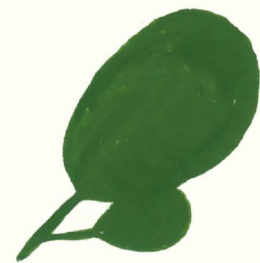
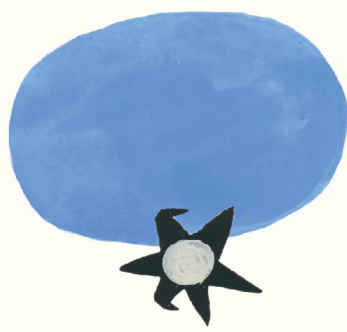
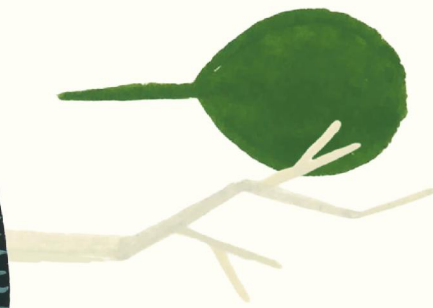
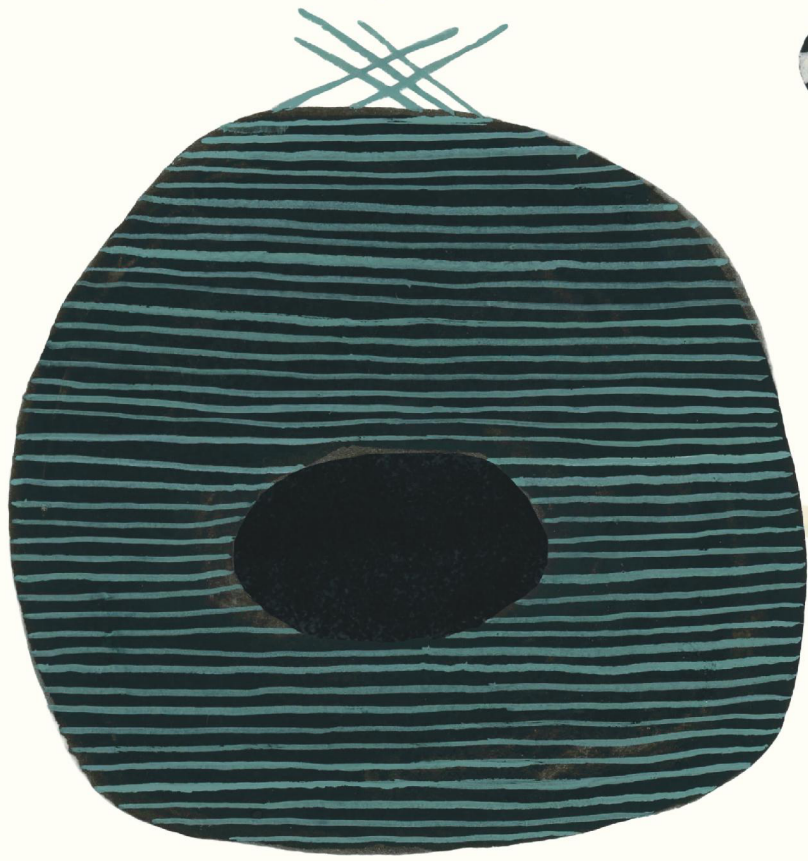




**VOLUNTEER
LAWYERS**
PROJECT

Annual Report 2017–2018



A Letter from Our Executive Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

With the support of our *pro bono* and legal aid partners, VLP has had an exciting year filled with growth and change. In 1977, The Boston Bar Association launched the Volunteer Lawyers Project, which marshaled the private bar to meet the unmet legal needs of low-income residents of Greater Boston. Our first Executive Director, Esther Lardent, designed this project. Although the model has since evolved and the organization has expanded significantly, the commitment to provide free quality legal representation through *pro bono* services has remained our core mission.

