

PRO BONO PROFILES

If you are interested in volunteering at the Family Lawyers Assistance Project, please contact Patricia Gerrich, Esq. 602-258-3434, Ext. 2630
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Spotlight on Volunteers



Ann-Marie D.
Alameddin



Ravindar K. Arora



James B. Connor



Ronald W. Meyer



Michael R. Palumbo

By Pegg Corneliu
VLP Programs Coordinator

Collaboration counts. It's often the way programs of social value and duration begin and flourish. The free legal advice clinic at St. Vincent de Paul's Watkins Campus in Phoenix is a stellar example.

In 2008, attorney Ann-Marie Alameddin joined the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP). Through her employment with the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association, she had developed an interest in Medical Legal Partnerships that were then forming as innovative pro bono projects. She attended a VLP continuing legal education program which prepared her to accept two pro bono cases for representation that year. In addition, she kept learning about and observing community advice clinics. A year later, the free legal advice clinic she developed with Patricia Winthrop had taken shape and was implemented when they collaborated with attorney Ron Meyer and St. Vincent de Paul's Family Assistance Ministries.

Attorneys James Connor at Gallagher & Kennedy and Michael Palumbo at Jennings, Strouss & Salmon became part of the collaboration. The two law firms agreed to make the St. Vincent de Paul Clinic (SVDPC) a part of their community service commitments, and Connor and Palumbo agreed to coordinate the participation of firm attorneys who wanted to serve. They still do, today.

The SVDPC takes place on the third Thursday each month, in tandem with the evening meal on the Watkins Campus, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Alameddin and Meyers are co-directors, each of them facilitating the clinic on alternate months. Myers says, "I'm there to keep it running." That means preparing the space, announcing the availability of the service, greeting those seeking consultations, and providing orientation, educational materials and resource information interviewing attorneys may find helpful. It can also mean conducting advice interviews, if needed.

The concerns people present during advice clinics reflect a wide range of life problems and legal issues. Connor summarized some typical interviews, saying "While there are occasional questions about criminal law issues, residential leases or real estate, car loans, judg-

ments, and job or wage problems are more frequent. For many people, I am the only attorney they've ever met. They can be overwhelmed by paperwork or matters that seem 'routine' to me."

Meyers adds that people requesting legal advice at the SVDPC might not otherwise seek it. "People are being assisted with other services St. Vincent family ministries offers, such as food or medical and dental care. Having legal advice available to them at the Watkins Campus is unique and important because most of them would not go to a separate legal facility."

In 2014, attorney Ravindar Arora of Alcock & Associates became a monthly volunteer at the SVDPC, offering his expertise as an immigration lawyer. He notes immigrants are particularly susceptible to fraud because they fear contacting legal authorities if there are problems with their immigration cases. Arora says, "There are document preparers and notaries who will charge to fill out forms and submit them without any supporting documents, or submit forms for applications for which people don't legally qualify." He believes any solution has to include education of the relevant population, as well as enforcement of laws against the unauthorized practice of law.

Since the SVDPC takes place in a facility where an evening meal is being provided to families, it's not uncommon for adults seeking legal advice to choose to have their children with them during the interview. Palumbo describes these instances as "more palpable" for him. "Family law, landlord-tenant and debt issues are prevalent, and the presence of children reminds me the kids are being impacted by their parent's situation." He's noticed people he meets at the clinic sometimes seem intimidated by their circumstances, and are especially appreciative of his time. He says, "Providing this service without consideration of remuneration gives me a special reward."

Naturally, each of the attorneys who contribute to the collaboration that makes the SVDPC so viable and effective humbly gives credit to their colleagues. Arora's expression of gratitude seems a fitting summary of their cumulative good works: "It's a great program and I'm honored to be a part." ■

The Volunteer Lawyers Program thanks the following attorneys for their participation in the St. Vincent de Paul Legal Advice Clinic, October 2016 through December 2017:

Ann-Marie D. Alameddin
Ravindar K. Arora
Jessica L. Beckwith
Jodi Bohr
Jeffrey P. Boshes
Shanna N. Bowman
Robert E. Brown
William A. Clarke
C. Lincoln Combs
James B. Connor
Andrew Dudley
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Scott F. Frerichs
Eric D. Gere
Paul G. Johnson
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Lindsay G. Leavitt
Ronald W. Meyer
Kenneth M. Motolenich-Salas
Garrett J. Olexa
Michael R. Palumbo
Christopher J. Rogers
Dominick San Angelo III
Patrick F. Welch

Volunteer Lawyers Program Thanks Attorneys

The Volunteer Lawyers Program thanks the following 15 attorneys and firms for agreeing to provide pro bono representation on cases referred by VLP to help people with low incomes. VLP supports pro bono service of attorneys by screening for financial need and legal merit and provides primary malpractice coverage, donated services from professionals, training, materials, mentors and consultants. Each attorney receives a certificate from MCBA for a CLE discount. For information about ways to help, please contact Pat Gerrich at VLP at 602-254-4714 or pgerrich@clsaz.org. ■

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The Volunteer Lawyers Program provided \$3,285,147 in economic benefit to families through cases completed during 2016.
Thanks to all who participated and supported VLP!

The Volunteer Lawyers Program is a joint venture of Community Legal Services and the Maricopa County Bar Association

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