy results in the successful resolution of countless cases. Without this support, GALs would encounter a multitude of bureaucratic obstacles. Toward this end, a meeting was arranged between the Special Counsel to HRA's Commissioner, the Assistant General Counsel at HRA's Office of Legal Affairs, and the GALs to discuss recent changes at HRA and how these changes affect court advocacy (see April listing in Appendix "A").

The Guardian Ad Litem Program is unique to New York City. Outside New York City there is no dedicated program for the appointment of GALs in landlord-tenant matters. In the fall of 2015, the GAL Program surveyed the New York City Housing Court Judges to explore replication of the GAL Program outside New York City. A copy of the survey is annexed as Appendix "E." The results of the survey revealed the following:

- 94% of the Judges think that the GAL Program prevents evictions of impaired people
- 86% of the Judges believe that it would be "difficult" or "very difficult" to find GALs to accept cases if the Housing Court GAL Program did not exist
- 87% of the Judges think that having the Housing Court GAL Program improves efficiency in the courtroom by having an advocate for the ward
- 89% of the Judges think that the GAL Program connects litigants to outside government agencies and community resources and helps cut through bureaucratic red tape
- 72% of the Judges think that the GAL Program provides Judges with a pool of GALs trained in landlord-tenant law

Judges were asked what did they think happens to impaired litigants when no GAL is appointed to advocate on their behalf?

- 91% think "more are evicted"
- 85% think "they are unable to raise appropriate defenses"
- 62% think that "the 'root cause' of the litigation is not resolved leading to recidivism"

"Without a GAL many are unable to successfully resolve the underlying issues, most commonly nonpayment of rent and nuisance issues like cluttering. The GAL focuses on those issues which is a tremendous help to the litigant and the court."

*Housing Court Judge, Bronx Co.,
December 2015*

Lastly, Judges were provided the option of sharing an example of something that they have seen a GAL do that has made a difference in the life of his or her ward. The following is a sampling of their comments:

- "I had a litigant who was bipolar. She had stopped taking her meds and was suicidal; the kindness and assistance of the GAL made her realize her case was not hopeless, she resumed taking her meds; the guardian obtained a grant for the ward that paid her arrears in full and ended the litigation."
- "In a HO action, pro [s]e litigant could not express the issues/defenses in a non-aggressive way due to lack of education, frustration and mental disability. GAL, in a

quieter setting with less time constraints, was able to get the issues out & clarify defenses, evidence, etc, all of which helped settle the action without an eviction.”

- “I have seen GAL’s coordinate with agencies to deliver services to prevent evictions, including payment of rent and deep cleaning of apartments with hoarding conditions and successfully interpose substantive defenses at trial, which prevented the ward’s eviction.”
- “I can recall an extraordinary case where the GAL was able to end the financial exploitation of the elderly, disabled ward by a third-party and reunite the ward with her family.”
- “The outstanding GAL in this proceeding worked with various agencies to obtain over \$40,000 in outstanding arrears and thus saved tenant from eviction.”
- “[C]onvinced the ward to accept a heavy duty cleaning allowing the tenant to remain in the apartment[.]”
- “It has been my experience on many occasions that a GAL has been able to make someone feel empowered to assert their rights and preserve a long term rent regulated tenancy. When if they were standing alone, due to either their significant disability or lack of an advocate who can access resources on their behalf (such as obtaining legal representation or government benefits), they would have lost housing of last resort[.]”
- “I have seen GALs articulate arguments in a cogent manner that their ward would have never been able to do. The trial was a better adjudication of both sides’ issues because, if there wasn’t a GAL, the Court would have had to parse through all the documents and statements and try to determine the issue. There is no guarantee that this would have happened.”
- “A GAL was able to coordinate assistance available to the ward in 3 different agencies and to apply for DRIE (something the ward would not have been able to do).”
- “In an access holdover which had been on the calendar for a year before the GAL was appointed, the GAL was able to assist in getting the apartment cleared to facilitate the repair work that was needed and in the process averted an eviction.”

In 2015, approximately 45% of the number of litigants appointed a GAL were facing a nonpayment proceeding, 52% involved holdover proceedings, and 3% HP proceedings. It is estimated that more than 33% of the judicial requests for GALs were made due to concerns that the litigant was mentally impaired, 16% were due to physical impairment concerns, while 51% were due to both. In addition, over 62% of the people appointed a GAL were age 60 and above. The New York City Housing Part GAL Program is able to serve over 1400 physically and mentally impaired litigants each year.

ASSIGNED COUNSEL PROJECT

The Access to Justice Program continues its partnership with the Department for the Aging (DFTA) to provide free legal and social work services to seniors facing eviction or owners or tenants whose safety is threatened by a tenant or roommate. Seniors facing New York City Housing Court proceedings often live in apartments that are rent

controlled or rent stabilized, have Section 8 subsidies, or are the recipients of entitlements such as SCRIE. Under these protective laws and subsidies, seniors are able to afford rent payments notwithstanding limited income. Yet, with increased age, many seniors find themselves in a position where, due to their deteriorating health, they are no longer able to manage their responsibilities in the same way, resulting in a Housing Court proceeding being brought against them.

Established in 2005, the Assigned Counsel Project (ACP) provides eligible seniors with an attorney and social worker, or social work intern, who work as a team to help seniors resolve their Housing Court cases. Seniors must be sixty years of age or older, have an identifiable social service need, and a pending Housing Court case in order to be assisted by the Project. Legal representation is provided at no cost to the litigant by the following sub-contracted legal service providers: Brooklyn Legal Services, Inc.; JASA Queens Legal Services for the Elderly; Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn; Legal Aid Society, the Bronx; and MFY Legal Services, Inc. More information on the Project can be found at:

<http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/services.shtml#acp>.

“Thank you so very much for the kindness and tenderness you showed me during my visit with you. Because of such good people like yourself, seniors like me can rest easily knowing we will not lose our home.”

ACP Tenant, Kings Co., 2015

The Access to Justice Program conducts overall program coordination and advocacy, and facilitates communication between the partners; ensuring that Judges refer seniors to the ACP, that seniors are aware of the existence of the ACP, and that the partners remain responsive to challenges each face in serving a growing number of seniors with existing limited staff. The Civil Court Housing Court Attorneys conduct initial screening to determine if a senior is appropriate for services and to coordinate with DFTA and the legal service providers so that seniors are successfully linked to an attorney and social worker once their referral is accepted. The partners also continue to work diligently to connect those who are not accepted by ACP to other available resources for help. Seniors who may otherwise find it challenging to obtain help in the processing of renewal applications or delivery of information necessary to remain in their apartment are assisted by the Access to Justice Program Special Counsel and the DFTA ACP Director through informal but effective advocacy efforts. Moreover, beginning in March 2015, the ACP Director visits the New York County Help Center twice a week to provide social service help and advice to seniors facing eviction due to underlining problems with SCRIE. In 2015, 63 seniors were assisted in such a way.

Since the Legal Services Providers and the ACP Director are paid through DFTA, the cost to the Access to Justice Program to support the ACP is minimal. Personnel costs include the equivalent of 15% of a Special Counsel/MSW. Housing Court Attorneys devote a significant amount of time screening referred seniors for the Program and completing required paperwork.

In 2015, after a meeting in Kings County Housing Court with Access to Justice Program staff, the Supervising Judge of Kings County Housing Court, Help Center staff, Legal Aid, DFTA, and Legal Services of New York representatives, the six page ACP intake form was revised to create a streamlined one page referral & intake form. The new form speeds up intake for the Help Center staff and litigant, and provides the legal services provider with all relevant information. The new form was piloted in the Kings County Housing Court in October 2015.

In 2015, the ACP served approximately 511 seniors facing Housing Court proceedings in Bronx, Kings, New York and Queens Counties.

ASSIGNED COUNSEL PROJECT INTERNSHIP

Created in 2014, the Assigned Counsel Project Internship Program, now in operation in Kings, New York County and Queens Housing Court, recruits, trains, and supervises law student and recent law graduate interns to assist the court in conducting intake and assessing the legal and social services needs of vulnerable seniors at risk of eviction. Interested volunteers must successfully interview, participate in a comprehensive training, and complete a 50-hour service commitment alongside experienced Help Center Court Attorneys.

“I found the Assigned Counsel Project when researching ways to blend my J.D. with an interest in social work. Doing the intake process for the Assigned Counsel Project was a great way to become familiar with some of the issues low income seniors in New York City face, as well as to become familiar with landlord/tenant law.”

ACP Intern, Kings Co., June 2015

The internship training consists of an 8.5 hour video-replay of the VLFD Housing and VLP Housing training, a two hour video replay of “Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)” and “The One Shot Deal,” and two live trainings. The live trainings instruct the interns on how to identify social service needs when conducting an intake with a senior seeking to be accepted into the program. The training teaches the use of open ended questions, how to pay close attention to body language when gathering information and how to address sensitive areas that may present a concern. An overview of the ACP program and a brief introduction to the Court Help Centers and Housing Court is provided. The interns are trained to conduct intake and practice issue spotting to increase intake efficiency. The internship and training is conducted through collaboration between the Access to Justice Program’s Housing Court Initiatives, Help Centers, and Court-Based Interdisciplinary Programs. Visit: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/intern.shtml> to learn more.

In 2015, two classes of volunteers participated in this internship program. (See Appendix “A”). All interns completed well beyond their 50-hour commitment serving their community’s most vulnerable members. Given that existing Access to Justice

Program and Court Help Center staff carry out the training and supervision of the interns and that the intern's work significantly frees up Help Center Court Attorneys to assist litigants, this internship is very beneficial to court operations. At the same time, the ACP Internship Program provides volunteers with an opportunity to give back to their community while meeting their *pro bono* requirements.

HOUSING HELP PROGRAM

In 2004, the New York City Housing Court partnered with the United Way of New York City, the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and Legal Service NYC to establish the Housing Help Program (HHP), the nation's first court-based homelessness prevention program. Since 2009, the Access to Justice Program has partnered with DHS, Robin Hood, The Legal Aid Society and various community based organizations, continuing the HHP's provision of integrated legal and social services to threatened families at the greatest risk of homelessness in the Bronx, Kings and Queens Counties.

Upon entering the Housing Court, litigants from designated zip codes are referred to the Court Help Center where a Court Clerk confirms eligibility. Attorneys, paralegals and social workers from the Legal Aid Society then interview the family, exploring all of the issues that have led to their housing crisis. The HHP then helps the family answer the landlord's petition and develops a comprehensive legal and social service plan to prevent the family from becoming homeless. Services range from full representation by an attorney throughout the Housing Court case to brief assistance from a paralegal with obtaining rental arrears to obtaining long-term supportive services through a social worker. On the return date of the petition, a single judge hears all HHP cases in a designated Part where HHP staff is available to all families. This unique approach allows for greater judicial oversight, meaningful negotiations between the parties and far more equitable settlements. With the population in New York City homeless shelters rising, the HHP promotes housing stability. In 2013, the John F. Kennedy's School of Government at Harvard University recognized the HHP as one of the top 25 programs in that year's "Innovations in American Government Award" competition.

In 2015, the HHP's innovative approach to homelessness prevention continued to be an overwhelming success. In the first six months of 2015, only 16 out of the 2,589 families with eviction cases entered shelters (.06%) after being assisted by the HHP.

POVERTY SIMULATIONS

Inequality and poverty are increasingly on the forefront of people's minds. According to the 2014 United States Census Bureau Report, the federal poverty guideline for a family of four is \$24,230 a year. The official poverty rate for the United States is 14.8% which equals 46.7 million people living in poverty. In New York state 15.9% of the population lives in poverty, which is about 3,062,938 people. (See <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60->

[252.pdf](#)). Now more than ever it is imperative to recognize the limitations that people living in poverty have when interacting with the court system. Many litigants lack the resources to access transportation to the courthouse and social services agencies, let alone the ability to fully deal with their cases when they appear in court. The Access to Justice Program conducts Poverty Simulations for court system personnel and law students to educate and sensitize the legal community about how economic privilege affects the justice system and to encourage the provision of services in a more respectful and understanding manner. Poverty Simulations improve coordination, team building, and innovative thinking of its participants.

A Poverty Simulation is a ½ day training that places participants into groups of one to five, with each group representing an impoverished family. Participants are assigned a fictitious identity, family, and financial situation then forced to work together to simulate a one month period living in poverty. They live four 15 minute simulated weeks during which they have to do all the things families normally do on a regular basis -- go to school or work, pay bills, grocery shop, take care of emergencies, and so forth -- essentially live life with the resources of those living at the poverty level. They do this by interacting with the various agencies, officials and retailers found in the community -- the grocer, banker, teacher, policeman, etc. After the Simulation all parties participate in a discussion to share their reflections on the experience.

A Poverty Simulation kit, numerous volunteers and a large space are required to hold a Poverty Simulation. The primary one time cost involved is the purchase of the Poverty Simulation kit. Having bought a kit and modified it for court system use several years ago, the annual costs to conduct Poverty Simulations are minimal. In 2015, The Access to Justice Program devoted the equivalent of 1% of a Special Counsel's time, and less than 1% of three support staff members to running the Simulations. Non-personnel costs were less than \$300 for travel and food.

In 2015, for the second year in a row, the Access to Justice Program conducted Poverty Simulation training for the entire first year law class of Touro Law Center. In addition, New York City Housing and Civil Court Judges also participated in the Poverty Simulation with the law students. Touro Law Center professors, 2L and 3L students, and some of the Judges, played the roles of community groups and office staff and interacted with the "families." A total of 140 law students and over 60 New York City Housing and Civil Court Judges were trained over the two half day sessions. (See October listing in Appendices "A" and "C").

"The experience of treatment by the various community members (bank, work, social services), and experiencing how poorly they treated the individuals who went to them for assistance. This illustrated to me how difficult it is to obtain various services and how discriminated against people of low-financial means are."

Touro Law Center 1L Student, Suffolk Co., October 2015

The Access to Justice Program joined the newly formed NYS Poverty Simulation Network in 2015. As a subgroup under the New York State Community Action Association, its goal is to pool resources, ideas, and strategies between New York State providers.

For more information about the Poverty Simulations and past events visit the Access to Justice Program's website at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/povertysimulation.shtml>

PART IV: TRAININGS, PRESENTATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

Despite limited staff and budget, the Access to Justice Program spends a substantial amount of time each year conducting trainings, making presentations and publishing written materials which are aimed at those who are in the position to improve access to justice for others. The Access to Justice Program reaches out to lawyers, students, members of the access to justice community, legal services providers, advocate groups, bar associations, public officials, community leaders, librarians, and court system personnel about access to justice programs and initiatives. Education is the key to increasing and strengthening awareness of the inequalities that exist in accessing the justice system and to providing the tools for assisting the unrepresented public. Understanding and heightened awareness of the obstacles that unrepresented litigants face promotes the change and support needed for measures that can level the playing field for the estimated 1.8 million New Yorkers who navigate their way through the court system each year on their own.

The Access to Justice Program conducts educational programs both inside and outside the courthouse, employing a variety of training and presentation methods. Live training programs with the opportunity for discussion or hands-on use of technology are ideal. More often, technology is utilized to keep costs down and reach a greater audience across the state. In-house trainings are conducted via webinar and many volunteer trainings are conducted via video replay. Publications are posted on the internet, with few copies printed to save costs. Social media is used to promote trainings, presentations and publications.

A summary of the Access to Justice Program's 2015 trainings, presentations and publications is set forth in this Part. A detailed chronological listing of the trainings and presentations conducted for the public is contained in Appendix "A" and a detailed chronological listing of the trainings conducted for court system personnel is contained in Appendix "C."

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

A significant part of the Access to Justice Program's training regimen is devoted to educating program volunteers so they are fully prepared to assist the unrepresented public. As is previously noted in this Report, the Access to Justice Program regularly recruits volunteers and conducts trainings for volunteer law students, law graduates and lawyers who participate in the court-based unbundled legal services programs where they are supervised by experienced practitioners. The Access to Justice Program is an accredited CLE provider and offers free CLE in exchange for the *pro bono* participation. The substantive legal training and supervision help ensure that competent quality services are provided. Similarly, the Access to Justice Program regularly conducts training for the non-lawyer volunteers who provide legal information and assistance in the court-based programs. Completion of training is a pre-requisite to participate in all Access to Justice Program volunteer programs.

