



VLSP's Second Decade:

1987–1996

"THOSE WERE HEADY TIMES" *

Teresa Lynn Friend

The Justice & Diversity Center (JDC), formerly known as the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP), celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year. In recognition of its unwavering dedication to creating positive and lasting change in clients' lives, the VLSP/JDC forty-year anniversary will be chronicled in every issue of San Francisco Attorney magazine in 2017. This second installment covers 1987 to 1996.

The second decade of the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP)—from 1987–1996—was an incredibly busy and productive time. It was a time of growth, of pioneering ideas, of meeting the unique challenges that arose during that time, and of widening recognition of the leadership and vision of VLSP Director Tanya Neiman and the tireless work of countless staff and volunteers.

DYNAMIC DUO

With the support and devotion of strong board leaders, the work of VLSP was spearheaded by the dynamic leadership of Drucilla “Dru” Ramey and Tanya Neiman. With Ramey as executive director of BASF and Neiman as executive director of VLSP, the two organizations continued to work hand in hand. Ramey points out that her and Neiman’s “personalities meshed well.” They came from very different backgrounds and had

different strengths, but between them there was almost nothing they couldn’t accomplish.

PROJECTS TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS

Neiman was “constantly full of ideas,” according to Ramey, and what made her unique was her ability to both appreciate the big picture, and look at systemwide issues, while simultaneously being able to concentrate intensely on the details of

* Dru Ramey, BASF executive director, 1985–2002

This timeline was constructed with quotations from and comments on present and past BASF publications, including *San Francisco Attorney* and others.

AUGUST 1987

PRO BONO LEGALIZATION PROJECT

Responding to community requests, VLSP launches the Legalization Project to “help with the massive legalization program under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in November 1986.



Volunteer attorney Patricia Black serves at a HAP clinic.

JUNE 1988

HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

“In response to [the] collective desire of BASF members to ‘do something’ about the problem of homelessness in our community, the Volunteer Legal Services Program has organized the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP).” VLSP organized and administers HAP in partnership with the Barristers Club. Its central intake system is the Legal Clinic, held every other Thursday in the Cadillac Hotel in San Francisco's Tenderloin.

1987

1988

FEBRUARY 1988

GROWING SERVICES TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

Responding to a growing need for services, a new program is launched, “patterned after VLSP’s successful ‘teaching clinic’ model,” training attorneys without family law experience to help indigent defendants in state-prosecuted child support actions.



Bill Martinez, VLSP, responds to a request for legal help

AUGUST 1988

ESTABLISHMENT OF AIDS PANEL

“VLSP has developed a well-deserved reputation of being responsive to community needs [...] An example of this innovative approach is the creation of the AIDS panel, which VLSP formed with Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom to help expand the services provided to people with AIDS.”

MAY 1991

TANYA NEIMAN DAY

San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos proclaims May 20, 1991 Tanya Neiman Day.



Mayor Art Agnos displays the City's Proclamation naming Monday, May 20, as "Tanya Neiman Day."

AUGUST 1991

SUMMER AT THE BAR: ESTABLISHMENT OF SUMMER DIVERSITY RECEPTIONS

Kicking off the season with a summer event that raised \$9,000 for VLSP, the Barristers Club hosted a party attended by over 450 people. The Committee on Gay and Lesbian Issues, as well as the Committee on Minority Employment also hosted receptions. Today, more than two decades later, diversity summer receptions are still an annual highlight at BASF/JDC.



Hon. Thelton Henderson, Hon. Mary Morgan and Supervisor Roberta Achtenberg

1989

1990

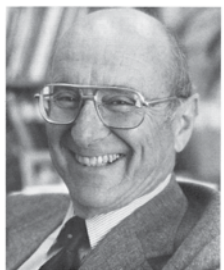
1991

1992

1993

AUGUST 1989

JAMES P. PREVOLOS, VLSP VOLUNTEER, LEAVES A LEGACY OF SERVICE BEHIND



Today, James Prevolos is known to JDC volunteers as the name behind one of JDC's most prestigious annual awards, honoring outstanding service in family law. Prevolos was a longtime BASF member and one of VLSP's "most active and enthusiastic" volunteers from its inception in 1977, particularly in family law. On August 19, 1989, Prevolos "died in an accident in Bali where he was participating in an archaeological dig."

1993

NEW PROJECTS LAUNCHED

"VLSP is often the only place clients have to turn," serving "as a societal safety valve, providing critical services for those living on the edge." New programs and projects launched in the past year include: The Cancer Legal Services Project, the Abused and Neglected Immigrant Foster Children Project, the Consumer Credit and Finance Project, the Immigrant HIV Assistance Project, the Advocacy Clinic for Indigent and At-Risk Children with Disabilities, a Community Economic Development pilot program, and a Low-Income Women's Clinic.

a situation. Neiman was “an around the clock workaholic,” and the growth of VLSP and the number of projects responsive to emerging needs in the community was impressive. One such emerging need was the massive legalization program in response to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. VLSP, in conjunction with other community organizations, trained and mobilized hundreds of volunteers to assist indigent immigrant clients with amnesty applications and appeals during the one-year, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Another was the formation, in conjunction with Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF), of the AIDS Legal Referral Panel, in response to the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco.