Our commitment to the client community, along with the support of the Boston Bar Association and the private bar, has kept us flexible and open to change. Strong Board Leadership has given us the courage to be creative, to assess our work and identify opportunities to flourish. VLP's Board Members have empowered us to take chances with new ideas and see them develop into vibrant projects. This wide-ranging support enables us to accomplish great things including discharge more than \$60,000 worth of debt in one month, serve more than 3,500 people at housing court in one year, have our legal help line, ERLI, provide intake for more than

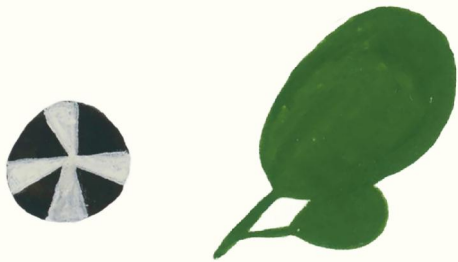


15,000 people in 2018, and now be a program whose impact spans nationwide. Today VLP has twelve court clinic programs, two onsite legal assistance clinics, and a bustling legal help line.

Your generosity of time, expertise, and financial support has allowed us to grow tall as the organization we are today. Because of you, our volunteers, our supporters, our board and our staff, forty-two years later Volunteer Lawyers Project remains strong enough to bend.

With Gratitude,

Joanna George Allison, Esq.



From Eviction to Elation

Massachusetts slumlords use a variety of tactics to bully less-wealthy tenants. Sometimes they try to evict tenants who complain about poor conditions in their apartments or even refuse to compensate tenants who endured years of mistreatment. Ms. Price's landlords tried to do both of these things, and both times, VLP was there to help.

In April 2014, Ms. Price and her legally blind daughter moved into an apartment in Dorchester under a Section 8 voucher. Throughout her tenancy, Ms. Price paid her rent on time and did her part to maintain the apartment, but her landlords failed to uphold their end of the bargain. In October 2016, Ms. Price began informing her landlords of serious problems in the unit: a rat infestation, broken windows and faulty electrical outlets,

among other things. The landlords failed to fix any of the problems. After months of the landlords ignoring her complaints, Ms. Price contacted the Boston Inspectional Services Division (ISD). On three separate occasions, ISD found health and safety violations in the apartment and issued failing reports. Eventually, ISD took the remarkable step of filing a criminal complaint against one of the landlords. The landlords still refused to address the issues and retaliated against Ms. Price for complaining by filing to evict her in early 2017. Ms. Price went to Housing Court hoping to find a way to stay in her apartment long enough to find alternative housing. Ms. Price came to the VLP Lawyer for a Day Program and asked VLP to represent her in the eviction case. A VLP lawyer was able to negotiate an agreement that allowed Ms. Price to remain in her home while she looked for safe, alternative housing—keeping her and her daughter from being on the street.

But that was not the end of Ms. Price's story or VLP's involvement. In 2018, after Ms. Price and her daughter were settled in their new home, Ms. Price returned to VLP, determined to fight back against her former landlords for their unlawful conduct. After review, VLP referred her to panel attorneys Christopher Clark—a VLP Board Member—Nigel Tamton, Isaac Saidel-Goley and Nicole Pacheco, a team of attorneys at the Skadden, Arps law firm, who took on the case *pro bono*.

Ms. Price's passion and determination were immediately apparent. Mr. Clark recalled that "from the beginning Ms. Price made it clear that this case was about her having a voice and showing these landlords that she would not be taken advantage of. She knew the legal battle would be challenging, but she was willing to do it because the way she was treated was

wrong." Mr. Tamton, who had taken on similar cases in the past, explained that "landlords in these types of cases can be bullies and push the tenants around. They typically have more money and resources and so are able to get away with it. We were able to help Ms. Price level the playing field so she could fight back." Upon reviewing Ms. Price's case, Mr. Saidel-Goley said that he felt it was a "particularly egregious case" and "was struck by the nature and severity of the issues."