The Access to Justice Program offers frequent training sessions in order to keep up the cadre of qualified volunteers who give up their free time to help relieve the unrepresented crisis. Training dates and details for the VLFD, VLP, Limited Assistance, Court Navigator, GAL, ACP Internship, VAP, and Uncontested Divorce Programs are contained in Appendix “A.” As can be seen, a number of Programs (GAL, VLP Housing and VLFD Housing) also offered additional trainings and workshops to existing volunteers to supplement the basic education and further hone skills. Several Programs collaborated to hold joint trainings.

The majority of the training is conducted in the New York County Civil Court. In 2015, a number of volunteer trainings were graciously hosted by participating area law firms, corporations, and schools, including: Barclays; Brooklyn Law School; Colgate-Palmolive; Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP; Paul Hastings LLP; Proskauer Rose LLP; and St. John’s University School of Law. The trainings were conducted by a combination of court staff, program directors, judges and volunteer attorneys from private practice or government agencies. Guest presenters graciously shared their expertise and time without compensation. (2015 presenters are included in the back of this Report under “Partners, Friends and Volunteers”).

An appreciable number of hours is devoted to preparing law students, law graduates and newly admitted attorneys to participate in the court-based unbundled legal services programs and instilling a desire to continue *pro bono* work long into their legal careers. The Access to Justice Program partners with several participating law schools through a judiciary civil legal services grant, to teach law students the skills needed to assist the unrepresented public. Twice a year, the Access to Justice Program also offers a multi-day, multi-program Bridge-the-Gap training series, which emphasizes education of law students and new lawyers and encourages continued participation in volunteer programs. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program conducted its Poverty Simulation training for the entire first year class of Touro Law Center students to give them an understanding of life in poverty. (Law student and new lawyer trainings are detailed in Appendix “A”).

PERSONNEL TRAINING

Equally essential to the Access to Justice Program’s training agenda is education of judicial and non-judicial court system employees. The importance of training court personnel cannot be overemphasized. The men and women who tirelessly work in the notoriously short-staffed New York State court system are the public face of the court. They must be properly educated and provided with the tools needed to assist the confused and bewildered unrepresented litigants that come through the courts on a daily basis, many of whom are intimidated by the legal process. The Access to Justice Program offers a variety of training programs for court personnel throughout the year. Many webinar training sessions are open to all personnel. Targeted trainings are

conducted for Help Center personnel, Court Clerks, Public Access Law Librarians, Court Attorneys and Judges.

In 2015, the Access to Justice Program held 26 trainings for court personnel. In particular, considerable time was spent on training court employees about the CourtHelp website and the Court Help Centers. The more court system personnel are educated about these resources, the greater the benefit to access to justice and courthouse efficiency. In fact, the genesis for the new Help Center in Columbia County is attributable to the Access to Justice Program personnel training. (See Appendix “C” for a listing of personnel training conducted in 2015).

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Public presentations are another important component of the Access to Justice Program’s training efforts. Presentations about the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives and current access to justice topics of concern are vital to spread the message about injustices and promote discussion and brainstorming of ideas to facilitate increased access to justice. In 2015, Justice Fern A. Fisher and the Access to Justice Program’s extended staff presented at numerous conferences and webinars discussing various access to justice topics, including; law school incubators; cultural competency; unbundled legal services; Court Help Centers; roles of Judges to facilitate access; document assembly programs; and the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives and programs. For the first time, the Access to Justice Program hosted its own conference on limited scope representation and many of the Access to Justice Program staff participated in the presentations (see Part I). Details of all 2015 presentations are included in Appendix “A.”

Additionally, Justice Fisher, Chief Counsel Rochelle Klempner and Access to Justice Program staff frequently attend and learn from numerous trainings, discussions, conferences, presentations and committee meetings, both national and in New York, that work to address litigant challenges and the lack of civil legal services. Although these are not listed in this Report, the Access to Justice Program’s participation in educational programs and learning from others is equally as important as sharing the Access to Justice Program’s own knowledge and data. Continuing education is always needed to improve existing programs and develop new initiatives.

TRAININGS FOR OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The Access to Justice Program makes every effort to share the practices that have proven successful in increasing access to justice in the New York State Courts by entertaining visitors from around the world when they come to New York. Every year, live trainings and tours are conducted for other jurisdictions and access to justice advocates in an effort to provide guidance for court systems contemplating or undertaking replication of some of the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives. In 2014, after visiting the Access to Justice Program, the Kansas court system opened its first

Help Center in Johnson County, Kansas. This Help Center utilized much of the information they learned on their visit to New York. Their experience is detailed in an article: [Starting a Help Center in Twelve Easy Steps: One Court's Experience with Trial, Error, and Lots of Help](#), available at: bit.ly/1GomYpn.

The year 2015 brought more visitors from near and far to the Access to Justice Program. In March 2015, an eight-person delegation from the Supreme Court of Nepal visited Bronx County Family Court Help Center in the morning and spent the afternoon with Justice Fisher and the Access to Justice Program staff learning about access to justice programs and initiatives. Presentations were made about court-based unbundled volunteer lawyer programs, the Guardian Ad Litem program, law student outreach, program partnerships, the Mobile Legal Help Center, the CourtHelp website, DIY Form programs and Court Help Centers. The Nepal delegation, led by Senior Justice Kalyan Shrestha, and organized by D. Christopher Decker, Chief Technical Advisor, Rule of Law and Human Rights Programme, United Nations Development Programme, visited Arizona and Washington D.C., before finishing their judicial outreach trip in New York.

In July 2015, the Access to Justice Program entertained visitors from the Pennsylvania's court system and legal services office. This visit was arranged after Rochelle Klempner presented on the New York State Court's experience with A2J Author software at CALI's (The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instructions) June webinar (see Appendix "A"). Vivian M. Appel, Esq., Family Court Administrator, Lehigh County Court of Common Pleas and Sheila J. Fisher, Esq., document assembly developer, North Penn Legal Services spent two days learning about the Access to Justice Program's work on document assembly programs, Court Help Centers, and the unrepresented litigant training conducted for judicial and non-judicial staff. The Pennsylvania guests were also escorted to the Bronx County Family Court Help Center for a tour of its state-of-the-art services.

"I was over-the-top impressed - by not only the Bronx County Help Center (and Mike Williams), but also by what care you took to arrange a meaningful visit for Vivian and me. Thanks again."

Sheila Fisher, North Penn Legal Services, July 2015

In August 2015, Judge Boakye-Yiadom, Second Deputy Judicial Secretary in the Judicial Service of Ghana visited Justice Fern A. Fisher to discuss access to justice initiatives, including court-based volunteer lawyer programs and DIY Form programs. The visit was arranged by Alena Herklotz of the Leitner Center for International Law & Justice at Fordham Law School.

In September 2015, David M. Eppler, Special Assistant to the Attorney General of the State of Maryland, visited the Access to Justice Program to share ideas and discuss programs and resources that increase access to justice for unrepresented litigants. In the morning, Judge Fisher and the Access to Justice Program's staff made presentations on various topics, including unbundled court-based volunteer programs,

community outreach programs, the Guardian Ad Litem program, document assembly programs, the CourtHelp website and Court Help Centers. In the afternoon, Mr. Eppler was escorted to the Bronx County Family Court Help Center to observe and tour the innovative facility.

PUBLICATIONS

The Access to Justice Program publishes various resources aimed at promoting improved access to justice within the New York State court system. The publications are written with it in mind that the principles and best practices suggested for New York can be replicated elsewhere. Publications are linked on the Access to Justice Program's website at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/publications.shtml>. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program published or updated the following three publications.

- Justice Fern A. Fisher, authored an article in the CUNY Law Review, urging the judiciary to embrace a new definition of judicial activism in light of the legal needs crisis. The article discusses the various ways that judges can improve the administration of justice. See: Fern Fisher, Moving Toward a More Perfect World: Achieving Equal Access to Justice Through a New Definition of Judicial Activism, CUNY L. Rev., vol. 17-2 (2015), available at: http://www.cunylawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CNY202_Fern-Fisher.pdf.
- Rochelle Klempner, Esq., authored a new version of the Access to Justice Program's Best Practice Guide for Court Help Centers. The Guide is available online at: http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/NYSA2J_BestPracticesHelpCenter.pdf. The best practices are aimed at court administrators and personnel inside and outside New York State who are already interested in establishing a new Court Help Center or improving services in an existing Court Help Center. The guide is divided into six parts that cover initial considerations, services, set-up, staffing and responsibilities, promotion and oversight. The goal of the publication is to facilitate Court Help Center expansion.
- Yacine Barry-Wun, Esq., updated the Access to Justice Program's Handbook for Volunteer Programs. This Handbook includes information on the operations and procedures of the Court Help Centers and important guidelines for Access to Justice Program court-based program volunteers. The Handbook is available online at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/VolunteerHandbook.pdf>.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS

Tens of thousands of Family Offense Petitions are filed in the New York State Family and Criminal Courts each year by litigants seeking protection from domestic violence. Domestic violence thrives when people lack information about available resources and support that might empower them to seek help. Those who volunteer to help litigants with other legal matters in the court may recognize signs of domestic violence and yet not know what to say and how to help. In recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness

Month, in October 2015 the Access to Justice Program featured a 2.5 hour CLE training for all court volunteers entitled "Domestic Violence and Courtroom Advocacy."

During this training, the speaker, Jennifer L. DeCarli, Senior Director, Legal Services, Her Justice, provided an overview of the dynamics of domestic violence, New York State's family, criminal, immigration and housing laws relevant to domestic violence and resources available for victims of domestic violence. Specific laws addressed included the following: New York's mandatory arrest statute, primary aggressor statute, orders of protection in Family and Criminal Court, the role of ACS in domestic violence cases, and the federal Violence Against Women Act protections afforded to clients with regard to housing and immigration. The training also featured discussion on how to effectively and sensitively ask about domestic violence and how to connect litigants to available social service resources in their community.

PART V: RECOGNITION

The Access to Justice Program could not assist thousands of unrepresented litigants each year without the commitment of hundreds of volunteers. The law firms, solo-practitioners, corporations, government attorneys, non-profit organizations, law schools, non-attorneys, and court personnel who give so much of their time and energy are essential for providing assistance and improving access to the courts for litigants who do not have counsel.

It is important to spotlight the difference these organizations, individuals and court employees make in peoples' lives. Therefore, every year, the Access to Justice Program acknowledges the volunteers who are integral to the success of the court-based programs and who go above and beyond and extend themselves on behalf of others. Their *pro bono* service is trumpeted during National *Pro Bono* Week with deep appreciation for their contribution. Volunteers are also featured on the Access to Justice Program's Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/NYCOURTSVLP> and Twitter feed: <http://twitter.com/NYCOURTSA2J>. Individual court employees and Court staffs are recognized for their contributions to the DIY Form programs at Star Award ceremonies held throughout the year.

Equally important to recognize are the contributions of judicial and non-judicial staff throughout New York State who continuously further the Access to Justice Program's goals through their own efforts.

This section reports the contributions deserving of recognition in 2015. In addition, the names of Access to Justice Program Partners, Friends and Volunteers are set forth at the back of this Report.

NATIONAL PRO BONO CELEBRATION WEEK VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Pro Bono Celebration Week is a national event that takes place every year in late October with events all over the country acknowledging the extraordinary contributions of volunteer attorneys. During the seventh annual *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the Access to Justice Program, the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA), and the New York County Lawyers' Association (NYCLA) co-sponsored a *pro bono* volunteer recognition event on Thursday, October 29, 2015 at NYCLA. Awards were presented by NYCLA President Carol A. Sigmond, NYSBA President-elect Claire P. Gutekunst and Fern A. Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts and Director, New York State Courts Access to Justice Program. All of the Access to Justice Program honorees performed over 50 hours of *pro bono* services in a court-based program throughout 2015. A complete list of all the volunteers who were recognized for their outstanding *pro bono*



service is listed in the back of this Report and is available online at: http://nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/ProBonoAwards_2015.pdf. A photo gallery from the event is posted on the Access to Justice Program Facebook page: www.facebook.com/NYCourtsVLP.

Special recognition was given to a number of exceptional attorneys and non-attorneys for their dedication and commitment. The Access to Justice Program honorees included Juanita Lasprilla, Esq., who received a Superstar Award for her five years of dedicated service in the Uncontested Divorce Program; Guardian Ad Litem Program volunteer Jaime Lathrop, Esq.; Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program volunteers Shaun McElhenny, Esq. and Len Colonna, Esq.; Uncontested Divorce Program volunteers Carolyn A. Mann, Esq. and Horacio Sardinas, Esq.; Housing Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program volunteer Evelyn Kaye Lin, Esq.; Housing and Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Programs volunteer Thomas Joseph Mennecke, Esq.; Housing Volunteer Lawyers Program volunteer Andres Edwin Valles, Esq.; Civil Court Volunteer Lawyers Program volunteers Ginu Jacob, Esq. and Law Student Victoria Hill; Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program volunteers George Bassias, Esq. and Law Students Tyler Roberts and Israel Appel; and Court Navigator Program volunteers Vanessa Gutierrez, Jacqueline Zeigler and Sherly Romero.

The law firm of Paul Hastings LLP was also presented with a plaque in recognition of its contribution to the Housing Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program. Paul Hastings has an established record of *pro bono* service in the Access to Justice Program in that well over 100 of their associates and partners have taken the VLFD Housing Program training. The award was accepted by Paul Hastings Senior Litigation Associate Anthony Antonelli, Esq.

RECEPTION IN HONOR OF 20,000 CONSUMER DEBT DEFENDANTS SERVED BY VLFD PROGRAM

In October 2015, the Access to Justice Program hosted a reception at the New York County Civil Court to celebrate the milestone marked by the Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Consumer Debt Program representing 20,000 consumer debt defendants since its inception. A similar celebration was held in May 2013 to mark the Program's assistance of 10,000 litigants.

The reception was held to recognize the partner organizations and attorneys who provide legal representation through this program. At the celebration, Justice Fern A. Fisher presented plaques to current program partners Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, New York County Lawyers' Association, and the New York Legal Assistance Group; and past partner New York Appleseed. Justice Fisher said, "We are so proud of the hundreds of attorneys who have provided legal representation through this program and our partner organizations who have worked with us to achieve justice for so many thousands of



litigants.” Pictures of the honorees are posted at:
<http://nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pages/consumerDebt2015.shtml>.

DIY FORM PROGRAM STAR AWARDS

From time to time, the Access to Justice Program recognizes court system personnel and courts that have made exceptional contributions to the successful development and implementation of the



DIY Form programs. The DIY Star Award applauds the individuals or courts whose actions are critical in creating lasting change in court culture and work environment. The DIY Star Award also boosts employee morale and fosters court competition which improves the success of the DIY Form programs. Quarterly statistical information, litigant User Surveys, and nominations by fellow employees are reviewed to choose the winners. DIY Star winners earn large touchscreen monitors and computers for their courthouses to use as public access terminals. The computers are customized for ready access to the DIY Form programs. The touchscreen monitors enhance the user experience. Only DIY Star Award winning courts have these monitors.

In 2015, DIY Star Award ceremonies were held in February and August. Each celebration is summarized below and more information about the DIY Star award recipients is located at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/diyawards.shtml>.

Lance B. Harris **Kings County Supreme Court**

Kings County Supreme Court Help Center Senior Court Clerk Lance B. Harris received the DIY Star Award because of his valuable contribution to the development, implementation and promotion of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program. His efforts furthered equal access to justice for unrepresented litigants both in Kings County and the rest of the state. Access to Justice Program Director Justice Fern A. Fisher, Kings County Supreme Court Administrative Judge for Civil Matters Lawrence Knipel, Access to Justice Program Chief Counsel Rochelle Klempner and Kings County Supreme Court Chief Clerk Civil Term Charles Small all spoke about the stellar assistance that Lance Harris provides in Kings County Help Center to unrepresented litigants using the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program. Lance Harris was nominated by his wife Wanda Harris, who is an Associate Court Clerk in the Queens County Supreme Court. When Lance accepted the award he stated, “Through technology and efficient programming DIY has made an otherwise burdensome legal procedure rather simple and has in turn made our job less difficult.”