THE CREATION OF THE HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT AND HOLISTIC ADVOCACY

One of Neiman’s most enduring legacies is the Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP). Founded in 1988, planning for the project was extensive, including gathering information from many perspectives, interviewing people in homeless shelters to determine the most pressing issues, and formulating a model designed to meet the unique needs of individuals and families who were homeless. The original HAP clinics were held at the Cadillac Hotel in the Tenderloin, and volunteer attorneys and advocates formed one-on-one relationships with homeless clients and acted as their ongoing advocates. Legal experts



California Chief Justice Ron George, Dru Ramey, Mayor Willie Brown, and Tanya Neiman in 1997

acted as mentors for the volunteers, provided expert advice, or took on cases. HAP was also the project where Neiman first implemented the innovative “holistic legal services” model, with the hiring of a social worker in 1994. While the service delivery model of HAP has evolved over the years, the essence of HAP has remained consistent: a holistic model, and personal relationships that focus on the whole client and address the underlying issues that gave rise to the presenting legal problems.

THE 1989 EARTHQUAKE

Another key example of VLSP’s ability to react to an immediate local crisis was the response to the 1989

Loma Prieta earthquake, which was especially devastating to low-income communities in San Francisco and the greater Bay Area. Among other things, an estimated 4,000 units of low-income housing were destroyed. This included more than 1,000 single-room occupancy hotel rooms, and these rooms represented the only affordable, if often substandard, option for many of VLSP’s clients. VLSP and BASF responded in several ways. Volunteer attorneys took on appeals from FEMA denials of emergency assistance. In addition, multiple service providers in the community, including HAP, formed the FEMA Working Group. The group evolved into a litigation team in a lawsuit brought by earthquake victims who were frustrated in their attempts to obtain disaster relief. The State Bar of California Board of



Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp, Tanya Neiman, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. Louis Sullivan in 1992, presenting the Homeless Advocacy Project with a Community Service Award

Governors gave special recognition to Neiman and VLSP for “outstanding work in planning and organizing the delivery of legal services to victims of the October 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquake.”

THE BIRTH OF JDC’S DIVERSITY PROGRAMS

Although BASF’s diversity programs did not officially become a part of JDC until 2013, the genesis of many of the programs occurred during VLSP’s second decade. The first step was the creation of a minority bar committee at BASF, which undertook a comprehensive survey of minority lawyers in San Francisco and eventually developed goals and timetables for minority hiring and retention. BASF also took early leadership roles on gay and lesbian issues and disability rights issues. Furthermore, the Barristers Club played a central role in creating and supporting educational and community programs that continue to this day as part of JDC, including the

Mock Trial program and Lawyers in the Schools.

VLSP AS A NATIONAL MODEL

During the second decade, VLSP as an organization, its leadership, and its volunteers were recognized locally, statewide, and nationally for leadership, and as a national model for the innovative provision of legal services. San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos proclaimed October 31, 1988, as “Homeless Advocacy Project Day,” and May 20, 1991, as “Tanya Neiman Day.” In 1992, US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Interagency Council on the Homeless awarded HAP a Community Service Excellence Award. In 1992, Neiman was named the Pro Bono Coordinator of the Year by the National Association of Pro Bono Professionals. In 1993, Neiman was appointed to the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Homelessness and Poverty, and was chosen as an ABA Legal Services

Peer Counselor. Over the decade, numerous VLSP individual volunteers and law firms were awarded State Bar President’s Pro Bono Service Awards. In 1995, the Harvard Club of San Francisco awarded Neiman the Distinguished Citizen Award. In 1996, Neiman was awarded the prestigious Kutak-Dodds Award by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association. VLSP staff regularly presented at conferences throughout the country to organizations that were interested in replicating VLSP’s projects.

The second decade of the Volunteer Legal Services Program was indeed an incredibly busy and productive time. With the enthusiastic support of BASF’s executive director and the BASF and VLSP boards of directors, the leadership of Tanya Neiman, and the participation of literally thousands of pro bono volunteers, VLSP provided a wide array of services to meet the diverse and compelling legal needs of low-income San Franciscans and set an enviable standard of excellence.

Teresa Friend is the director and managing attorney of the Justice & Diversity Center’s Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP). To find out more about HAP, visit www.sfbar.org/hap.



A volunteer at Women's Clinic helping a client prepare a resumé.

FEBRUARY 1994

WOMEN'S POVERTY PREVENTION PROJECT

"The WPPP is the newest of VLSP's special projects, and was created to provide more comprehensive assistance to the increasing numbers of poor women with children contacting the program for legal help." According to Tanya Neiman, "through the WPPP, VLSP is experimenting with an innovative approach to service delivery, one which, we hope, will truly transform clients' lives. By moving beyond the exclusive provision of legal solutions to a more 'holistic' approach of comprehensively overcoming many barriers to self-sufficiency, WPPP represents VLSP's vision of the future of poverty law."

1994

1995



Food from the Bar will help to ensure that children's nutritional needs are met during the summer months. (photography by David Weintraub)

APRIL 1995

FIRST MOCK TRIAL PROGRAM

The Mock Trial program "came to San Francisco this year as a result of the enthusiastic recommendation, supervision and management of O'Melveny & Myers attorney Douglas E. Dexter."



McAteer student Emanuela Joseph closed for the prosecution.

APRIL 1994

FIRST FOOD FROM THE BAR

"BASF has long been committed to serving the greater community by providing pro bono legal services. Food from the Bar provides BASF with an opportunity to continue and strengthen that commitment and make a visible contribution to the fight against hunger in our city."

— 1994 BASF President Raymond Marshall