The *pro bono* team sent a letter to Ms. Price's landlords, outlining Ms. Price's legal claims and demanding payment. The landlords insisted that the issues in the apartment were Ms. Price's fault and threatened to sue Ms. Price and seek sanctions against her attorneys! Ms. Price and her *pro bono* team were not deterred. They cited the ISD reports which stated that the landlords were at fault for the problems in the apartment. Further, the *pro bono* team found that in prior agreements with other tenants, the landlord's attorney had included a provision that expressly released the tenant's future claims. The agreement Ms. Price signed did not have that provision, allowing the *pro bono* team to file a complaint in Housing Court against the landlords for their abusive practices.

Losing confidence that they could continue to mistreat Ms. Price, the landlords offered to settle the case. After several rounds of negotiation, the landlords agreed to settle the case for \$7,500. Mr. Clark explained that this amount was significant because it represented "a complete and total refund of every cent Ms. Price paid the landlords in rent for the entire time she resided in the apartment." "And just as importantly," Mr. Clark



added, "we were able to give Ms. Price a voice by filing a public complaint detailing her mistreatment by these landlords."

All four members of the *pro bono* team remarked on the support VLP provided throughout the Ms. Price's case. Mr. Clark explained, "I have been involved with VLP for ten years in large part because of their mentor model. It's a safety blanket for *pro bono* attorneys who do not do this type of work every day." Ms. Pacheco, who was working on her first housing case, added that "the amount of support we received from VLP was integral to the success we achieved for Ms. Price. Their attorneys were proactive and dedicated. Having VLP's expert support provided a level of comfort in aggressively litigating Ms. Price's case."

Ms. Price said that she was grateful for the opportunity to work with VLP and the *pro bono* team to stand up for the rights of tenants too often mistreated by Massachusetts slumlords. The *pro bono* team also insisted that Ms. Price played an integral role throughout her legal battle and deserves credit for the successful outcome. She was truthful, authentic and passionate, and now she can go on to live her life and put this chapter behind her.

Court-Based Clinics

VLP maximizes accessibility to under-represented clients through frequent legal "clinics" at courthouses across the Greater Boston area, as well as through the ERLI helpline. At our courthouse clinics, clients meet with volunteer attorneys for legal advice and assistance with pleadings on topics such as family law, housing, debt collection defense, and guardianship. Some of these clients go on to receive full representation from VLP *pro bono* attorneys. In addition to courthouse clinics, VLP conducts bankruptcy clinics, general intake at a community health center in Dorchester, and wage theft clinics in partnership with the Attorney General's Office at Suffolk Law School in Boston.

\$688,291.15
In consumer
debt discharged

5,747
Housing
cases open

\$34,375.57
In stolen wages
returned to clients



Staff Attorney Geraldine Gruvis-Pizarro mentors Volunteer Attorney Kerline Jean-Louis while Staff Attorney Colin Harnsgate reviews a motion.



Volunteer Attorney Sharon Jones and Staff Attorney Sarah Lee greet clients at the Housing Court Lawyer for the Day clinic.



Staff Attorney Sarah Lee provides guidance to intern Xin Li at the Family Law Clinic.



Legal Director Cindy Palmquist reviews a client's paperwork while training new volunteer attorneys.