Dawn Maletta
Suffolk County Family Court

Suffolk County Family Court Deputy Chief Clerk Dawn Maletta won the DIY Star Award for her various contributions incorporating DIY Form programs into her court's protocols. Access to Justice Program Director Justice Fern A. Fisher, Suffolk County District Administrative Judge C. Randall Hinrichs, Chief Clerk Terry Matyszczyk and Special Counsel Tracy McNeil all spoke about the amazing innovations that Dawn implemented in the Suffolk County Court House. Dawn contributed to DIY Form programs by creating new promotional materials that are now used statewide, speaking in webinars about how DIY Form Programs have positively affected her court, and the creation and implementation of a "DIY Center" at the Central Islip Family Court. Her efforts have furthered access to justice for unrepresented litigants both in Suffolk County and the rest of New York State.

**ACCESS TO JUSTICE EFFORTS IN THE COURTS
THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE**

In addition to the Access to Justice Program's measures taken to provide equal access to justice, many other judicial and non-judicial personnel throughout the New York State Court system act to assist unrepresented litigants and improve access to justice. These accomplishments should not go unrecognized. Attached as Appendix "F" is a compilation of these efforts, as contributed by the various Judicial Districts and New York City Courts. This sampling of the wonderful programs, services, presentations, community events and fairs held in 2015 could not have happened without the care and commitment of so many hard working court employees who strive to provide equal access to justice.

APPENDIX A: PUBLIC TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS

January

Lunchtime Assistance Program - Supreme Court Training

Over two half days, a live training was held at Brooklyn Law School for the Supreme Court Lunchtime Assistance Program. This training taught five volunteer lawyers and Brooklyn Law School students how to provide legal information on Art. 78, matrimonial matters, and 201-A lien law in the Kings County Supreme Court.

The Bridge to Practice: Law School Incubator and Fellowship/Bridge-to-Practice Programs as Pathways to Public Service

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented at the annual meeting in Washington, DC, of the Association of American Law Schools' Section on Pro Bono & Public Services Opportunities. Judge Fisher discussed the developing law school incubator and fellowship program models that are helping public interest and public service-minded law students move from eager yet inexperienced law students to skilled and more seasoned legal practitioners.

NY Court Amici Podcast with Hon. Fern A. Fisher

Justice Fern A. Fisher was interviewed about her dual role as the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the New York City Courts and her statewide position as the Director of the Access to Justice Program. She discusses various access to justice related topics, including unbundled legal services, civil Gideon and the law student 50-hour *pro bono* rule. The audio and transcript are available at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/admin/amici/index.shtml>.

February

Lunchtime Assistance Program-Supreme Court Training (see January)

A live training was conducted for 10 attorneys to participate in the Supreme Court Lunchtime Assistance Program.

Assigned Counsel Project (ACP) Internship Program Training

This comprehensive three-day training was held at the New York County Civil Court with the collaboration of the Access to Justice Program's Housing Court Initiatives, Help Centers, and Court-Based Interdisciplinary Programs. One attorney participated in this program's multi-day training, which included an 8.5 hour CLE credit video-replay training on: Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), Introduction to the Help Center (1 CLE credit), Holdover Proceedings (3 CLE credits), HP Actions and Harassment Law (1 CLE credit) and a segment on Ethics (.5 CLE credit). In addition to this basic training, the volunteer learned about Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS) (1 CLE credit), and the One Shot Deal through a video replay, and attended two live trainings on How to Identify Social Services Needs, and How to Conduct Intake in ACP Cases. The training was offered in exchange for 50 hours of volunteer service conducting intake for the Program and assessing the legal and social services needs of vulnerable seniors at risk of eviction.

Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was offered at the New York County Civil Court to 12 recent law graduates and admitted attorneys for the VLFD segment (including one ACP Internship volunteer), and 13 attendees for the VLP portion of the training (including one ACP Internship volunteer). The training included a CLE on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), Introduction to the Help Center (1 CLE credit), Holdover Proceedings (3 CLE credits), HP Actions and Harassment

Law (1 CLE credit) and a segment on Ethics (.5 CLE credit). VLFD Program training attendees committed to volunteer two days within three months in exchange for this training, and VLP Program participants pledged to give free legal advice for 12 hours in one of the Housing Court Help Centers within three months of the training.

Supplemental Training on Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization

This 3 hour CLE credit training was provided live at the New York County Civil Court to 15 volunteer lawyers and law graduates who had already completed the basic VLFD/VLP Housing training in exchange for volunteer service. Guardian Ad Litem Program volunteers were also invited to attend, given their volunteer work for the Court and 9 attended. The panelists provided a comprehensive overview of the Rent Stabilization legal framework, explained the relationship between the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and the New York City Housing Court, and discussed recent doctrinal developments. VLFD Program training attendees committed to volunteer three days within four months in exchange for this training, and VLP Program participants pledged to give free legal advice for nine hours in one of the Housing Court Help Centers within four months of the training.

Brooklyn Law School Cultural Competency Lawyering Panel

The Public Service Office of Brooklyn Law School invited the Access to Justice Program to participate on a panel about the need for, and challenges of, cross-cultural lawyering, viewing cultural difference broadly to include differences between law students/attorneys and their clients due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic standing, education, disability, language, etc. Tracy McNeil, Esq., presented, along with a panelist from Immigration Equality. More than 30 Brooklyn Law School students attended the discussion.

Hofstra University School of Law A2J Author Presentation

Rochelle Klempner, Esq., was guest lecturer at Hofstra Law School's Using Technology to Improve the Delivery of Legal Services class. The presentation, entitled, "The Benefits of A2J Author," was made in the A2J Author tool to showcase the various ways that A2J Author can be used to provide and collect information from an unrepresented litigant. There were approximately 12-15 students and professors in attendance.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing)

Two separate training sessions were given for a total of 30 college students, other approved volunteers, and staff and/or interns from partner organizations at the New Settlement Apartments' Community for Safe Apartments (CASA) in Bronx County and at the New York County Civil Court, in exchange for 30 hours of volunteer service in a Resolution Part of the Housing Court. The 2.5 hour session, which included both a video replay of role play scenarios with commentary and a training on the One Shot Deal as well as a live segment, provided an overview of the Housing Court with a focus on issues arising out of nonpayment proceedings.

Supplemental Training on Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)

Four volunteers (including one ACP Internship volunteer) were trained at the New York County Civil Court during this optional supplemental session where they learned about "Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)" (1 CLE credit) through a video replay.

Lay GAL Training

Free specialized training was provided for three court appointed GAL family members of a physically or mentally impaired litigant in the New York County Civil Court. This training is an abbreviated version of the training provided to those seeking to be on the Housing Part GAL list. Lay GAL training is provided when the Judge seeks to appoint a family member. The lay GAL training prepares family members to assume the role of GAL with knowledge of what this role entails, the expectations from the court, and available resources for help. Family members view a 5.5 hour video replay of the most recent live GAL training.

Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training

A video replay training was conducted for law students at the New York County Civil Court. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including Ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. Three New York University law students were trained. Attendees must provide at least 50 hours of *pro bono* in the Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program – Consumer Debt.

Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training

Two video replay trainings were conducted for law students at the New York County Civil Court. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including Ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. Three Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School students were trained in conjunction with the Law Student Initiative Consortium. Attendees must provide at least 20 hours of *pro bono* service in the Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program – Consumer Debt.

March

Bridge the Gap Training

A comprehensive live basic training for the VLP and VLFD Housing and Consumer Debt Programs, and the Uncontested Divorce Program was offered at the New York County Civil Court over three full days. In return for CLE training, participants were required to complete a 50-hour supervised *pro bono* practicum assisting litigants in New York City Housing, Civil, and Supreme Courts, within six months of training, assisting litigants with housing, consumer debt law and uncontested divorce in the Access to Justice Program's unbundled court-based legal services programs. Fifty recent law graduates and attorneys were trained in residential landlord-tenant law. This training fulfills the first or second year mandatory CLE requirements for recent law graduates and newly admitted attorneys.

Collaborative Pro Bono: Imagining the Possible

Justice Fern A. Fisher facilitated a session at the Pro Bono Institute Annual Conference in Washington, DC, attended by law firm, corporate and public interest representatives from across the United States and around the world. The session discussed collaborative *pro bono* initiatives. Justice Fisher's break-out session focused on medical bill bankruptcies.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Two court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

VAP Family Court Training

A live training was conducted for 40 attorneys at the offices of Barclays. The 2.5 hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

Nepal Supreme Court Training

A delegation from the Supreme Court of Nepal visited Bronx County Family Court Help Center in the morning and spent the afternoon with the Access to Justice Program staff learning about programs and initiatives. Presentations were made about court-based unbundled volunteer lawyer programs, the Guardian Ad Litem program, law student outreach, program partnerships, the Mobile Legal Help Center, the CourtHelp website, DIY Form programs and Court Help Centers. The Nepal delegation was led by Senior Justice Kalyan Shrestha, and organized by D. Christopher Decker, Chief Technical Advisor, Rule of Law and Human Rights Programme, United Nations Development Programme.

April

Rules of Engagement: Ethical Considerations in Dealings with Unrepresented Litigants and Civility in the Courtroom

The New York City Bar Association's Housing Court Committee invited the Access to Justice Program to participate in a live three-hour ethics CLE panel discussion along with seven other judges and practitioners. Rochelle Klempner, Esq., gave a PowerPoint overview of the Access to Justice Programs in the New York City Housing Court. The session was attended by approximately 60 people.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)

A training session was offered to 23 volunteers at the New York County Civil Court.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing & Consumer Debt)

A joint Housing and Consumer Debt training session was offered providing a Consumer Debt and Housing Court overview, including basics of nonpayment proceedings, how the Civil Court works and Court Navigator roles and responsibilities, to 25 students from the New York City Paralegal Association, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York City College of Technology, Baruch College, Hunter College, University at Albany - SUNY, LaGuardia Community College, and Hostos Community College. The training was held at the Bronx County Housing Court.

GAL Presentation on HRA Changes

A 1.5 hour live presentation by Molly Murphy, Special Counsel to HRA's Commissioner, and Ramon Flores, Esq., Assistant General Counsel at HRA's Office of Legal Affairs, was held at the New York County Civil Court building where GALs were informed of recent changes at HRA and how such changes may affect their advocacy work in Court.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Two court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

VAP Family Court Training

A comprehensive live 4.5 hour CLE credit training was conducted for 14 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law, child custody, visitation and family offense. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

Ethics Training

A 3.0 CLE credit video replay of the Bridge the Gap Ethics training was conducted for two attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided an in-depth overview of the ethics of providing limited scope legal services.

May

Brooklyn Law School Introduction to Public Interest Lawyering

The Public Service Office of Brooklyn Law School invited the Access to Justice Program to participate in an extended seminar on how to be an effective Attorney taking into account clients due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic standing, education, disability, language, individual bias, as well as one's own internal bias. Tracy McNeil, Esq., presented to more than 20 Brooklyn Law School students.

Forms are Never Finished! Forms Sustainability, Maintenance & Evaluation

Rochelle Klempner, Esq., presented a seven-minute ignite PowerPoint at the Self-Represented Litigants Network's (SRLN) pre-conference to the Equal Justice Conference in Austin, Texas to the 100+ attendees. The ignite presentation, along with three other PowerPoints presented by members of the SRLN Forms and Technology Working Group, gave an overview of the forms

process from start to finish. Forms testing was presented as part of a more in-depth discussion. The PowerPoint presentation is available on-line at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B24WDgnRBUHiU0xLWHJyTmZBcXM/view?pli=1>.

The Role of the Judge to Encourage Access to Justice

At the SRLN pre-conference, Justice Fern A. Fisher presented with a panel of Judges discussing the ways that Judges can and should facilitate access to justice from the bench.

Top Ten Tips for Forms Testing and Revision

At the SRLN pre-conference, Rochelle Klempner, Esq., co-presented a PowerPoint discussing some best practices for forms testing for both paper forms and document assembly programs. The discussion offered different viewpoints from the California court system and Michigan Legal Aid, with Ms. Klempner presenting the Access to Justice Program's practices. The PowerPoint presentation is available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B24WDgnRBUHiMUR3T0FUcVlvSkE/view?pli=1>.

Why an Incubator?

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented at the Equal Justice Conference in Austin, Texas, on a panel discussing how incubators for newly-admitted lawyers foster innovative methods of helping underserved populations and communities. The panel explained how law schools, legal aid agencies, courts and bar organizations all benefit from this relatively new movement.

Roles Beyond Lawyers

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented at the Equal Justice Conference in Austin, Texas, on a panel discussing how to increase access to justice by leveraging staff who are not fully qualified attorneys. Justice Fisher explained how the Court Navigator Program allows non-lawyers to play a role in court.

How Legal Aid and *Pro bono* Programs Can be Essential Partners in Court Re-Engineering and Court Based Triage

Mike Williams, Clerk of Court, Bronx County Family Court presented at the Equal Justice Conference in Austin, Texas on the Self-Represented Litigation Network's session describing innovative partnerships for self-help. Mr. Williams explained how his Court's Help Center consolidates numerous departments into one place, greatly increasing the number of people served while remaining revenue neutral. The PowerPoint presentation is available on-line at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B24WDgnRBUHiTXZSaG12aFpkVTg/view?pli=1>.

Getting to 100%: "A2J Author" and Meeting the Goals of the LSC Tech Summit

Rochelle Klempner, Esq. presented at the Equal Justice Conference in Austin, Texas, on a panel discussing the New York State court system's experience with A2J Author. The presentation was shown in the A2J Author tool itself and included data and metrics collected from unrepresented litigants, court personnel and the Bronx Family Court 2014 DIY study. The other panelists discussed the new mobile friendly A2J Author version 5.0 and its features. The presentation is available at:

<https://lawhelpinteractive.org/Interview/GenerateInterview/4837/engine>.

District of Columbia Courts Presentation

Justice Fern A. Fisher made a presentation in Washington, DC to District of Columbia Court officials on unbundled legal services.

Supplemental Training on NYCHA Administrative Hearings and Article 78 Proceedings

In exchange for *pro bono* service, five volunteers earned 2.5 CLE credits by attending a training at the New York County Civil Court on administrative hearings and the grievance process at the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA"). In this video replay, the presenter provided an overview of NYCHA terminations based on chronic rent delinquency and criminal grounds, including due process requirements. There was also a discussion of common legal issues arising in the context of Article 78 proceedings challenging NYCHA decisions.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing & Consumer Debt) (see April)

A joint Housing and Consumer Debt training session was offered to 16 college students from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Columbia University, College of New Rochelle, University at Albany - SUNY, LaGuardia Community College, Lehman College, University of Hartford, Hostos Community College, and Morrisville State College at the Bronx County Housing Court.

Training to be on NYCHA GAL List

A 4 hour video-replay training was held at the New York County Civil Court for 10 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program seeking to also appear on the NYCHA GAL list. GALs who appear on the NYCHA GAL list are specifically trained to advocate for NYCHA tenants who are either physically or mentally impaired and facing a NYCHA Administrative hearing at 250 Broadway.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training (see February)

A video replay training was conducted for two law students at the New York County Civil Court.

Uncontested Divorce Training

A 1.5 hour live training was conducted for eight law students at the New York County Civil Court from St. John's Law School in conjunction with the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The training provided an overview of uncontested divorce law and a demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce software program. In exchange for the training, students perform 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance in the Uncontested Divorce Clinic in the Queens County Supreme Court.

Consumer Debt VLFD Training

A 1.5 hour CLE video replay training was conducted for one attorney at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. In exchange for the CLE credits awarded for the training, the attorney agreed to provide 20 *pro bono* hours of limited representation in the VLFD Consumer Debt Program.

Uncontested Divorce Training

Uncontested Divorce Program live training was conducted at St. John's Law School for six law students and their supervisor in conjunction with the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The two hour training provided an overview of uncontested divorce law and a demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce software program. In exchange for the training, students perform 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance in the Uncontested Divorce Clinic in the Queens County Supreme Court.

Ethics Training

A three hour video replay of the Bridge the Gap Ethics training was conducted for nine law student summer interns at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided an in-depth overview of the ethics of providing limited scope legal services.

Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training (see February)

A video replay training was conducted for five St. John's Law School students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with the Law Student Initiative Consortium.

June

National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented at the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Court "Uniting Communities: Justice for All" annual meeting held in Buffalo, New York. Justice Fisher facilitated a breakout session on Access to Justice in the Courts.

Assigned Counsel Project (ACP) Internship Program Training (see February)

A training was conducted for two law students at the New York County Civil Court.

