



JDC Celebrates Forty Years Providing Legal Help to San Franciscans and Their Families

Forty years ago, James Brosnahan, then president of The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF), along with the late Joanne M. Garvey, president in 1981, and Thomas F. Smegal, president in 1979, mobilized the city's legal community to respond to a growing, unmet need. They had come to realize that government-funded, staff-based programs did not have the resources, or the capacity, to meet all the legal needs of San Francisco's poor.

Though BASF had been involved with the creation of the San Francisco Legal Aid Society in the early 1900s, BASF's members, while supportive, had not been incredibly active in pro bono legal services. Determined to help its members provide legal services to those who were being left behind, BASF launched the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) in April 1977, hoping it would serve as a catalyst to involve more BASF members in pro bono work for the poor.

In 2012, VLSP, the BASF Foundation, and BASF's Diversity Educational Programs merged into one 501(c)(3) organization and the resulting entity was named the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC).

Now celebrating forty years, JDC continues its work to fulfill the vision of the three founders and to expand into preventing homelessness, increasing diversity in the legal profession, and assisting immigrant children and their families.

VLSP's First Ten Years: 1977-1986

SEED FUNDING TAKES HOLD AND GROWS

Ann Murphy and Vince Sison

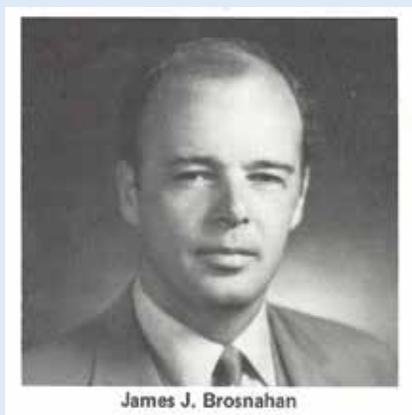
In recognition of its unwavering dedication to creating positive and lasting change in clients' lives, the Volunteer Legal Services Program/Justice & Diversity Center's forty years will be chronicled in every issue of San Francisco Attorney magazine in 2017. This first installment covers 1977 to 1986.

A look back at the last forty years reveals a period full of exponential social, political, and cultural change. From the battle for civil rights to the technological landscape, today's society has encountered a whirlwind of evolution that is projecting us into yet another era of intense technological revolution.

Smartphones have replaced Walkmans, while the tunes played on them have gone from the

Carpenters to Michael Jackson to Back Street Boys to Adele. Computers have migrated from the desktop into watches. Wars waged enveloped Vietnam, then moved throughout the Middle East with battlefields from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden. Foot soldiers are becoming obsolete, being replaced with drones and robots.

High-waisted bell-bottoms have shrunk to low-rise skinny silhouettes to yoga pants and leggings, while men's tailoring has gone from slim to double-breasted to business



DECEMBER 1976

A PLEDGE TO THE POOR

James Brosnahan announces the agenda for 1977, the year of his presidency: "We will place heavy emphasis this year on programs which will increase our ability to represent the poor and near poor."

MAY 1977

VLSP: AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE AMERICAN PROMISE OF JUSTICE FOR ALL

Announcing the formation of the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP), as JDC was then known: "The Bar Association, under the aegis of the Volunteer Legal Services Program, is suggesting that each lawyer in the city make an annual contribution of 50 hours of legal services to the poor. As an alternative we are suggesting that those who choose, may make a commensurate contribution of money."

1977

This timeline was constructed with quotations from and comments on present and past BASF publications, including *San Francisco Bar, In Re, Brief/Case, San Francisco Attorney*, and others.

casual. Generation X has given way to Millennials who will soon be joined in the work force by Generation Z, while the mere fact that we can call, text, and talk face-to-face with each other wirelessly has been overshadowed by breaking news travelling globally in the blink of an eye through a single tweet.

Additionally, within the last four decades Americans have experienced the Watergate scandal; relinquished control of the Panama Canal; explored space, back to the moon, on to Mars, and into the depths of our solar system; witnessed the tearing down of the Berlin Wall; and engaged in the war on terrorism beginning with the tragedy marked by September 11, 2001.

We have seen “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” enacted and then redacted within this same generation, and have lived to see our first African American president. We have encountered debates and laws involving reproduction in *Roe v. Wade*, gender-based discrimination in *Jackson v. Birmingham*

Board of Education, and a decade of struggle resulting in legalization of same sex marriages across the United States.

In light of the symbolic milestones of this time period, The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) has continued its commitment to public service, with a renewed focus on civil rights and equal opportunity for all citizens, and affirmed its relentless pursuit of the common good. Rooted in fertilizing its members’ success, BASF continues to demonstrate its engagement in today’s most pressing issues.

