

Forty Years at the Center of Justice & Diversity

The Third Decade: 1997 to 2006

Forty years ago, in 1977, 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.

Together, they founded what would become the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC). Over the decades, under the

leadership of extraordinary women, the organization, then known as the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP), grew into a national pro bono model and the single largest provider of free legal services in Northern California.

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 are chronicled in every issue of *San Francisco Attorney* magazine in 2017. This third installment covers 1997 to 2006. You can find previous timelines and stories at jdc.sfbar.org.

1996

1997



AUGUST 1996

WELFARE REFORM SIGNED INTO LAW

President Clinton signs into law the Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, better known as Welfare Reform. Within a year, San Francisco begins to feel the real impact of the legislation. Thousands of adults and children see life-and-shelter-preserving benefits jeopardized, as the cost of housing continues to climb.

VLSP's Homeless Advocacy Project assists many of the 3,000 adults who have to reapply for benefits. Due to these efforts, and newly established programs like the SSI for Children with Disabilities Project and the Citizenship Project, San Francisco has the highest reapplication rate in the country.

OCTOBER 1996

SSI FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES PROJECT

As a result of welfare reform legislation, 135,841 children nationally are cut from SSI rolls. In response, VLSP starts the SSI for Children with Disabilities Project.



1997

CITIZENSHIP PROJECT

VLSP launches a new Citizenship Project to help elderly and disabled legal immigrants become naturalized citizens and preserve their right to food stamps, SSI, and other benefits.

MAY 1997

WOMENTORING NETWORK

In response to welfare reform, VLSP also enlarges the innovative Womentoring Network, pairing Women’s Clinic participants with professional women. The network offers opportunity for professional women to give back to the community and make a concrete difference in someone’s life. Mentors offer assistance in using the public library, résumé writing, setting goals and filling out financial aid forms. On another, and perhaps more powerful level, mentors provide confidence-building psychological and emotional support.

“Womentor” Angela Bradstreet, in 1998, says that her relationship with her mentee has broadened her horizons: “We as lawyers can have such tunnel vision...when you’re talking to someone who’s been both physically and mentally abused, doesn’t have a family or a support system, it puts everything into perspective.”



PHOTO CREDIT NAJIB JOE HAKIM

“Womentor”: Angela Bradstreet (left) and mentee Judy Jordan.

1997

LAW ACADEMY

Law Academy, a project by BASF and the San Francisco Unified School District, is established to introduce underprivileged high school students to law and law-related careers.

1998



PHOTO CREDIT NAJIB JOE HAKIM

■ The Women’s Initiative for Self-Employment provides information and follow-up services.

SEPTEMBER 1997

ONE-STOP WOMEN’S CLINICS

VLSP expands and strengthens services in the wake of welfare reform, hosting One-Stop Women’s Clinics with dozens of community-based agencies offering workshops, information, and consultations.

1998

BAY AREA MINORITY LAW STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

BASF’s Bay Area Minority Law Student Scholarship Program is established. During its highly successful inaugural year, the program raises over \$380,000 and sponsors three-year scholarships for 25 entering law students.

Two Decades of Scholarships

Turn to page 14 to read more about past and current scholarship recipients.

1998

LEGAL EMPLOYMENT IN ACTION PROJECT

The Legal Employment in Action Project (LEAP) is founded, providing former welfare recipients with extensive job and skills training and entry-level job placement with legal employers. After 18 weeks of training, and with the support of volunteer mentors, LEAP graduates obtain full-time jobs in San Francisco law firms.

Within a few years, LEAP becomes one of the most successful sector-based training programs in the country, with over 100 law firms and corporate law departments participating.



1999



2000

SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE

The School-To-College (STC) program is established, providing SAT test preparation, funding to visit colleges, counseling and assistance with college applications. STC's first year is a huge success, with every student in the program accepted into a college. To this day, STC guides students—80 percent of them first-generation students—through the application process and 97 percent of STC students go on to attend college.

JULY 2001

FAMILY LAW ASSISTED SELF HELP

Family Law Assisted Self Help (FLASH) is established and operated in conjunction with the Unified Family Court of San Francisco to provide legal counseling and education for people seeking to represent themselves in their divorce cases. For many low-income people, the sheer number of forms required to get a divorce can be so confusing and intimidating that some just end up staying married—frequently, the tension produced by these unresolved situations can lead to violence. Still based at the San Francisco Unified Family Court today, FLASH helps litigants with family law matters, including dissolution (divorce), child support, child custody and visitation, spousal support, drafting legal documents and answering questions about the availability of additional community resources.

2000

2001

9/11 PRO BONO INITIATIVE

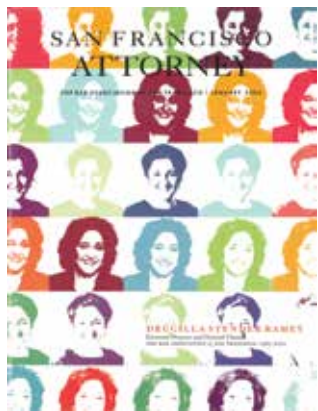
The legal community is quick to answer the call in the wake of the attacks of September 11, working together with governmental and social service organizations to provide assistance. The 9/11 Pro Bono Initiative is launched to provide legal support to the California families who lost loved ones as a result of 9/11. These families have to deal with life insurance claims, probate matters, loss of health benefits, immigration problems, child custody, and other issues while still grieving. VLSP arranges for families to receive advocacy and counsel.

At the same time, BASF's Lawyer Referral and Information Service is working with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights to screen victims of racially-motivated discrimination and hate crimes seeking legal assistance.

2001

2001

DRU RAMEY LEAVES BASF AFTER 16 YEARS OF SERVICE



Dru Ramey leaves as Executive Director of BASF after sixteen years of service. In the words of Tanya Neiman, “Under Dru’s leadership over the past two decades, VLSP has become the largest and only full-service provider of legal services to poor people in San Francisco, with some services extending into the greater Bay Area as well. This is an astonishing accomplishment. Nowhere else

in the country is there a bar association that provides a home for such a large and complex program....That is the strength from which we operate, enabling us to respond to the ever-changing problems faced by indigent people in our community.”



2001

HEALTH CARE ACCESS PROJECT

The Healthcare Access Project is launched as a collaborative venture with the Haight Ashbury Free Clinics and Support for Families of Children with Disabilities. Through this project, San Francisco’s disabled low-income population receives greater access to the full array of legal and social services needed to help them achieve stability and move forward.

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006



2004

LAWYERS FOR CHILDREN

Recognizing that the criminal justice system is ill-equipped to address and treat the problems of youth offenders with developmental issues, VLSP launches a pilot program called Lawyers for Children. The program assigns volunteer attorneys to work with children caught in the courts to make sure they receive the educational or mental health services they are entitled to by law.

2006

THE GUIDING LIGHT OF VLSP: TANYA'S VISION, INNOVATION AND SPIRIT



Tanya Neiman, VLSP’s director since 1982, passes away after a long battle with cancer. Her legacy as the guiding light at VLSP lives on. In the words of Steven Scudder, ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, “There are few, if any, pro bono programs in America that have not been impacted by Tanya’s vision, innovation, and spirit.” Kamala D. Harris, then district attorney for the City and County of San Francisco, describes her as “a tireless and energetic fighter for equality and fairness. She had one of the loudest voices for those who had no voice.”