The New York State Court System's Experience with A2J Author

Rochelle Klempner, Esq., conducted a live webinar for the June session of CALI's A2J Author Supplemental Live Training Sessions (in conjunction with LHI and Capstone). This series is primarily aimed at A2J Author new users. Ms. Klempner reprised her presentation about the New York court system's experience with A2J Author document assembly program that she gave in person at the Equal Justice Conference in May. A video of this presentation is posted on A2J Author's YouTube channel at: http://youtu.be/FoDT_7b7BMM. This presentation directly led to the Pennsylvania court and legal aid personnel visit to the Access to Justice Program – see July.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)

Two separate training sessions were offered to a total of 68 volunteers, and members or interns of partner organizations at the New York County Civil Court.

Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training (see February)

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was conducted at the New York County Civil Court for 18 recent law graduates and admitted attorneys participating in the VLFD Program, and 13 in the VLP.

Housing Court Navigator DIY Form Program Training

Ten Court Navigators and one CUNY School of Law Professor attended a live training about the DIY Form programs to help unrepresented litigants prepare personalized court forms that are ready to serve and file. The presenter, highlighted the Tenant Affidavit to Vacate a Default Judgment, Tenant Affidavit to Restore Case to the Calendar, and Roommate Holdover programs, and provided an overview of other available programs. The two hour training held at New York County Civil Court addressed common legal concepts arising in the context of the filing of the Affidavit to Vacate a Default Judgment, Affidavit to Restore Case to the Calendar, the Roommate Holdover Notice of Termination, and the Roommate Holdover Notice of Petition, and Petition.

Court Navigator Program Research Training

Justice Fern A. Fisher and the Access to Justice Program trained 23 summer associates and attorneys from the law firms of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Morrison & Foerster, Ropes & Gray LLP, and Kaye Scholer LLP, CNP volunteers, a CUNY School of Law Professor, social scientists and other partners from Barnard College, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the American Bar Foundation, the National Center for State Courts, and the National Center for Access to Justice to participate in a social science evaluation of the CNP. Yacine Barry-Wun, Esq trained the volunteers to identify and locate critical facts in Housing Court files that will enable social scientists to make findings on the impact of Court Navigators and judges in eviction cases.

Pro Bono Outside Big Law

Yacine Barry-Wun, Esq. participated in a panel discussion in this CLE Program titled "I Don't Have a *Pro Bono* Coordinator in my Office, How Can I Do *Pro bono*?" sponsored by the New York City Bar Association. She focused her remarks on the recruitment, training, supervision, and resources provided for *pro bono* practitioners outside Big Law by the Access to Justice Program's court-based unbundled legal services initiatives. There were approximately 10 attendees.

Supplemental GAL Workshop on Complex Cases

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled "Handling Complex Cases: Dos and Don'ts for GALs" was held at the New York County Civil Court for 12 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program. Leah Goodridge, Staff Attorney at the Urban Justice Center, offered suggestions for how to address the complexities of a nonpayment case and provided tips on handling complicated issues which often arise in advocating for the tenant-ward.

GAL General Training

The GAL Program offered free live training to prospective GALs in the New York County Civil Court. The GAL Program training consists of 7.5 hours of training including “Introduction to Housing Court/What is a GAL” (1.0), “Housing Court Nonpayment and Holdover Proceedings” (1.5), “Adult Protective Services and GAL Work” (1.0), “Advocacy and Negotiation in Housing Court Nonpayment and Holdover Cases” (1.0), “Short Guide to Emergency Assistance in New York” (1.0), “Overview of Mental Illness and Engagement Strategies” (1.0), and “GAL Practical Issues” (1.0). Attorneys were provided with free CLE credits (including 1 Ethics credit) upon completion of the training. All new GALs are expected to accept three pro-bono appointments over the course of the first year following training. Although many applied, 20 people successfully interviewed, completed background checks and reference checks and attended the training and were added to the GAL list.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Three court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

VAP Family Court Training

A two-day live training was conducted for 22 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The 4.0 CLE training prepared attorneys to provide 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers. Day one of the training included an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law. Day two of the training provided an overview of child custody, visitation and family offense.

Uncontested Divorce Training

A 1.5 hour live CLE training was conducted for 20 attorneys at the Richmond County Supreme Court in cooperation with the Staten Island Women’s Bar Association to prepare volunteers to participate in the Uncontested Divorce Program in Richmond County. Volunteers were trained in the law of uncontested divorce; how to communicate with litigants and how to use the Drafting Libraries software to prepare uncontested divorce papers for litigants needing assistance. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance to unrepresented litigants in the Uncontested Divorce Program.

July

Pennsylvania State Court and Legal Services Training

This live one and a half day training was provided for two visitors from Pennsylvania, one from the court system and one from legal services. The morning agenda included a meeting with Justice Fern A. Fisher to discuss the court system’s judicial training on unrepresented litigants, and presentations on facilitating access training and court help centers. In the afternoon, the visitors were split-up to focus on document assembly issues suited to their interests, followed by joint presentation on how legal services and court systems can better work together on document assembly, and a presentation on tracking, maintenance and sustainability. The following morning, the visitors were given a tour of the Bronx County Family Court Help Center’s various services.

Self-Represented Litigants Network Presentation

The Access to Justice hosted a private webinar for the Self Represented Litigants Network’s court administrator’s nationwide working group. Tracy McNeil, Esq., showcased the New York State Court Help Centers’ online database intake form, the Help Center staff shared intranet site SharePoint, and the internal outreach to court staff about Help Center resources and how it increases individual courts’ efficiency.

Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training (see February)

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was conducted at the New York County Civil Court to five recent law graduates/students and admitted attorneys participating in the VLFD Program, and four in the VLP.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Four court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

VAP Family Court Training

A live training was conducted for 10 attorneys at the offices of Colgate-Palmolive. The 3.0 hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

7th JD Access to Justice Diversity Training

The Access to Justice Program participated via Skype in the 7th Judicial District's WorkForce Diversity Committee presentation on "Access to Justice and the Courts." The purpose of the event was to present existing innovative initiatives that increase access to justice for unrepresented litigants and to provoke discussion on how the court system can expand and improve. After opening remarks by District Executive Ronald Pawlczak, Justice Fern A. Fisher spoke about access to justice, followed by a presentation by Tracy McNeil, Esq., on the CourtHelp website and how it assists the public and court staff alike. Attended by approximately 50 people, including members of the public: students and staff from Monroe Community College's Education Opportunity Center, staff members from "REOC" Rochester Educational Opportunity Center-Brockport University, the Free Justice Task Force, University of Rochester, Ibero-American Action League, the City of Rochester, Rochester Black Bar Association, Monroe County Dept. of Human Services, Monroe County Sheriff's Dept., VLSP-Volunteer Legal Services Program and Volunteers of America.

Re-engineering to Better Serve the Self Represented: The Key to Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness in Court Operations and Help Centers

Mike Williams, Clerk of Court, Bronx County Family Court presented at the National Association of Court Managers conference in Louisville, Kentucky on the Self-Represented Litigation Network's session describing how the Bronx County Family Court Help Center consolidates numerous departments into one place, greatly increasing the number of people served while remaining revenue neutral.

August

Supplemental Training on Legal Issues Arising out of Rent Stabilization (see February)

This CLE via video replay provided seven lawyers/recent law graduates and 13 Guardians Ad Litem with a comprehensive overview of the Rent Stabilization legal framework, explained the relationship between the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and the New York City Housing Court, and discussed recent doctrinal developments.

Using Online Forms to Help Address DV

The Access to Justice Program was invited to make a presentation about the Advocate Family Offense Petition E-Filing Program at LawHelp Interactive's forms webinar. The webinar focused on models for technology innovations in the area of domestic violence services that could be replicated in other states and jurisdictions. Sun Kim, Esq., presented a PowerPoint that showcased the Advocate Family Offense Petition program. The presentation was well attended

with 36 participants from a wide range of legal aid organizations and courts from around the country.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing & Consumer Debt) (see April)

A joint Housing and Consumer Debt training session was offered to eight college students from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Hunter College, Mercy College, St. John's University and Morrisville State College at the Bronx County Housing Court.

Ghanaian Court Official Visit

Justice Fern A. Fisher met with Judge Boakye-Yiadom, Second Deputy Judicial Secretary in the Judicial Service of Ghana to discuss access to justice initiatives, including court-based volunteer lawyer programs and DIY Form programs. The visit was held in Justice Fisher's chambers and was arranged by Alena Herklotz of the Leitner Center for International Law & Justice at Fordham Law School.

September

Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program Training

A webinar training was conducted for six attorneys and four support staff of Western New York Law Center to familiarize the staff with Parts A and B of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program. Western New York Law Center staff were trained to utilize the DIY Form program to assist unrepresented litigants in the 8th Judicial District Erie County Help Center.

Adult Name Change and Tenant Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form Program Training

A webinar training was conducted for 14 people from Western New York Law Center and Erie County Legal Aid to familiarize the attendees with the Adult Name Change and Tenant Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form programs so they can assist unrepresented litigants in the 8th Judicial District Erie County Help Center. The training also presented an overview of the CourtHelp website.

Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing (see February)

Thirteen CUNY School of Law LaunchPad for Justice Fellows, three CUNY School of Law students, and two attorneys attended this two-day comprehensive training, which covered the prerequisite training for VLFD and VLP as described in the February listing above, as well as video replays of a Short Guide to Emergency Assistance in NYC by the Human Resources Administration, and of CLE presentations on How to Conduct Intake in VLFD Cases, and Legal Issues arising out of Family Eviction Prevention Supplement ("FEPS"). The volunteers were also afforded an opportunity to observe proceedings for the morning calendar in a Resolution Part as part of their training.

Supplemental Training on Traverse Hearings 101

This live 2.5 CLE credit program trained current VLFD Housing and Consumer Debt volunteers on how to litigate a traverse hearing. The training featured a live mock hearing, preceded by a presentation on the rules governing service of process pursuant to CPLR 308 and RPAPL 735. The presenters focused on the statutory and regulatory framework pertaining to the licensing, record keeping, and reporting requirements for New York City process servers and process server agencies. This free training was offered at the New York County Civil Court in exchange for representation in a traverse hearing of a VLFD Housing Program respondent in Kings County, or a VLFD Consumer Debt Program defendant in New York or Kings County. Housing Court Guardians Ad Litem were invited to attend and eighteen attended.

Supplemental GAL Training on Nuisance Holdovers

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled "Nuisance Holdovers 101" was held at the New York County Civil Court. Seventeen GALs attended the workshop. Leah Goodridge, Staff Attorney

at the Urban Justice Center, addressed the different parts of a nuisance claim and how GALs can protect their wards from eviction in a nuisance holdover case.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training

A video replay training was conducted for 12 law graduate fellows at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with CUNY Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. In exchange for the training, law graduate fellows provide *pro bono* representation to consumer debtors in the Kings and Queens County Civil Courts.

Uncontested Divorce Training

Live two hour training was conducted for three law graduate fellows at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with CUNY Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The training provided an overview of uncontested divorce law and a demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce software program. The training prepared the fellows to assist unrepresented litigants in the Kings County Supreme Court Uncontested Divorce Program.

Massachusetts Attorney General's Office visit

David M. Eppler, Special Assistant to the Attorney General of the State of Maryland, visited the Access to Justice Program to share ideas and discuss programs and resources that increase access to justice for people who do not have an attorney. The Access to Justice Program presented topics including: unbundled court based volunteer programs, community outreach programs, the Guardian ad Litem program, document assembly programs, the nycourthelp.gov website and Court Help Centers. In the afternoon, Mr. Eppler was escorted to the Bronx County Family Court Help Center for a guided tour.

Court Navigator Program Presentation

Justice Fern A. Fisher participated via Skype in the California Commission on Access to Justice meeting. Justice Fisher made a presentation on the Access to Justice Program's Court Navigator Program.

October

Law a La Carte Conference

The Access to Justice Program hosted an all-day conference on limited scope practicing for low and moderate income clients at the New York County Civil Court. The conference, co-sponsored with NYSBA was simulcast to the New York State Bar in Albany. The ethics, best practices and models of delivering legal services via limited scope representation were explored by national and New York experts. The conference provided 6.0 hours of CLE credits for presentations that discussed views from the bench, practitioners' experiences, volunteer lawyer program experiences, and best practices. Topics included ethics, advice, ghostwriting, document preparation, and courtroom representation. The conference was attended by 122 bar leaders, legal services attorneys, law firm *pro bono* coordinators, private practitioners, law school faculty and judges. The agenda, conference materials and videos are available online at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/LawALaCarte/index.shtml>.

VLFD Housing Training

A 3.5 hour CLE credit video-replay training was offered at the law offices of Paul Hastings to 34 recent law graduates and attorneys as well as one law student. For the first time, the entire class of first year Paul Hastings associates was scheduled to attend the program in addition to

other associates. The training included presentations on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), and a segment on Ethics (.5 CLE credit). VLFD Program training attendees committed to volunteer two days within nine months in exchange for this training.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)

A training session was offered to 34 volunteers including employees/interns of partner organizations at the New York County Civil Court.

Domestic Violence and Courtroom Advocacy Training

A 2.5 hour live CLE training seminar entitled “Domestic Violence and Courtroom Advocacy” was held at the New York County Civil Court. Five GALs and 12 volunteer attorneys attended. Jennifer L. DeCarli, Esq., LMSW, Senior Director at Legal Services, Her Justice provided an overview of the dynamics of domestic violence, New York State’s family, criminal, immigration and housing laws relevant to domestic violence and resources available for victims of domestic violence. Participants also learned how to effectively and sensitively ask about domestic violence and how to connect litigants to available social service resources in their community.

Poverty Simulation at Touro Law Center

Over two days the entire first year class of Touro Law School participated in the Poverty Simulation. Approximately 140 students were assigned a fictitious identity, family, and financial situation to simulate a one month period living in poverty. Second and third year law school students and Touro Law Center professors volunteered to act in the role of community groups and government office staff. The first day of the simulation over 60 New York City Civil and Housing Court judges participated in the event playing family members and community group workers. After each days’ event a discussion was held for participants and volunteers to share their thoughts on the experience.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Four court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

Bridge the Gap Training (see March)

In honor of National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, a comprehensive live basic training for the Housing, Consumer Debt and Uncontested Divorce Programs was conducted for 45 attorneys and law graduates at the New York County Civil Court over three days.

Virginia Access to Justice Commission Training

Justice Fern A. Fisher made a live presentation to the Virginia Access to Justice Commission’s Committee on Access for Self-Represented Litigants in Richmond, Virginia. Justice Fisher gave an in-depth overview of all of the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives and programs.

November

Supplemental GAL Training on Non-Primary Residence Holdovers

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled “Nuts and Bolts of Non-primary Residence Holdovers” was held at the New York County Civil Court. Eleven GALs attended the workshop. Leah Goodridge, Staff Attorney at the Urban Justice Center, presented on GAL advocacy within the context of non-primary residence holdover cases.

Court Navigator Program Training (Housing & Consumer Debt) (see April)

A joint Housing and Consumer Debt training session was offered to 21 students from Baruch College; Bronx Community College; City College; College of New Rochelle; Columbia University; Empire State College; Hostos Community College; Hunter College; John Jay College; LaGuardia Community College; Lehman College; Mercy College; Morrisville State College; New York City College of Technology; Saint John’s University; SUNY- Albany;

University of Hartford; NYC Paralegal Association and Westchester Community College at the Bronx County Housing Court.

CourtHelp Training for LawHelpNY's LiveHelp Operators

Two live one hour webinars were held for a total of thirteen LiveHelp operator law students and two LawHelp coordinators on CourtHelp, the court's website for unrepresented litigants. The training focused on the foreclosure webpages on CourtHelp as well as the website in general. Students were taught how the website can work in tandem with LawHelpNY.org's website. The goal of the presentation was to prepare the LawHelp LiveHelp operators to provide legal assistance using the LiveHelp chat feature on CourtHelp's foreclosure pages.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

Court Navigator Program Presentation

Justice Fern A. Fisher gave a presentation at the American Academy of Arts & Sciences' "Making Justice Accessible" Symposium held in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Justice Fisher gave an overview of the Access to Justice Program's Court Navigator Program.

December

GAL General Training (see June)

Ten people successfully interviewed, completed background checks and reference checks and attended the training and were added to the GAL list.