VLSP IS FORMED

In the year that Jimmy Carter took the oath of office as president of the United States, BASF launched what would become one of the most prominent pro bono programs in the nation. BASF’s Board of Directors’ meeting minutes on September 21, 1977, reveal:

DECEMBER 1977

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

“With the direct assistance, input and suggestions of at least 50 to 75 members of the Association, the Voluntary Legal Services Program was established during 1977. [...] During the year the Association received a \$36,000 grant from the Legal Services Corporation which will make it possible to have two additional staff members who will work exclusively on the Voluntary Legal Services Program. With this staff in place and with the response of the lawyers of San Francisco which we anticipate, it is fair to say that the Voluntary Legal Services Program will be permanent and will increase the contribution of lawyers to the representation of the poor, a combination which has always been substantial in this city.”



Michael Lee (left), a member of BASF’s Voluntary Legal Services Program Policy Board, visited Call-A-Lawyer in 1978. KQED reporter Robin Pollock interviewed him about the legal services available to the Bay Area. Photo by Sam Hayes.

MAY 1978

FIRST CALL-A-LAWYER NIGHT

“In late spring, under the direction of Joanne Garvey, Mary Jane Large and Bob Williams, we coordinated Call-A-Lawyer evening, aired on KQED television, which included a one-half hour play on how to use Small Claims courts and utilized over 100 volunteer lawyers to answer calls and give free legal information to the community.”

1978

“As a condition of the \$36,000 grant the Bar Association received from the Legal Services Corporation the Association is bound to establish a governing body which will set policy for the Association’s Volunteer Legal Services Program. The governing body will be made up of at least one-third client representatives. The number of Committee members can be designated by the Association. It was moved, seconded and passed to authorize the formation of the Committee.”

With this one-time funding, then BASF President James Brosnahan, Morrison & Foerster, along with 1981 BASF President the late Joanne M. Garvey, and 1979 BASF President Thomas F. Smegal, Law Offices of Thomas F. Smegal, created VLSP to motivate and mobilize the legal community to respond to the growing unmet need of providing legal services to San Francisco’s most marginalized. VLSP was founded to offer BASF members a chance to volunteer and to close the gap between those who could afford legal representation and those who could not.

With the grant from the Legal Services Corporation, two additional BASF staff members were hired to work exclusively on the Voluntary Legal Services Program. According to Brosnahan, “With this staff in place, and with the response of the lawyers of San Francisco which we anticipate, it is fair to say, that the Voluntary Legal Services Program will be permanent and will increase the contribution of lawyers to the representation of the poor, a combination which has always been substantial in this city.”

PRO BONO REPRESENTATION AND FUNDING RAMP UP

BASF presidents throughout VLSP’s early years asked each lawyer in San Francisco “to contribute 50 hours a year to the representation of the poor.” Two main methods of achieving such a contribution were established. The first was the use of the Lawyer Referral Service (now named the Lawyer

OCTOBER 1978

VLSP: GROWING TO MEET NEEDS

“There are now over 350 attorneys active in this program [VLSP]. In order to meet the critical needs of San Francisco’s low income population in important areas such as domestic relations, consumer law, SSI and housing, we need 400 more volunteer attorneys.”



“Pamela Rhodes, VLSP pro bono attorney, and Wallace Oman, SNLAF attorney at the Landlord/Tenant Clinic.”

1979

HOUSING AND FAMILY LAW CLINICS ESTABLISHED

“Responding to the overwhelming need for housing and family law assistance, VLSP with the cosponsorship of the Lawyers’ Committee for Urban Affairs and the Queen’s Bench, have developed specialized clinics in these areas.”

1979

Referral and Information Service), by which a participating lawyer could sign up on a panel and receive clients on a referral basis. The second avenue was to match law firms with legal services offices to increase the capabilities of the representation of the poor in San Francisco.

Sustaining VLSP beyond the initial two years, other funding began to flow in. Grants were received, and in the 1980s a group of Bay Area foundations pooled money into the Common Fund for Legal Services; the first project funded was a grant to VLSP specifically to help corporate counsel get started in pro bono projects.

Corporate legal departments shared a commitment to involve corporate attorneys in the pro bono effort. According to an April/May 1985 *San Francisco Attorney* magazine article, US District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel and California Court of Appeal Justice Donald B. King made a personal appeal to attendees at an April 1, 1985, BASF/American Corporate Counsel Association luncheon at the Clift Hotel. They “eloquently described the tremen-

dous need for greater pro bono service to the poor, particularly in light of decreased federal funding for legal services. They also stressed the benefits of participation to the individual lawyers. Enhanced skills development and courtroom experience were cited as ‘bonus’ results of pro bono work, added to the main derivative of representing the neediest of our citizens: knowing you have fulfilled your professional obligation to serve those who would otherwise go without help.”