Court-Based Clinics

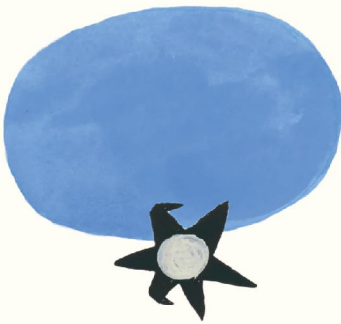
77
Guardianships
granted

Pro bono attorneys
spent over
30,000
hours on cases



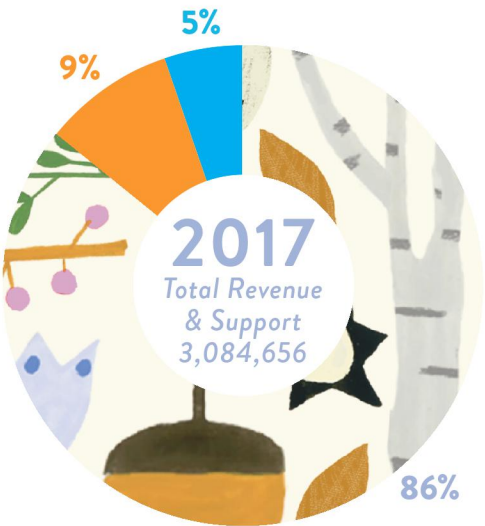
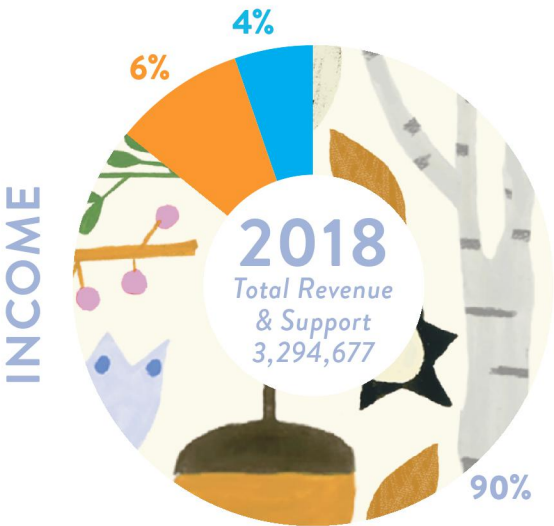
\$5,679,771.52
In debt discharged
through bankruptcy

1664
Clients served
in Family and
Guardianship

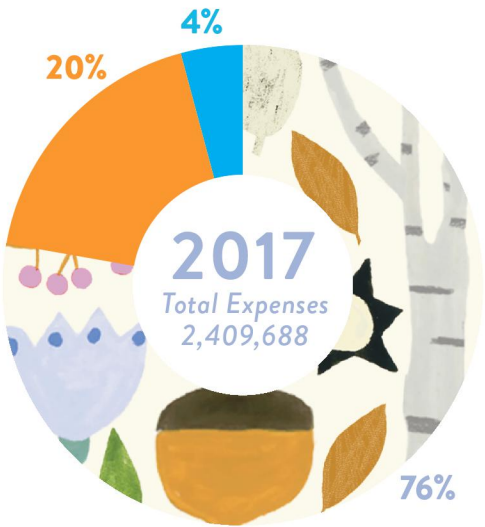
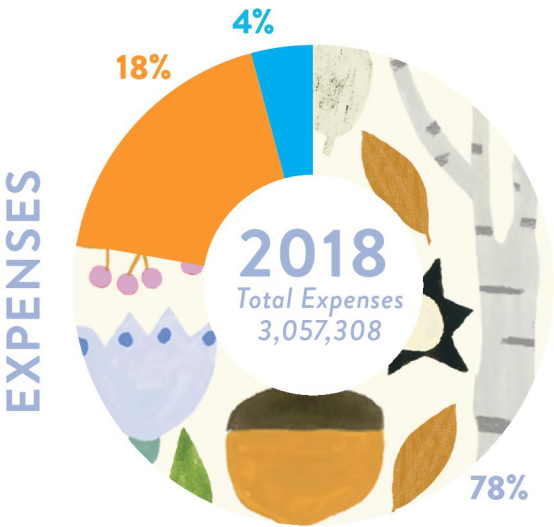


Financials

Income & Expenses For the Years Ended December 31, 2018 & 2017



- Interest, Other Income & In-Kind
2018: \$155,320
2017: \$152,344
- Contributions
2018: \$184,227
2017: \$277,210
- Grants & Contracts
2018: \$2,955,130
2017: \$2,655,102



- Fundraising
2018: \$114,860
2017: \$100,145
- Management & General
2018: \$548,815
2017: \$478,442
- Program
2018: \$2,393,633
2017: \$1,831,101

Thank you to our 2017–2018 volunteers and supporters
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Staff



Volunteer Lawyers Project • 7 Winthrop Square • Boston, MA • 02110

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