Lay GAL Training (see February)

Three court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

VAP Family Court Training

A live training was conducted for 36 attorneys at the offices of Proskauer Rose LLP. The 2.5 hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

VAP Family Court Training

A live training was conducted for 16 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The 2.5 hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

VAP Family Court Training


A live 2.5 hour CLE credit training was conducted for 19 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided an overview of the basics of child custody, visitation and family offense. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

APPENDIX B: COURTHELP POSTCARD



NEW YORK STATE



COURT  **Help**

**Find the Help You Need
to Represent Yourself in NY Courts**

WWW.NYCOURTHELP.GOV



NEW YORK

COURT  **Help**



The CourtHelp website can help you when you don't have a lawyer

- **Find court forms and DIY Forms**
- **Locate court addresses and Help Centers**
- **Learn about foreclosures, custody, divorce, name changes, cases for money, going to court, and more**

Visit www.nycourthelp.gov



APPENDIX C: PERSONNEL TRAININGS

January

Help Us Help You: All About Court Help Centers

This new live webinar was offered on three dates to all court system employees to explain and clarify the assistance that unrepresented litigants can receive in the Court Help Centers. This webinar highlighted what Help Centers do, what services are offered, who should be referred, and the special resources that some Help Centers offer. Attendees were shown where to find Help Center information on the Court's intranet, as well as the Help Center pages on CourtHelp that have "What's There?" links. This webinar was attended by the entire Richmond Surrogate's court staff and over 120 court staff statewide, across eleven judicial districts.

February

Help Us Help You: All About Court Help Centers (see January)

Offered two additional dates. More than 38 court employees were trained.

Legal Issues Arising Out of Rent Stabilization

This 3.0 hour CLE credit training was provided live at the New York County Civil Court to New York City Help Center Civil and Housing staff, as well as VLFD/VLP volunteers and Guardian Ad Litem Program volunteers. The panelists provided a comprehensive overview of the Rent Stabilization legal framework, explained the relationship between the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and the New York City Housing Court, and discussed recent doctrinal developments.

May

CourtHelp Showcase Update Webinar

Offered over two dates this live webinar was open to all court personnel to showcase the new Topics A-Z page, new Search box feature, Appeals, Collecting a Judgment, and Adoption sections, as well as highlighting the "What's There?" links on the Help Center page, listing the services provided at each Help Center. In addition, the webinar outlined how court staff can use the site to improve efficiency. The webinars were attended by a total of 85 employees.

NYS Help Center training: Statewide Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program

A private webinar was held for the statewide Court Help Center personnel. The court system's Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution presented on the Statewide Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program. The presentation was attended by 27 Help Center staff. The presentation explained the mandatory procedure to resolve fee disputes between attorneys and clients through arbitration.

Introduction to DIY Form Programming

This live one hour webinar was offered to all court personnel. It highlighted A2J Author, the software used in creating the front-end of the DIY Form programs, and focused on basic programming techniques and the use of litigant-friendly features, such as pop-up definitions and Learn Mores. Twenty-six people attended this training from 16 counties including Chief Clerks, Deputy Chief Clerks, Court Assistants, a Law Librarian, and a LAN Administrator.

June

New York City Civil Court Resources Webinar

Offered on two dates, live webinars were held for the New York City Civil and Housing Court staff to showcase the various court resources and programs available to unrepresented litigants. The webinar focused on Volunteer Lawyer Programs, the CourtHelp website for unrepresented litigants, and the Court Help Centers. The goal of this private webinar was to inform and remind court staff of resources for the public thereby freeing themselves up to work more efficiently. Management staff and employees from every New York City Civil and Housing Court attended.

July

Updated GAL File Maker Application Training

Two separate one-hour trainings were provided, via Skype, for New York City Housing Court Attorneys on how to use an updated version of the GAL File Maker Application. This Application allows judges to secure GAL names, in compliance with PART 36 Rules, when the need for a GAL appointment arises. Approximately 45 court attorneys attended.

7th JD Access to Justice Diversity Training

The Access to Justice Program participated via Skype in the 7th Judicial District's WorkForce Diversity Committee presentation on "Access to Justice and the Courts." The purpose of the event was to present existing innovative initiatives that increase access to justice for unrepresented litigants and to promote discussion on how the court system can expand and improve. Justice Fern A. Fisher spoke about access to justice and Tracy McNeil, Esq., provided an overview of the CourtHelp website and how it assists the public and court staff alike. Attended by approximately 50 people, including members of the public (see Appendix "A.").

September

Family Court Part 1: Support DIY Form Program Showcase

This live webinar highlighted the two Family Court support related DIY Form programs, the Support Enforcement Program and the Support Modification Program. Open to all Family Court, Help Centers, and Public Access Law Librarian employees, this review training was attended by 21 court system staff.

Family Court Part 2: Custody and Paternity DIY Form Program Showcase

This live webinar outlined the Spanish and English Paternity DIY Form programs in addition to the Custody and Visitation Modification Program and the Custody and Visitation Enforcement Program. This training was open to all Family Court, Help Centers, and Public Access Law Librarian employees. A total of 19 people attended this review training.

Social Media 101

This live webinar was given at the special request of the Franklin H. Williams Commission. The presentation focused on the use of social media, the benefits, and the various social media platforms available, in particular Twitter and Facebook. Subsequent to the training, the Commission initiated a Twitter account.

October

Training for Bronx Court Attorneys on Use of the GAL File Maker Application

A one-hour live training was provided in the Bronx County Housing Court to train the Court Attorneys on how to use the GAL FileMaker Application to secure GAL names, when the need for a GAL appointment arises. Approximately 20 court attorneys attended.

Help Center Training: Ejectments in Civil Court

A 1.0 hour CLE live webinar explained the basics of an ejectment action in Civil Court. The training also featured new court forms for Help Center staff including new service instruction forms and ejectment instructions that outlined the procedure from 30-Day Notice to Inquest. Exclusive to all New York State Court Help Center staff, this training emphasized how to breakdown the complex legal concepts of an ejectment into plain language for unrepresented litigants. A total of 17 Help Center Court Attorneys, Court Analysts and Clerks attended.

Poverty Simulation at Touro Law Center

Over 60 New York City Housing and Civil Court Judges participated in the Poverty Simulation at Touro Law Center. One-third of the Judges along with Touro Law Center professors and 2L and 3L students played the role of community groups and office staff. The remainder of the judges were paired with half of the 1L class and assigned fictitious identity, family, and financial situations. Judges and students were then forced to work together to simulate a one month period living in poverty. After the simulation all parties participated in a discussion to share their reflections on the experience.

Public Access Law Librarian Association Conference

The Access to Justice Program conducted two presentations at the annual New York State Courts Law Librarians Association meeting. On the first day of the conference, a live Skype presentation was delivered to nearly 40 attendees from all over the state, about the New York State Court Help Center intake form & database, and internal website SharePoint. On the second day of the conference a live presentation, entitled "Law Libraries and Help Centers," was given to discuss ways that law libraries can expand their services for unrepresented litigants to increase access to justice. A total of 16 librarians and court administration personnel attended in person, plus 14 librarians attended via Skype.

December

Help Center Training: Replevin in Civil & Supreme Courts

A 1.0 hour CLE live webinar explored the historical background and basics of a Replevin Action. Designed specifically for the needs of Court Help Center staff, the training focused on how replevin is distinct from conversion, general defenses, and orders of seizure. A total of 26 people attended including Help Center Court Attorneys, Court Analysts and Clerks, as well as Deputy Chief Clerks and Assistance Deputy Chief Clerks of the New York City Civil Court.


Facilitating Access Training

A one hour Skype presentation was conducted for the District Executive and other non-judicial staff of the 3rd Judicial District to provide a general overview of Facilitating Access to Justice. Facilitating Access Training emphasizes how court staff can assist the public and the differences between legal information and legal advice. Attended by approximately 12 employees

Child Name Change DIY Form Program Developers Group Preview

Before the Child Name Change DIY Form program was launched, a Skype presentation was held for the developers group members. The webinar included demonstrations of the DIY Form program and the papers produced when run under different sets of facts. The webinar also included a questions and answer session to raise and address any procedural issues that the developers had. A total of 28 court employees from around the state attended.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE HELP CENTER POSTER AND SLIDES



NEED HELP?

Visit the Columbia County Court
Help Center

Come in and get *FREE* legal information

- Talk about court information and procedures
- Get free sample forms and guidebooks
- Find out about DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Form Programs

Tuesday & Thursday
9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Wednesday
1:30 PM– 3:30 PM

**GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED FOR
COURT!**



* please note, Help Centers are first come, first served.

We speak



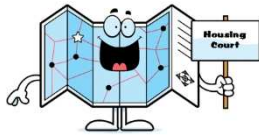
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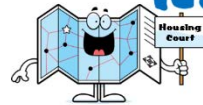


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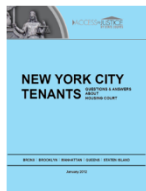
Get help in
Housing Court
from a Court
Navigator 



Consiga ayuda
en el tribunal de
vivienda de un
Navegador del
Tribunal (Court
Navigator) 



Read “NYC
Tenants:
Questions &
Answers
about Housing
Court.”



Lean: “Inquilinos
en la ciudad de NY:
Preguntas y
respuestas sobre el
Tribunal de
Viviendas.”



APPENDIX E: HOUSING COURT GAL SURVEY

Housing Court Guardian Ad Litem

The Housing Court Guardian Ad Litem Program is unique to New York City. Outside New York City, there is no dedicated program for the appointment of GALs in landlord-tenant matters. Your survey responses are entirely confidential and will be used to explore replication of the GAL Program outside New York City.

1. What County do you sit in?*

Bronx
 Kings
 New York
 Queens
 Richmond

2. Outside NYC, there is no program that provides GALs for Housing Court cases. How difficult would it be to find GALs to accept cases if the Housing Court GAL Program did not exist?*

Very difficult
 Difficult
 Slightly difficult
 Not difficult

3. Do you think having the Housing Court GAL Program helps with any of the following? (check all that apply)*

Improves efficiency in the courtroom by having an advocate for the ward
 Connects litigants to outside government agencies and community resources and helps cut through bureaucratic red tape
 Prevents evictions of impaired people
 Provides judges with a pool of GALs trained in Landlord-Tenant law
 None of the above
 Other, please specify

4. What do you think happens to impaired litigants when no GAL is appointed to advocate on their behalf? (check all that apply)*

More are evicted
 They are unable to raise appropriate defenses
 The "root cause" of the litigation is not resolved leading to recidivism
 None of the above
 Other, please specify

5. Please provide an example of something that you have seen a GAL do that has made a difference in the life of his or her ward.

APPENDIX F: ACCESS TO JUSTICE EFFORTS THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE

3rd Judicial District

Educational Outreach

- The Third Judicial District encourages educational programs sponsored by the various Bar Associations in the District through the use of Court facilities and UCS employees volunteering their time. Throughout the year, Ulster, Rensselaer, Columbia and Sullivan County Bar Associations sponsored mock trials for high school students.

Civic Outreach

- The District is part of a coalition with the Capital District Pro Bono Committee that meets regularly to discuss *pro bono* services. The CDPBC is comprised of several agencies including: The Legal Project, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY), Albany County Bar Association (ACBA), Prisoners Legal Services of New York, and Albany Law School's *Pro bono* Program. Throughout the year CDPBC sponsors many events. At the annual "Tulip Festival" in Spring 2015, a table was staffed by CDPC members and flyers and pamphlets listing the types of legal matters handled by the different *pro bono* providers were distributed to community members.

Help Center

- The Capital District Pro Bono Committee (CDPBC) continues to support the Help Center located in the Albany County Family Court, which is staffed by volunteer attorneys from the Capital District. The Third Judicial District also supports the Help Center through IT services and equipment.
- December 2015, a new Court Help Center was opened in the Columbia County Courthouse to primarily assist Family and City Court litigants.

Continuing Legal Education

- In an effort to encourage *pro bono* volunteers from the local legal community various organizations associated with the Capital District Pro Bono Committee (CDPBC) offer Continuing Legal Education.
- On September 23, 2015 Prisoners Legal Services of New York and the New York State Bar Association held a program entitled "Challenging Denials of Parole and Medical Parole through Advocacy and CPLR Article 78 Procedures."

4th Judicial District

- A Law Day Naturalization ceremony was held as part of a day-long event in conjunction with the Schenectady County Bar Association, to provide educational outreach to the public about the law and the services provided by lawyers and the courts.

5th Judicial District

Educational Outreach

- Onondaga County Family Court: April 15, 2015 – Non-Judicial personnel conducted a presentation to Vera House, local domestic violence agency regarding court programs.
- Onondaga County Surrogate's Court: revamped the court's website: <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/5jd/onondaga/surrogate/index.shtml> and added the feature

“Self-Represented Litigants” which provides information to the public about free legal assistance opportunities and offers a number of useful links including a link to <http://nycourts.gov/courthelp>.

Court Tours

- Lewis, Oneida, Onondaga, and Syracuse counties held numerous various court tours throughout the year.

Help Center

- Onondaga County Surrogate’s: Continuous promotion of the use of DIY programs and assistance/facilitation by court staff and Syracuse University College of Law Extern using a dedicated public computer and monitor, the latter of which was given to the court in recognition of being the very first recipient of the DIY Star Award. Continuous accessibility to the public of court’s records via an internet connected database (“OnBase”). This accessibility is an aid to unrepresented litigants since it allows a review of prior proceedings in the court. While every matter is different, the unrepresented are able to independently search similar types of proceedings to get a sense of the types of documents and the format of documents used in various proceedings which, in turn, may serve as a resource of procedural “how to” information.
- Onondaga County Family Court: ongoing referrals by Judicial & Non Judicial Staff to the Parent Support Program, an in-house employment assistance/referral program funded by Onondaga County.
- Syracuse City Court: there is a monitor located in the public hallway outside Civil Part which constantly is scrolling a slideshow presentation regarding DIY Forms for Landlord Tenant actions.

Law Day

- Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and Syracuse counties held Law Day celebrations.

Volunteer Lawyers Project

- Onondaga County Family Court: Every Wednesday & Friday, volunteer attorneys provide free legal advice to low income clients. Non-judicial court staff refer individuals to the program on an ongoing basis.
- Onondaga County Surrogate’s Court: the continuation of the project began in 2013 at the court’s invitation to local bar association’s Volunteer Lawyer’s Project (“VLP”) and local practitioners to establish and “staff” a court-based limited representation clinic to offer legal counsel and assistance to unrepresented low-income people who come before the court. In 2015, the VLP established itself as a separate 501(C) (3) organization. The Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Inc.’s Surrogate’s Court Free Legal Clinic is now an on-going project which assists unrepresented litigants every Wednesday from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm using equipment and space provided by the court. Services, by appointment and walk-ins, include consultations and assistance, as needed in completing forms and other documents. Through outreach by the local bar and literature made available in the court and on the court’s website, the public is being made aware of this resource. The community at large has already recognized the clinic as a most valuable asset.
- Syracuse City Court: there are volunteer lawyers available outside of the Landlord/Tenant part each weekday morning to assist the parties with landlord/tenant actions.

6th Judicial District

Educational Outreach

- Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, and Tompkins counties held various educational programs for students to familiarize them with the court system.

Civic Outreach

- District Wide Access: the 6th Judicial District regularly provides and strongly encourages Access to Justice training and opportunities at all levels. The Special Counsel for Town and Village Courts facilitates training and regularly attends magistrates meetings. The judges, clerks and court officers routinely speak at events designed to provide the public, especially litigants, with accurate and up to date information on the District, the Courts and their staff.

Court Tours

- Chenango, Schuyler, and Tioga counties held numerous court tours throughout the year.

7th Judicial District

Civic Outreach

- “Day at the Courthouse” Program: Workforce Diversity Committee partnered with GRAWA (Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys) to host an educational/career exploration program for local Girl Scout Troops on March 31.
- City of Rochester Summer Youth Law Prep Program: “Courthouse Scavenger Hunts” for at-risk youth ages 14 and 15 designed to help educate, create positive connections and dispel common misconceptions about the judicial system July 17 – August 7 (Fridays).

Court Tours

- More than 90 tours conducted at Monroe County Courthouse.

Cultural Awareness

- Throughout the year public informational/display resource tables have been set up at the Hall of Justice for Black History, Martin Luther King Jr., LGBTQ and Hispanic Heritage.
- District newsletters produced regularly featuring articles on Black History and Hispanic Heritage months.