TANYA NEIMAN’S LEGACY: HOLISTIC SERVICES

Within the years of 1981 and 1982, BASF not only saw its first woman president (Joanne Garvey), but it was also within this period that VLSP saw its very first employee on the payroll, the late Tanya Neiman. Up until 1981, BASF staff, with the help of volunteer attorneys, had facilitated VLSP; then under Neiman’s direction, VLSP grew into one of the largest pro bono programs in the country.



JUNE 1980

FIRST COMMUNITY LAW WEEK

The first Community Law Week was held, a joint effort between BASE, KRON television, and neighborhood groups. During the week, volunteer attorneys provided free one-on-one consultations at several law fair locations throughout the city.

SEPTEMBER 1980

LEGAL AID AND REFERRAL CLINIC MADE PERMANENT



After the first three Legal Aid and Referral Clinics were a big success, the Board of Directors voted to make the Saturday morning clinics permanent.

1980

1981



Joanne Garvey

Neiman took a bold approach to legal services with her vision of providing “holistic services” to clients. Holistic advocacy recognizes that legal assistance programs must take

a multidisciplinary approach to their work and acknowledge that their clients’ problems cannot be boiled down to a purely legal dilemma. This approach combines the expertise of both attorneys and social service professionals, aiming to put out legal fires while addressing the full range of issues clients are facing.

MOVE TO BECOME A NONPROFIT

As the original seed money grew, it became clear that VLSP was firmly established. With additional funding and increased staff necessary, the founders’ goal to mobilize the city’s legal community “to meet all the legal needs of San Francisco’s poor” was best accomplished through the formation of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. In 1984, this was accomplished and a board of directors was formed with four attorney members, two members “from a variety of appropriate groups including client and neighborhood organizations,” and one individual member “who is supportive of legal

1982

TANYA NEIMAN BECOMES DIRECTOR OF VLSP



“At the age of 29, Tanya Neiman became director of the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP). In that role since 1982, Neiman transformed VLSP into one of the largest and most innovative legal services programs in the country. She pioneered the development of unique models of delivering services, including

holistic advocacy, which forges a multidisciplinary approach to helping clients change their lives.”

1982

CHRISTOPHER F. EMLEY
HONORED BY STATE BAR



OCTOBER 1983

CHRIS EMLEY RECEIVES STATE BAR AWARD

“Christopher F. Emley, Chair of the Volunteer Legal Services Program Board of Directors, was recently honored at the State Bar’s Annual Pro Bono Reception where he was presented with the prestigious President’s Pro Bono Service Award. [...] Not only has Mr. Emley taken an extraordinary number of individual cases from VLSP’s Pro Bono Panel over the years, [...] In addition to taking pro bono cases, Mr. Emley has served as the ‘resident expert’ at the monthly VLSP Family Law Clinic nearly every month since its inception in 1980.”

1983

services to the poor.” Board members served one-year terms and met quarterly, and the “president, president-elect, secretary, and treasurer of [T]he Bar Association of San Francisco shall serve, respectively, as the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and treasurer of this corporation.”

MONEY AND TIME: THE YIELD WAS TREMENDOUS

As the close of VLSP’s first decade approached, the organization had grown to become a major provider of legal services to low-income San Francisco residents. From 1981 to 1986, the number of clients served increased by 254 percent, and the number of attorney and paralegal volunteers, as well as pro bono trainings, increased dramatically.

As Tanya Neiman noted in another *San Francisco Attorney* magazine article, “I hope that you will conclude that your money, and your time, have been wisely

invested—with a yield that has surpassed our most wildly optimistic projections.”

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Coming next:

The summer issue of *San Francisco Attorney* magazine will highlight VLSP from 1987 to 1996.

FEBRUARY 1984

INCORPORATION OF VLSP

VLSP became its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity.

MAY 1985

COOPERATIVE VENTURES

VLSP, in a joint effort with local organizations, helps establish a Temporary Restraining Order Clinic to meet a growing need to help survivors of domestic violence.

OCTOBER 1986

REFLECTING ON VLSP’S GROWTH

“VLSP has grown to become one of the major providers of legal services to the poor and low-income San Francisco residents” Tanya Neiman in 1986, reflecting on her time at VLSP.

Between 1982 and 1986, under her first few years of leadership, the following programs were established:

- Landlord/Tenant Training Clinics
- Uncontested Dissolution System
- County Jail Legal Assistance Project
- AIDS Assistance Panel
- Legal Services to Persons with Life Threatening Illness Panel

1984

1985

1986