Help Center Advisory Committee

- This committee consists of 7th Judicial District Judges, Chief Clerks, attorneys and agency representatives. The committee collectively offers guidance and support of the operational needs of the Help Center, strategies to enhance public awareness of available services and ongoing outreach opportunities to increase attorney participation.

8th Judicial District

Educational Outreach

- January 16, 2015, Western New York Coalition of Blacks in the Court presented the Life and Works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Guest Speaker Pastor Alan R. Core, Commissioner of Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority.
- June 10 -13, 2015 - The 27th Annual Meeting of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts was held in Buffalo, New York.
- Andrew B. Isenberg, District Executive, 8th Judicial District presented a workshop on Access to Justice in Courts of the 8th Judicial District.

Court Tours

- Numerous court tours conducted throughout the year.

Help Center

- Eighth Judicial District Court Help Center is located in the Supreme Court Law Library. Every year it serves 7,200 people. It is staffed by a full-time Court Attorney. The most

frequent case inquiries at the 8th Judicial District Court Help Center relate to: matrimonial matters, name change petitions, consumer credit transactions, post-judgment matrimonial matters. The 8th Judicial District expanded the range of services offered at the Court Help Center in 2014 through collaboration with Legal Aid Bureau and Western New York Law Center who provide volunteer attorneys empowered to give legal advice.

- Erie County Family Court. The Help Center is staffed by volunteer attorneys from the Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc. Since its opening in 2013 it has assisted over 1,200 unrepresented litigants.

Pro bono Programs

- Buffalo City Court offers three programs to assist the unrepresented litigants: CLARO volunteer lawyers assist with consumer credit transactions, Attorney for the Day Program for landlord/tenant eviction proceedings, and the Court Arbitration Program which assists unrepresented litigants with settlement of civil law suits.
- Erie County Surrogate's Court offers an attorney for the day project. On a daily basis a Court Attorney is assigned to assist unrepresented litigants who seek assistance with navigating Erie County Surrogate's Court.
- Erie Supreme and County Court collaborates with the City of Buffalo and civil legal service providers annually to open a one-stop center in Part 27 to assist unrepresented litigants with settlement on in rem tax foreclosure matters. Thousands of tax foreclosure cases are settled annually in this part.
- Erie Supreme and County Court pro-actively operate a residential foreclosure conferencing Part where unrepresented litigants are paired with an attorney from the Western New York Law Center. Over 50% of the cases scheduled in the foreclosure conferencing part reach a settlement with the bank.

Cultural Awareness

- February 24, 2015, Celebration of Black History Month 2015. Guest Speaker Cindy Odom, CEO of Girl Scouts of Western New York.
- February 26, 2015, Ethnic Luncheon held in Buffalo City Court in continuation of the Celebration of Black History Month for court employees.
- October 20, 2015 -Luncheon held celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. A board certified family physician with over 40 years of experience was the guest speaker.

Law Day

- On May 8, 2015 a Law Day program was held in the Supreme Court Ceremonial Courtroom. The Law Day theme was "Magna Carta: No One, No Matter How Powerful, is Above the Law." Students participated from six high schools throughout the Western New York area. Over 150 high school students were in attendance, six debate high school teams participated in the event moderated by WKBW, Channel 7.

9th Judicial District

Educational Outreach

- Rockland County: non-judicial personnel provided legal research information to the New City Public Library.
- Dutchess County: a judge and non-judicial personnel gave a presentation on Surrogate Court at a training for mediators held at the Mediation Center of Dutchess County. Judges from Dutchess County served as speaker and moderator at the Dutchess County Bar Association sponsored continuing legal education (CLE) course on Article 81 Guardianships.

Court Tours

- Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties held numerous court tours throughout the year.

Help Center

- The 9th Judicial District Court Help Center provides free court and procedural information to *pro se* litigants. The Help Center staff, which consists of a staff attorney and a court analyst, assisted 3,837 *pro se* litigants from January 1, 2015 to June 30, 2015. Of the 3,837 *pro se* litigants, 3,560 were residents of the 9th JD which encompasses five counties (Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Rockland and Orange) and 277 litigants resided outside of the 9th JD.

Law Day

- Westchester and Putnam counties held Law Day celebrations.

P.E.A.C.E. (Parent Education & Custody Effectiveness)

- Westchester County. March 11, 2015 – Mediation Center, Jenny Besch Clinical Director Presentation. April 27, 2015 – Blueprint for change Educational Outcomes Follow-Up Meeting with Casey Family Programs and the Community. May 29, 2015 - Blueprint for change Educational Outcomes Follow-Up Meeting with Casey Family Programs and the Community. June 24, 2015 – Blueprint for change Educational Outcomes Follow-Up Meeting with Casey Family Programs and the Community.

Pro bono

- Westchester County: Uncontested Divorce Clinic - the court supervises private attorney volunteers who assist litigants in uncontested matrimonial actions without children or equitable distribution issues. The clinics are held weekly on Tuesdays 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

10th Judicial District Nassau County

Civic Outreach

- Judicial Speaker's Bureau: Judicial and non-judicial volunteers from every Court in Nassau County participate in the Speaker's Bureau. The Speaker's Bureau accommodates Middle School, High School and collective community organizations by sending volunteer speakers out into the community across Nassau County. Ranging from town hall meetings, where Judges and/or other court personnel travel to venues to speak with residents, to career day programs that are designed to educate students about employment opportunities in the court system and the legal profession, programs are tailored to address a specific school curriculum or a particular audience.
- Appellate Division visited the St. Christopher's School and Acting County Court Judge Gary Knobel visited the Plainview School District in May 2015. District Court Judge participated in the Uniondale High School symposium. Several Judges have addressed students at the Wantagh School district in June 2015. Administrative Judge Thomas Adams delivered a commencement day address to the students of Uniondale High School in June 2015. A staff court security member participated in the Locust Valley Career Day in March 2015.

Court Tours

- Numerous court tours conducted throughout the year.

Cultural Awareness

- Black History Month Recognition. The Courts in Nassau undertake an annual celebration of Black History Month. A collaboration between the Amistad Long Island Black Bar Association and the Nassau County Courts Black History Committee, this year's ceremony was held on February 27, 2015. Special awards were presented to Hon. David A. Paterson as the Hon. James Garner. Diversity and achievements in the workplace are also recognized through the recognition of dedicated and distinguished non-judicial employees.

Children's Center

- Nassau County Courts Children's Center: the Family Court Children's Center is located in the Nassau County Family Court. By contract with OCA, it is currently operated by North Shore Child & Family Guidance and provides a separate and supervised environment for more than 200 children per month while caretakers tend to Court business.

P.E.A.C.E. (Parent Education & Custody Effectiveness)

- The Nassau County Courts collaborate and host a PEACE (Parent Education and Custody Effectiveness) program held in the Supreme Court several times per year. Since its founding in 1992, PEACE has served thousands of families across New York. It is a multi-disciplinary educational program designed to provide free information to parents about divorce and separation process with the goal of resulting in improved parent/child relationships in the reorganized family and reduction in the number of contested custody, visitation and support disputes that face our courts.

Court Information/ Help Center

- Located in a newly redesigned area of the Supreme Court Public Access Law Library, the Center undertakes broad informational outreach to both attorneys and those individuals attempting to navigate the complex legal system without an attorney.
- Enhanced automation and the centralized and consolidation of this department has permitted the Court to absorb a significant number of vacancies while maintaining and improving service to a growing population in need of vital information and assistance. Due to the efforts of the staff in the Court Information Center towards improving efficiency and the quality of the delivery of assistance, forms delivery and information through the internet have been integrated into services provided.

Mobile Legal Help Center

When available, the Nassau County Courts have made available a Mobile Legal Help Center offering Nassau County residents legal assistance for a myriad of legal issues including: Housing, Public Benefits, Healthcare, Immigration, Family Law, Employment, Consumer Protection and Advance Planning. The Mobile Legal Help Center is a partnership between the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), a not-for-profit legal services provider, and the Access to Justice Program. The Mobile Legal Help Center initiative was established to assist residents of New York with low incomes who are in need of legal assistance and may not have access to a courthouse. The Mobile Center serves as a fully functioning legal services office with a team of attorneys present to provide legal assistance with a wide array of civil legal issues. The center also includes separate meeting areas to ensure clients' privacy.

Problem Solving Courts

- Problem Solving Courts throughout Nassau County create partnerships requiring intensive collaboration between court personnel and a multitude of diverse agencies and groups throughout the community. Many judicial and non-judicial personnel in the Nassau County Courts have met the daunting challenge of planning, implementing and operating the many different problem solving courts opened in Nassau County. The problem solving courts in Nassau County include a Misdemeanor Drug Treatment Court in the District Court and a Felony Drug Treatment Court in the County Court that link addicted offenders to drug treatment instead of incarceration, three Domestic Violence Courts - two of which are located in the County Court (IDV, Felony DV) and one in the District Court (Misdemeanor DV).

10th Judicial District Suffolk County

Pro bono Programs

- Landlord-Tenant *Pro bono* Program: In conjunction with Nassau Suffolk Law Services and the Suffolk County Courts, Touro Law School operates a program in which first year law students assist attorneys in landlord tenant matters. The students interview clients and prepare the case which allows staff attorneys to concentrate on litigation.
- Uncontested Matrimonial Program: In this collaborative program between the Suffolk County Courts, Nassau Suffolk Law Services and Touro Law School, first year law students, working under the leadership of a staff attorney at Touro Law School, help litigants navigate uncontested matrimonial proceedings. Coordinating as a community to better serve the public, individuals on the Nassau Suffolk Law Services *Pro bono* Divorce Program waiting list who are seeking an uncontested divorce are alternatively assisted by Touro Law School. The law students interview the litigants, who remain *pro se*, and assist in preparing all required paperwork. This is the 4th year of the program with approximately 60 individuals served each year. This program provides personal attention to each litigant and assistance at every stage of the process to ensure successful case disposition. The program further benefits Nassau Suffolk Law Services, as it allows their volunteer attorneys to work on more complex matrimonial cases.
- Advocate Family Offense Petition Program: The Suffolk Family Court utilizes the Access to Justice Program's Advocate Family Offense Petition Program which was specifically designed for domestic violence advocates to assist litigants in completing and e-filing Family Offense petitions with the Family Court. The program allows domestic violence advocate groups to create legally sufficient Family Offense petitions for a victim of domestic violence. The information collected in the program is directly transferred into the Family Court's case management system. Court personnel can easily review the information and docket the case upon being handed the hard copy petition. This process streamlines the overall court experience for the petitioner/domestic violence victim while providing domestic violence advocates the flexibility of accessing this program and aiding victims from any internet accessible location.
- Homeowners Protection Program: This program, coordinated by the Empire Justice Center in partnership with the Suffolk County Courts, assists homeowners at risk of foreclosure understand their finances, connects them with legal services and speaks with the bank on their behalf.
- Using a Hot Docs created by Hofstra Law School makes it easier for unrepresented litigants in Family Court to complete initial petitions for child support, volunteer attorneys and law student interns can assist users with the guided interview program, answer questions, print the petitions and educate them on what to do next.
- On a trial basis, Manhattan-based Kaye Scholer, LLP represented indigent litigants on support matters in Suffolk County Family Court. Due to logistical constraints, this partnership was unable to continue. Those already referred are continuing to receive *pro bono* representation. Nassau Suffolk Law Services Self-Help Child Support Project: In collaboration with the Suffolk County Courts, the Child Support Project is for custodial parents in Suffolk County who meet financial criteria. Made possible by the *Pro bono* Innovation Fund Grant, Nassau Suffolk Law Services provides support to individuals who are not currently involved in a court proceeding on a child support matter, but who wish to file for an initial order of support or for a modification or enforcement of an existing order of support. Law students, under a student practice order, and volunteer attorneys assist with

the preparation of petitions and educate litigants on the child support process, required documentation and what to expect at a hearing.

Law Day

- A Law Day program entitled “The State of Guardianship in Suffolk County” was held on May 8, 2015. The event was attended by judges, senior court personnel and attorneys specializing in the practice of Elder Law. The program demonstrated both the interest and expertise among professionals to ensure this vulnerable population is well served.

PEACE (Parent Education & Custody Effectiveness)

- Parent Education is a program to help parents who are going through court proceedings involving divorce, separation, and custody/visitation issues to learn about the court system, the process, and the effects on their children. The PEACE Program educates parents about the impact a separation or divorce may have on their children. Sessions are held at Touro Law School under the direction of the Supervising Judge of the Matrimonial Courts.

Civic Outreach

- Women’s History Month: A program entitled “Weaving the History of Women’s Lives” was held on March 20, 2015 in recognition of Women’s History Month. The program, sponsored by the Suffolk County Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts and District Administrative Judge celebrated women whose stories have been woven into the fabric of our nation’s history. The program partnered with a local middle school English class who prepared video and oral presentations discussing role models in their communities. A quilt was presented to the Suffolk County Courts which will remain on display during the 2016 Women’s History Month program.

Court Tours

- The District Administrative Judge’s Office organized and scheduled 17 court tours on behalf of middle and high school students from public and private institutions in Suffolk County. Approximately 400 students attended tours this year.

Cultural Awareness

- A program was sponsored by the District Administrative Judge, in collaboration with Amistad Long Island Black Bar Association and the Suffolk County Bar Association, to celebrate Black History Month on February 20, 2015.
- The program, entitled “A Century of Black Life, History and Culture,” was attended by over 100 judicial and non-judicial court personnel, members of the public and local attorneys.
- The first annual Hon. Marquette L. Floyd Achievement Award, in recognition of the first African-American Judge in Suffolk County, was presented to the founding member of the Amistad Long Island Black Bar Association.
- Material was on display throughout the month of February 2015 in the public area of the Cohalan Court Complex showcasing the history and achievements of the African-American community.
- Hispanic Heritage Celebration, sponsored by District Administrative Judge, in collaboration with the Long Island Hispanic Bar Association, was held at the Cohalan Court Complex on October 8, 2015. The program will feature speeches from the District Administrative Judge and the President of the Long Island Hispanic Bar Association. Food representing the Hispanic culture was served following the program.
- Cultural displays of artwork and history was on display in the public hallways of the Cohalan Court Complex during Hispanic Heritage Month.

Court Help Centers

- DIY (Do It Yourself) Program: The DIY Help Centers in Family Court provide litigants with a comfortable, semi-private work station in close proximity to the General Clerk’s Office where DIY Forms Program is readily accessible. DIY Forms easily guide users through a series of

questions and information sheets based upon the litigant's responses. Using these well-designed program provide litigants and members of the public easy access to information about court proceedings and retrieve necessary information.

- Deputy Chief Clerk of Suffolk County Family Court received the Access to Justice Program's DIY Star Award in recognition of her efforts to provide access to justice to unrepresented litigants in Suffolk County.
- Post-Foreclosure Presentation: As part of the Access to Justice Program's *Pro bono* Week celebration, a staff member presented "What Happens after Foreclosure" at the Cohalan Court Complex in Central Islip. The event was held the week of October 19, 2015. This free program for the public focused on unrepresented litigants facing foreclosure. The presentation provided attendees with information about what to expect and procedural steps that can be taken after the judgment of foreclosure has been signed. Sample forms were made available during the presentation.
- Library Resources for the Public Program: In Central Islip and Riverhead court complexes, the law libraries house a Library Resources for the Public Program (LRPP) Help Center, in which program representatives provide users with information about various proceedings and available resources. Court personnel assigned to the LRPP have assisted an average of 478 litigants and answered an average of 216 phone calls and emails per month during 2015. Non-English speaking litigants have the option of speaking to a bilingual representative or using the Language Line to ensure complete understanding of the information disseminated.

Professional Organizations

- Suffolk County Bar Association – Pro bono Foundation: The District Administrative Judge's Office has historically been represented by a standing member on the Pro Bono Foundation. The Foundation strives to ensure that everyone, no matter their means, receives the highest level of professional representation. The presence of a court representative on the Board of Managers allows for a free exchange of information from those in the best position to provide it, as to the status of *pro bono* efforts throughout the County.
- Touro Law School's Public Advocacy Center: The Suffolk County District Administrative Judge's Office is represented at Touro Law School's Public Advocacy Center quarterly meetings. The Center, which encompasses representatives from many public advocacy agencies, strives to streamline service delivery and increase access to legal services for Suffolk County residents.

Children's Center

- The Suffolk County Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts, together with the Educational Assistance Corporation, has collaborated to ensure the Children's Center in the Cohalan Court Complex remains open for litigants with children. From January through August of 2015, 982 children and 677 families were served by the program.

New York City Supreme Courts

Kings County

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year.

Richmond County

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year.

Uncontested Divorce Clinic

- This clinic is held and open to the public every other Wednesday throughout the year.

Law Day

- A celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the Magna Carta was the theme of this event. In attendance were judicial and non-judicial personnel, officers and members of the Richmond County Bar Association, as well as students from various local schools, some of whom addressed the assembly on the significance of the Magna Carta.

Pro Bono Event

- Lawyers were on hand to educate and assist members of the public with their legal concerns October 26, 2015.

Civic Outreach

- Breast Cancer Awareness Breakfast held in October 2015, inspired by the Judges and Lawyers Breast Cancer Alert (JALBCA), to educate the legal community on breast cancer.
- Gay/Straight Alliance of the New York State Courts Luncheon held in June 2015, provided by the Alliance to Justices of the Court, non-judicial personnel, interns and others, during which time emerging legal issues were discussed by the speakers.
- 9/11 Memorial Service held September 11, 2015.

New York City Family Courts

Bronx County

Law Day

- Law Day Presentation on the individual's rights and need for improved access.

Help Center

- A delegation from Nepal, including their Chief Justice and the Chief Technical Advisor for Rule of Law & Human Rights Project with the Supreme Court of Nepal and the UN Development Programs, conducted a site visit of the Bronx Family Court Help Center.
- A delegation from the Pennsylvania Association of Court Management and court administrators from the Lehigh County Court, Pennsylvania conducted a site visit of the Bronx Family Court Help Center.

Civil Outreach

- Family Court Information Fair for Healthy, Happy Families staffed an A2J table to provide information to court users along with 40 other community providers.
- Piloted an abridged and more user friendly version of the Family Court "Financial Disclosure Affidavit" created with the Access to Justice Program. Resulting in reducing 7 ½ page form to two pages. Subsequently expanded to multiple counties.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month:

- As part of ATJ efforts during DV Awareness Month, The Bronx Family Court held a three part CLE presentation entitled, "The Anatomy of a Domestic Violence Case," which showed the life of a case from petition filing through disposition. It was presented in a narrated role play format.
- As part of DV Awareness month, Hostos Community College Office of Health and Wellness provided the Bronx Family Court with pieces of artwork created by student artists depicting their interpretation of domestic violence. The artwork was created as part of their Domestic Violence Empowerment Initiative program (DOVE). All of the pieces were on display in our 9th floor conference area and Help Center. Uniformly, everyone was amazed by talent of the artists and powerful emotion of each piece. As one out of state visitor commented, "It is some of the most moving, raw and powerful depictions of DV I have ever seen."

Kings County

Educational Outreach

- Kings County Family Court, & the NYC Family Court Advisory Council to the Administrative Judge Committee for LGBT Matters conducted a presentation on Marriage Equality. Speakers included: Alexia D. Koritz, Esq. (Associate, Paul Weiss), Hayley Gorenberg, Esq. (National Deputy Legal Director, Lambda Legal), Yoruba Richen, Esq. (Writer, Film Director and Producer), and Karess Taylor-Hughes (Sports Management Student & Social Justice Advocate).
- Kings County Family Court in collaboration with Citizens' Community Leadership conducted a presentation to the public regarding poverty, homelessness, child welfare, juvenile justice and the Family court. Participants also observed the CP Parts.

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year including students from the Epiphany School and representatives from Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

Cultural Awareness

- Black History month was opened by Keynote Speaker- Kenneth Thompson, Kings County District Attorney. Several events were held throughout the month including viewing the documentary, "The Lessons of Hayti, The Rise and Fall of Black Economic Power in America", the Correctional Association presenting a program on the Challenges: Race, Incarceration, Family Stability, and LGBTQ. Topics discussed included difficulties faced by parents of system involved youth; criminalizing Black & Latino youth; race, incarceration and family stability; the need for cultural sensitivity in Family Court proceedings; challenges faced by LGBTQ youth in the criminal justice system; and involving Youth & Community in law reform.
- The Tribune Society, Inc. & Kings County Family sponsored a presentation "A Century of Black Life, History, & Culture", keynote Speaker: Former US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook.
- Kings County Court's Black History Month Committee presented "A Century of Black Life, History, & Culture. Keynote Speaker: Honorable Sheila Abdus-Salaam, Associate Judge New York State Court of Appeals. Performance by Alvin Singleton, Composer, Mookestuek, for five-string electric viola - Martha Mooke, Violist. The committee also presented a program on "A Dichotomy of the Underground Railroad: Pathway to Freedom".
- The Gay/Straight Alliance of the NYS Courts presented "Gay Pride in the Brooklyn Courts". Featured Speakers included: Cathy Marino-Thomas (Emeritus Board President, Marriage Equality 2015), Sasha Alexander & Olympia Perez (The Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Advocates for the Right to Free Gender Identity and Expression).
- Law Day
- Kings County Family Court presented a program entitled "Law Day: Magna Carta, Cornerstone of Liberty, 800th Anniversary". Keynote Speaker: Professor Daniel Hulsebosch, NYU School of Law.
- CourtHelp Webinar via Lync/Skype for court employees was conducted. Program included review of the A-Z topics feature, Adoptions & Appeals sections, and the major features of CourtHelp.
- Community Outreach
- National Adoption Day was celebrated with the finalization of over 50 adoptions.

New York County

Educational Outreach

- Court staff trained the Harlem Community Center staff on filing petitions in order to assist the self-represented litigants with the process.

Civic Outreach

- Hand-knitted purple ribbons were distributed to employees in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Throughout the month, representatives organized community outreach events to provide Family Court information.

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year.

Law Day

- Various activities throughout the day including an original play, “Dear John, Thanks for Habeas Corpus”, written by a court employee and cast with New York County Family Court employees.
- A representative from Family Court participated in the Community Information Fair held in New York County.

Community Outreach

- Adoption Day celebrated

Domestic Violence

- Pilot project with NY County Family Justice Center (FJC) allowing victims of DV to appear before Family Court Judge via video-conference directly from FJC.

Queens County

Educational Outreach

- Host medical residents during their pediatric rotation from Cohen's Children's Hospital and North Shore/LIJ. The residents observe child protective cases.
- In collaboration with Legal Services for the Elderly, Safe Horizon and the Weinberg Center have implemented a procedure that provides this growing population with resources and assistance in filing Article 8 Family Offense petitions from offsite locations.
- Citizens' Committee for Children conducts a Community Leadership Course (CLC) where they teach concerned adult New Yorkers about issues facing children and families as well advocacy. Participants learn about a variety of topics such as poverty, homelessness, child welfare, juvenile justice and family court. Part of the course includes site visits where course participants visit sites in the morning and then discuss their experiences and learn more about the topic from the relevant policy associate. Queens Family Court hosts 5-8 participants in Child Protective and Juvenile Delinquency Parts.
- Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) and LIFT to introduce SKYPE interviews to increase availability of VAP attorneys.

Law Day

- Law Day address given by the Honorable Connie Gonzales on the topic of Magna Carta and the Rule of Law.

New York City Surrogate's Courts

Bronx County

Educational Outreach

- Judicial and non-judicial personnel conducted presentations to schools, including Sonia & Celina High School regarding court programs. Following the presentations, students were provided with demonstrations of Access to Justice DIY and Court Help sites.

Court Tours

Various court tours held throughout the year, including a tour for 7th graders from St. Luke's Catholic school.

Help Center

- Bronx Surrogate's has created a Help Desk to assist non-represented litigants process Small Estate Applications.
- 70% of the Voluntary Administration Proceedings filed utilized the DIY program.

Richmond County

Educational Outreach

- Judicial and non-judicial personnel conducted presentations to schools regarding court programs.

Civic Outreach

- Judicial and Non Judicial personnel conducted presentations regarding Article 17A process and proceedings for The Seton School, at the Family Resource and Transition Fair.

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year, including an information session for the students from P.S. 53 Gifted and Talented Program.

Help Center

- The Richmond County Surrogate's Court Help Center has been fully operational since September of 2007 and continues to service the Pro Se community. The Help Center also provides the public with a portal for access to all DIY programs.
- The Help Center compiles and maintains a library of proceeding-specific informational handouts for the public's use, and supplies OCA published forms for proceedings commonly brought in the Surrogate's Court. In addition to servicing "walk up" inquires, all telephoned inquiries are returned and responded to by the Help Center, most usually the same business day, and no later than the next business day. Statistics show that about ¼ of the initial contacts to this Court, start out as a *Pro-Se* inquiry by either mail, telephone or in person visit to our Court. In fact in 2014, our statistics show that, in addition to all "walk-up" inquires and requests for assistance, 300 appointments were made with members of the public to have anticipated filings reviewed by a member of the law department of the Court. The Help Center processes all correspondence to the Court not submitted by an attorney.

Community Outreach

- The court has a continued relationship with Camp Good Grief, a counseling camp for children who have lost a close family member.
- The court holds an annual program during the month of November to educate and celebrate adoption in the State of New York.

New York City Civil Courts

Educational Outreach

- A Judge served as a guest speaker for a program with Amber Charter School Academy of Medicine. Discussion included a review of the court system and the case types handled by the Harlem Community Justice Center.

Civic Outreach

- Breast Cancer Screening Mobile Clinic provided throughout the year.
- During Breast Cancer Awareness month, Queens Civil Court posted flyers throughout the courthouse regarding the availability of free mammograms through the mobile clinic.

Court Tours

- Various court tours held throughout the year.

Law Day

- Various celebrations held at the Civil Courts for Law Day.

Community Outreach

- Harlem Community Justice Center initiated a collaboration with Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem and MFY Legal Services to provide free legal representation to tenants facing eviction in housing court. There are now five monthly opportunities for high risk tenants in Housing Court to access free legal representation.
- Harlem Community Justice Center launched its inaugural Family and Friends Orientation for parolees being released to Harlem. The effort is a collaboration with the Justice Center, NYS DOCCS, Church of the Heavenly Rest and Interfaith Center of New York with support from the J.C. Flowers Foundation. During the 40 minute orientation, family members learned about the reentry services that parolees would receive through the center.
- Harlem Community Justice Center's Project Director served as faculty at the annual Second Chance Act and Justice Mental Health Collaboration Program conference in Washington, D.C. U.S. Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch, White House Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett, and actor/activist Tim Robbins were among the top officials who participated in the criminal justice strategies at the conference.

Help Center

- Throughout the year, thousands of litigants accessed the court HelpCenters which are located in each Court. The Help Centers provide court users with literature, interactive computers and legal information.

Cultural Awareness

- Gender and Fairness Committees of New York County Civil, Criminal and Family Courts hosted a lunchtime seminar series on Women and Depression-Guest Speaker: Terrie M. Williams, MSW.

PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND VOLUNTEERS

The Access to Justice Program could not possibly reach as many New Yorkers in need of assistance without the help of our many partners, friends and volunteers outside the court system. Below is a list of the individuals, agencies, nonprofit organizations, charitable organizations, government offices, *pro bono* organizations, bar associations, law firms, corporations, law schools, social work schools, and colleges throughout New York State that generously offer their services to the New York State Courts and the Access to Justice Program in an effort to increase access to justice for unrepresented litigants. This list would be endless if it included the numerous court employees who continuously commit their time and energy to bolster our efforts. The Access to Justice Program is grateful for the assistance.

PARTNERS AND FRIENDS

Albany County Bar Association
Albany County Bar Association Pro
Bono Program
Alston & Byrd, LLP
American Bar Foundation
Amistad Long Island Black Bar
Association
Antonelli, Anthony, Esq., Paul Hastings
LLP
Arent Fox LLP
Appel, Vivian M., Esq., Family Court
Administrator, Lehigh County Court of
Common Pleas
Asian American Bar Association of New
York
Banco Popular North America
Bank of America
Bank of New York Mellon
Bar Association of Erie County
Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP)
Barberio, Gary, Director of Community
Affairs, NYC Human Resources
Administration, Adult Protective
Services
Barclays
Barnard College
Baruch College
Battered Women's Services of Family
Services, Inc.
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
Berkeley College
Better Business Bureau
Black Bar Association of Rockland
County
Blank Rome
BNP Paribas
Boakye-Yiadom, Samuel, Hon., Second
Deputy Judicial Secretary in the
Judicial Service of Ghana
Bond Schoeneck & King PLLC
Boricua College
Brighter Tomorrows, Inc.
Bronx CLARO Program
Bronx Community College
Bronx County Bar Association
Bronx Legal Services
Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging
Brooklyn Bar Association
Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer
Lawyers Project
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Law School
Brooklyn Legal Services, Inc.
Bushwick Housing and Legal Assistance
Program
Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, LLP
CALI (The Center for Computer-
Assisted Legal Instruction)
Calman, Marlene, Esq.

Canner, Alan, Esq., The Legal Aid Society, Harlem Community Law Offices
 CASA Community Action for Safe Apartments, A Project of New Settlement Apartments
 CASA of Rockland County (Court Appointed Special Advocates)
 Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New York
 Chadbourne & Parke LLP
 Cherubin, Sidney, Esq., Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project
 Chicago-Kent College of Law Illinois Institute of Technology Center for Access to Justice & Technology
 Children's Law Center (CLC)
 City Bar Justice Center
 City College
 City of Rochester
 CLARO NYC
 Colgate-Palmolive Company
 College of Mount Saint Vincent
 College of New Rochelle
 Collins, Timothy, Esq., Collins, Dobkin & Miller LLP
 Columbia Law School
 Columbia Law School Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic
 Cooley, LLP
 CSEDNY Batterer's Intervention Program
 CUNY School of Law
 CUNY School of Law Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN)
 Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP
 Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
 Dechert LLP
 Decker, Christopher D., Chief Technical Advisor, Rule of Law and Human Rights Programme, United Nations Development Programme
 Denerstein, Evan, Esq. MFY Legal Services, Inc.
 DePaul Addiction Prevention and Support Services
 DeCarli, Jennifer L., Esq., LMSW, Senior Director, Legal Services, Her Justice
 Disability Rights New York
 DLA Piper LLP
 Duane Morris LLP
 Dutchess County Bar Association
 Dutchess County Department of Mental Hygiene
 Education & Assistance Corporation
 Eppler, David M., Esq., Maryland Attorney General's Office
 Erie County Legal Aid
 Facing Race Embracing Equity (FREE) Juvenile Task Force
 Family & Children's Association
 Feerick Center for Social Justice, Fordham University School of Law
 Fein, Dina, Hon., Special Advisor, Access to Justice Initiatives, Massachusetts Courts
 Fisher, Sheila, Esq., North Penn Legal Services
 Fordham University School of Law
 Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
 Galacotos, Dora, Esq., Feerick Center for Social Justice, Fordham Law School
 Gebbia, Joseph A.J., Executive Director of the Association of Arbitrators, Inc.
 Goodridge, Leah, Staff Attorney, Urban Justice Center
 Grace Smith House, Inc.
 Greenberg Traurig LLC
 Gutekunst, Claire P., President-elect, New York State Bar Association
 Hamilton-Madison House Asian American Recovery Services
 Heller, Meredith, Esq. Law Offices of Spar Bernstein, P.C.
 Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association

Herklotz, Alena, Esq., Leitner Center for
International Law and Justice at
Fordham Law School
Hinshaw & Culbertson, LLP
Hiscock & Barclay
Hogan Lovells
Holzman, Chloe, Esq., Mental Health
Law Project, MFY Legal Services, Inc.
Hornsby, William, Counsel, ABA
Standing Committee on Delivery of
Legal Services
Hostos Community College
Housing Court Answers, Inc.
HSBC
Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP
Hunter College
Ibero-American Action League, Inc.
Immigration Equality
Internal Revenue Service Taxpayer
Advocate Service
Jacovetti, Robert, Esq., Brooklyn Bar
Association Volunteer Lawyers Project
JASA, Queens Legal Services for the
Elderly
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Jordan, Bruce, Assistant Deputy
Commissioner, NYC Human
Resources Administration
JP Morgan Chase
Junior Frontiers of the Mohawk Valley
Kaye Scholer LLP
Khan, Shafaq, Esq. Mental Health Law
Project, MFY Legal Services, Inc.
Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
Kroub, Silbersher & Kolmykov PLLC
Lachter, Katie M., Esq., Hinshaw &
Culbertson, LLP
LaGuardia Community College
Lavelle & Finn, LLP
LawHelpNY
Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo
Legal Aid Society, the Bronx
Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn

Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New
York, Inc.
Legal Aid Society of Rockland County,
Inc.
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc.
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Bath Office, Southern Tier Legal
Services
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Elmira Office, Chemung County
Neighborhood Legal Services
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Geneva Office
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Ithaca Office, Tompkins/Tioga
Neighborhood Legal Services
Legal Assistance Western New York,
Inc., Jamestown Office, Southern Tier
Legal Services
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Olean Office, Southern Tier Legal
Services
Legal Assistance of Western New York,
Inc., Rochester Office, Monroe County
Legal Assistance Center
Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled
or Disadvantaged of WNY, Inc.
Legal Services of the Hudson Valley
Legal Services NYC
Lehman College
Lenox Hill Neighborhood House
L.I. Against Domestic Violence
LIFT
Lincoln Square Legal Services, Inc.
Fordham University School of Law
Liu, Alvin, Esq., NYC Department of
Consumer Affairs
Long Island Crisis Center
Long Island Hispanic Bar Association
Manhattan CLARO Program
Manhattan College
Manhattan Legal Services
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at
Hofstra University

McCarter & English LLP
Medgar Evers College
Melnitsky, Sheldon, Managing Attorney,
New York State Division of Housing
and Community Renewal
Mercy Center Legal Advice Program
Mercy College
MFY Legal Services, Inc.
Mid-Hudson Women's Bar Association
Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and
Popeo, P.C.
Monroe College
Monroe Community College Educational
Opportunities Program
Monroe County Bar Association
Monroe County Department of Human
Services
Morgan, Lewis, and Bockius, LLP
Morrison Foerster LLP
Morrisville State College
Mount Vernon City School District
Mount Vernon Youth Bureau
My Sister's Place
Nassau County Bar Association
Nassau County Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
Nassau/Suffolk Law Services
Committee, Inc.
Nassau/Suffolk Law Services
Committee, Inc. Volunteer Lawyers
Project
Nassau University Medical Center,
Mobile Crisis Unit
National Center for Access to Justice
National Center for State Courts
Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.
Newman, Lucy C., Esq. Staff Attorney,
The Legal Aid Society
New York Appleseed
New York Career Institute
New York Cares
New York City Bar Association
New York City Bar Association Legal
Referral Service
New York City College of Technology

New York City Housing Authority
New York City Paralegal Association
New York County Lawyers' Association
(NYCLA)
New York Law School
New York State Bar Association
New York State Board of Elections
New York State Court Officers
Association
New York State Office of Alcoholism
and Substance Abuse Services
(OASAS)
New York University Law School
Niagara County Legal Aid Society, a
Division of Neighborhood Legal
Services, Inc.
Northern Manhattan Improvement
Corporation (NMIC)
Norton Rose Fulbright LLP
NYC Administration for Children's
Services
NYC Administration for Children's
Services, Office of Community
Partnerships
NYC Commission on Human Rights
NYC Department for the Aging
NYC Department of Consumer Affairs
NYC Human Resources Administration,
Adult Protective Services
NYC Human Resources Administration,
Office of Legal Affairs
NYLAG (New York Legal Assistance
Group)
NYS Poverty Simulation Network
Oneida County Bar Association
Onondaga County Bar Association
Onondaga County Parent Support
Program
Orange County Bar Association
Orange County Department of Mental
Health
Oswego County Bar Association
Pace Women's Justice Center
Partnership for Children's Rights
Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP

Paul Hastings LLP
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton &
Garrison LLP
Permanent Commission on Access to
Justice
Pluiose, Wedly, Director, Rental
Assistance Unit, FIA Housing &
Homeless Services/Initiatives, NYC
Human Resources Administration
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York
Pro Bono Net
Pro Bono Partnership
Proskauer Rose LLP
Putnam County Bar Association
Putnam County Mental Health Services
Queens County Bar Association
Queens Legal Services
Queens Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.
Reed Smith LLP
Renaissance Economic Development
Corporation
Retired and Senior Volunteer Program
of Rockland County (RSVP)
Richmond County Bar Association
Riegel, Deborah E., Esq., Rosenberg &
Estis, P.C.
Robin Hood
Rochester Black Bar Association
Rochester Educational Opportunity
Center, The College at Brockport
Rockland County Bar Association
Rockland County Department of Mental
Health
Rockland County Women's Bar
Association
Ropes & Gray LLP
Rozenholc, David, Esq., Rozenholc &
Associates
Russell, William T., Esq. Simpson
Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Safe Horizon
Sanctuary for Families
Sandman, James J., President, Legal
Services Corporation

S.A.N.E. (Sexual Assault Nurse
Examiner Program)
Schenectady County Bar Association
Schlick, Daphne, Esq. NYLAG
Schoenthal, Allison, Esq., Hogan Lovells
Schwadel, Blaine Z., Esq., Rosenberg &
Estis, P.C.
Seidman, Douglass J., Manhattan
Courthouse Project, The Legal Aid
Society
Self-Represented Litigation Network
Seton Hall University
Shearman & Sterling LLP
Shrestha, Kalyan, Senior Justice
Supreme Court of Nepal
Silvestre, Ygnacio, Director, Assigned
Counsel Project, NYC Department for
the Aging
S.I. Newhouse School of Public
Communications
Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom
LLP & Affiliates
St. John's University School of Law
St. John's University School of Law,
Ronald H. Brown Center for Civil
Rights
St. Vincent de Paul Legal Program, Inc.
Consumer Justice for the Elderly
Litigation Clinic, St. John's University
School of Law
Starrer, Anne, Esq.
Staten Island CLARO Program
Staten Island Legal Services
Staten Island Women's Bar Association
Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP
Student Advocacy
Suffolk County Bar Association Pro
Bono Foundation
Suffolk County Women's Bar
Association
Sullivan & Cromwell
SUNY Geneseo
Syracuse University College of Law

Tallarico, Shanna, Esq., New York Legal Assistance Group
 Tenant Protection Unit, Division of Housing & Community Renewal
 Thompson Hine LLP
 Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center
 The Bridge Fund of New York Inc.
 The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI)
 The City College of New York
 The City College of New York, Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies
 The College at Brockport
 The Family Center
 The LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York
 The Legal Aid Society Harlem Community Law Offices
 The Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc., Pro Bono Program
 The Legal Aid Society of New York City
 The Legal Aid Society of Rochester
 The Legal Project, Capital District Women's Bar Association
 The Retreat Domestic Violence Services
 The Safe Center LI
 The Women's Bar Association of Orange & Sullivan Counties
 UBS Financial Services
 Unflat, Laura M., Esq.
 University of Rochester
 University Settlement
 Urban Justice Center
 Urban Justice Center – Community Development Project
 Urban Justice Center – Domestic Violence Project
 Urban Justice Center – Human Rights Project
 Urban Justice Center – International Refugee Assistance Project
 Urban Justice Center – Mental Health Project
 Urban Justice Center – Peter Cicchino Youth Project
 Urban Justice Center – Safety Net Project
 Urban Justice Center – Sex Workers Project
 Urban Justice Center – Street Vendors Project
 Urban Justice Center – Veteran Advocacy Project
 Vera Institute of Justice
 Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Inc. (VIBS)
 Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts
 Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Inc.
 Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County, Inc.
 Volunteers of America
 Volunteers of Legal Services
 WDKX Radio
 Watson Farley & Williams (New York) LLP
 Weil, Gotshal & Manges
 Weliky, Mark, Executive Director, Queens Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.
 Westchester Black Bar Association, Inc.
 Westchester County Bar Association
 Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health
 Westchester Women's Bar Association
 Western New York Law Center
 White & Case LLP
 Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
 Worker Justice Center of New York
 Yasek, John, Esq.
 York College

VOLUNTEERS

The pages of this Report detail the numerous ways in which the Access to Justice Program delivers cost effective legal services and information to unrepresented litigants during these challenging economic times. Recorded throughout these pages are the extraordinary numbers of unrepresented litigants assisted in the court-based volunteer programs, as well as a review of the Access to Justice Program's highlights and milestones in 2015. What can never be acknowledged enough is the fact that none of these achievements would be possible without the generosity, skill and dedication of the individuals who volunteer their time to serve the many thousands of *pro se* litigants who would be lost without them. While the Partners and Friends enumerated in the previous section allow the Access to Justice Program to operate, there would be no court-based programs to operate without these volunteers. In recognition of their service, listed below are the names of the 2015 Access to Justice Program's stellar volunteers, divided by level of contribution. All of the individuals listed below were previously recognized during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week (see Part V). The Access to Justice Program is grateful for their ongoing support and service.

The Access to Justice Program's Star volunteer of the year, recognized for five years of exceptionally dedicated service in the Bronx County Uncontested Divorce Program::

Juanita Lasprilla, Esq.

The following outstanding volunteers provided the most volunteer hours in the programs they participated in:

Guardian Ad Litem Program

Jaime Lathrop, Esq.

Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program

Shaun McElhenny, Esq.

Len Colonna, Esq.

Uncontested Divorce Program

Carolyn A. Mann, Esq.

Horacio Sardinias, Esq.

Housing Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program

Paul Hastings LLP

Evelyn Kaye Lin, Esq.

Housing and Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Programs

Thomas Joseph Mennecke, Esq.

Housing Volunteer Lawyers Program

Andres Edwin Valles, Esq.

Civil Court Volunteer Lawyers Program

Ginu Jacob, Esq.

Law Student:

Victoria Hill

**Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for
the Day Program**

George Bassias, Esq.

Law Students:

Tyler Roberts

Israel Appel

**Certificates for Outstanding Service:
Court Navigator Program**

Vanessa Gutierrez

Jacqueline Zeigler

Sherly Romero

**The following distinguished individuals volunteered substantially in excess of
their required *pro bono* commitment:**

Edward Acton, Esq.

Evelyn Advante

Stefan Ali, Esq.

Tempest Alston, Esq.

Marisa N. Artherton, Esq.

Thomas Austin, Esq.

Wanda Baldera

Rebecca Ulich Balinskas, Esq.

Reynaldo Bargallo

Emila Bechrakis, Esq.

Peter Besada

Ernesto Belzaguy, Esq.

Alyssa Bliss, Esq.

Cil Shaw-Brewer, Esq.

Williams Brick, Esq.

John Briggs, Esq.

Jalissa Brown

Mariam Bukhrasvili

Karyn Burks

Joangel Capri

Conor Carrigan, Esq.

Lawrence Chandler

Starr Chandler

Sandra Chen

James Chin, Esq.

Margaret Ciepriez, Esq.

Elliot Cohen, Esq.

Shemori S. Corinthian, Esq.

Amy Davis, Esq.

Alexandra Dear, Esq.

Briana Demuccio

Claudia DiMartino, Esq.

Rosa Duarte

Shakera Ebanks, Esq.

Dian Eddy

Scott Flores

Kim Fontaine, Esq.

Evgeniya Galchenko, Esq.

Samuel Garrett, Esq.

Gillian Gayle

Franklin Genao, Esq.

Jodie Gerald, Esq.

Elena Gomez

Jonathan Gratch, Esq.

Alicea Hart

Angela Hamarich, Esq.

Jonathan Hurt, Esq.

Gregory Hyde, Esq.

Nelly Isaacson

LaDonna Johnson, Esq.

Angela Kaaiohelo, Esq.

Benjamin Kifle

Maria La Macchia, Esq.

Richard Landman, Esq.

Tae Young Lee, Esq.

Cindy Leviner

Nell H. Levy

Ann Lewis, Esq.

Andrew Lippman, Esq.

Diego Lopez

Jacob Malafsky

Hon. H. Malatzky

Merium Malik, Esq.

Giancarlo Malinconico, Esq.

Amanda Marmol

Stephani McCatty

Phaedra McIntosh, Esq.

Kiersten McKoy, Esq.

Debra Mechanick, Esq.

Dale Melchert, Esq.

Martha Mendoza
Raymar Mendoza
Kirsten Mickelson
Karin Moskovitch
Robert Moyland, Esq.
Christina S. Mulligan
Meredith Nachman, Esq.
Joshua Normand
Devora Nunez
Grace C. E. Obame
Richard Oberstein
Madeline Ocasio
Jamila Outlar
David Patterson, Esq.
Nelly Perez
Edward Pomerantz
Darlyn Presinal
Dianne Ramdeen
Sabrina Reid
Denise Reynoso

Nicholas Rosse
Angela Shamay
Francisco Silvero-El
Veranika Skrypskaya
Maia Smith
Zachary Sylvane
Keith Szczepanski, Esq.
Brian Sweet, Esq.
Mahbubar Talukdar, Esq.
Ashante Terrell
Vania Tseng, Esq.
Jasmin Valle, Esq.
Josanny Vasquez
Leonides R. Viagar III
Gadalupe Vidal
Katherine Vrgino
Adam Waldbaum, Esq.
Isabelle D. Wedemeyer, Esq.
Andrea Williams
Craig Zim, Esq.

The following individuals donated 50 hours or more in Access to Justice Program's volunteer programs:

Samson Adler
Agatha Archilbong, Esq.
Ama Attah-Mensah, Esq.
Grace Avedissian, Esq.
Leni Battaglia, Esq.
Cherell Beddard, Esq.
Nell Beekman, Esq.
Wilesca Belhonne
Roby Benn, Esq.
Deborah Bey, Esq.
Ashley Blakely, Esq.
Andrea Blair, Esq.
Melissa Boey, Esq.
Lauren Boulbol
Maxine Brannon
Amanda Bransford, Esq.
Rachel Brent
Steven Buchwald, Esq.
Joseph Buono, Esq.
Brian P. Calandra

Mary Callaghan, Esq.
James Chin, Esq.
Saralyn M. Cohen, Esq.
Yessi Colondres
Matteo Conterio
Amanda Cort
Timothy DeCicco, Esq.
Della Dekay, Esq.
Brett Dolin
Robert Drapkin, Esq.
Dorie Fader, Esq.
Arielle Firestone
Tana Forrester
Rudy Ferreira
Shani Freedman, Esq.
Barbara Gager
Danielle Garbien, Esq.
Thomas Giles
Navpreet Gill, Esq.
Yan Grinblat, Esq.

John Gross, Esq.
Gregory M. Harris
Leslie Harris, Esq.
Betty Hayes
Sara Herchenroder, Esq.
Bethany Hickey
Ivan Ho, Esq.
Mee Ho, Esq.
Lynn Horowitz, Esq.
Nipa Hossain
Xiaochun Jiang, Esq.
Darlene Jolibois, Esq.
Denise Karamain, Esq.
Anna Karpman
Ndali Kashume
Sharon Katz, Esq.
Edward Kim, Esq.
Sue Kim, Esq.
Rochelle Kiselman, Esq.
Jonah Klempner
Gaston Kroub, Esq.
Lakeisha Lambert
Cindy Levinder
Jesse Levine
Janelle Lewis, Esq.
Nikia Lewis
Andrew M. Lippman
Jing Liu, Esq.
Cassandra Mcnamee
Yaneike McKenzi-Coley, Esq.
Kiersten McKoy
Valerie McLaughlin, Esq.
Brigette McLeod, Esq.
Grissel Mercado, Esq.
Annie Mohan, Esq.
Audrey J. Morgan
Robert Moylan, Esq.
Rachel Nager
Mojoyinola Onijala, Esq.
Kristie Ortiz, Esq.
Robert Peters, Esq.
Mishael Pine, Esq.
Lleana M. Pitui
Anthony Randazzo, Esq.
Michael Rawls
Wendy Reilly, Esq.

Sophie E. Reiter, Esq.
Marlene M. Riley, Esq.
Kindel Rogers
Andreina I. Rosa
Jay Rubin, Esq.
Makedah Salmond, Esq.
Adelina Sejdiu
Reshma Shah, Esq.
Bryan Shipp, Esq.
Christopher Simon
Rebecca Sodhi, Esq.
Andrew Stafutti
DeVoia Stewart, Esq.
Luqman Stroud
Sarah Trepel, Esq.
Michael Valentine, Esq.
Nathalia Varela
Shmuel Vasser, Esq.
Carliana Wilson
Judy Woods, Esq.
Maryna Yeramianchuk
Kevin Younai, Esq.

New York State Courts Access to Justice Program
<http://www.nycourts.gov/nya2j>
(646) 386-4200



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