

Kristen's Thoughts on her Jury Duty Experience

CVLS Panel Referral Program Coordinator **Kristen Harrison's** commitment to bettering her community is undeniable. Kristen manages the entire case placement process, reviewing all cases that CVLS accepts and ensuring each goes to the volunteer best suited to handle it. In addition to her work with CVLS, Kristen recently contributed to her community in a different way: jury duty. Here is her account of that experience.

What was the case about?

It involved a union worker injured on a construction site. This gentleman was suing a sub-contractor at the job site. We ruled in favor of the defendant. I agreed with our verdict and continue to feel good about our decision.

I was almost sure that I was not going to be selected considering I work for CVLS. I had to mention to the judge and the attorneys that CVLS does not represent plaintiffs in lawsuits, just defendants. I thought that would have eliminated me for sure. I was wrong.

Was it hard not being able to discuss the case with others?

Yes! It was very difficult not being able to talk about the case with my colleagues. I still went to work over lunch and after we were released every day. People kept asking me about the trial and what it was about and I could not talk about it. We jurors didn't discuss the case before deliberating. We all took the case very seriously and followed the judge's instructions.

In deliberations, were there conflicts? Did you feel pressured one way or another?

There were conflicts among the jurors but my decision never changed. The burden of proof was the issue for me and that made my decision easy. We discussed the case and everyone was able to voice their opinion. It was very

orderly. I think everyone felt like I did; the decision weighed heavily.

There is a stereotype that people want to avoid jury duty, or to get it over with. Did you get that sense from your fellow jurors?

Well, I was not exactly happy when I was first selected. I was thinking, what about work??? I can't miss two weeks of work!!! But as the trial got going, I started to enjoy it and found it to be really interesting. Some of the jurors had personal problems and that delayed things a bit, but what can you expect when you ask people to put their lives on hold for an unexpected trial! I think in the end, we all had a positive experience. I love anything relating to civil justice so this was right up my alley!

Overall, was it a positive experience?

Very positive. I was completely amazed by the defendant's attorneys and the seamlessness of their case. It made me appreciate civil litigation and I got an opportunity to see how much work is involved with civil litigation. It made me so proud to work for CVLS in that we provide litigation attorneys for people who might not otherwise have anyone to defend them. Of course I asked the defense attorney to volunteer for CVLS at the end of the trial.

Is there anything you would like to add?

As an advocate for social justice, it was my pleasure and honor to serve on a jury. I know most people dread jury duty, but now I see how important and necessary it is. It has enhanced my life personally and professionally.

At the end of the trial, I mentioned to the defense attorney that I was very surprised that I was selected as a juror. He then told me that I was "hand selected" because of my experience and he suspected that I would be able to look at the facts and make an informed decision based on the evidence. He was right. I have to admit, that was one of the coolest things anyone has ever observed about me. Great moment indeed!

Spotlight On: CASL Chinatown Clinic



The American legal system can be a scary, unfor- giving place, especially for non-English speakers. Mem- bers of Chicago's Chinese community, however, need not look further than their own neighborhood, where

they can resolve legal troubles at the **Chinatown Pro Bono Legal Clinic**.

Each month, on the second Saturday, cli- ents come to CVLS' **Chinese American Services League** (CASL) Clinic, the only Chinese-lan- guage pro bono legal service in the City of Chi- cago. It helps hundreds every year thanks to vol- unteer attorneys, law students and translators.

Volunteer attorneys learn very quickly that they do not need to speak Mandarin or Can- tonese to help clients at the CASL Clinic. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Managing Attorney **Vilan Odekar**, the Clinic has a thriving network of volunteer translators to interpret between cli- ents and attorneys.

Attorneys have the unique ability to help new immigrants and longtime residents who are often afraid to interact with the legal system be- cause of a language barrier or unfamiliarity with our legal system. CASL volunteers help clients with a multitude of case types, including evis- cations, immigration, debt and bankruptcy, labor and employment, probate and personal injury.

The Chinatown Pro Bono Legal Clinic offers a unique, community-based solution to legal problems in an immigrant neighborhood. With the language barrier eliminated, volunteer attorneys help clients find their voice, give them an equal chance at justice and exemplify the ide- als of the American legal system.

To be part of this network, attend an up- coming clinic, or contact Clinic Coordinator Dan Santrella (dsantrella@cvls.org) or Vilan (vilan_odekar@caslservice.org).

Not Eligible for a Loan Modification?

... Not So Fast!

When, after a year of failed negotiations, Wilhemina's foreclosure case was referred to the Cook County Foreclosure Mediation Pro- gram, the bank's attorneys told CVLS that Wil- hemina was not eligible for a modification.

Despite the bank's position, volunteer attorney Rich Orman agreed to represent Wil- hemina in mediation. When he reached out to the bank's attorneys to inform them of his rep- resentation, they again responded that his client was ineligible for a modification.

Ignoring the bank's position, Rich re- searched the history of the case and the mort- gage, delved into Wilhemina's finances, and investigated her previous efforts at securing a loan modification. Rich believed that his client was clearly eligible for a loan modification ... and she was!

Less than a month later, he convinced the bank and they agreed to modify Wilhemina's loan. Every homeowner in foreclosure should have an attorney like Rich Orman!

Time to Update Your Daley Center ID!

Beginning this December, Cook County attorneys will need new court ID's in order to avoid Daley Center metal detectors. Just go to the Daley Center's photo ID unit at CL-114, hand over your current card and get your new one.

IDs that expire after June 30, 2015 are being replaced for free. If your ID expires on or before June 30, you need to purchase the re- placement for \$30. The new cards are good for three years.

Don't wait until the last minute to get your ID updated! Right now, the lines are short and move quickly.

Bankruptcy Update

Effective November 1, 2014, all clients will physically have to sign all signature pages in a bankruptcy petition.

Documents filed electronically in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois that require a debtor's signature must include a scanned copy of the document's signature page, with the debtor's original signature. The Declarations Regarding Electronic Filing are no longer required.

For information, resources, forms and instructional videos on handling a Bankruptcy case, visit our Volunteer Resources: <http://cvls.org/resources-bankruptcy>

New CVLS Clinic! Legal Prep Community Law Clinic

We're opening a new clinic in conjunction with Public Interest Law Initiative and Legal Prep Charter Academies!

The **Legal Prep Community Law Clinic**, staffed by volunteer attorneys from CVLS and the PILI Alumni network, will serve the families, students and residents in the Garfield Park neighborhood. We'll be offering free civil legal help in areas including evictions, foreclosures, minor and adult guardianships and more.

Interested in getting involved with this clinic? Contact Clinic Program Coordinator **Dan Santrella** at dsantrella@cvls.org

Volunteer Spotlight: Leo Feldman



New clients to CVLS don't usually know what to expect when they walk through the doors. It is up to staff and volunteers to make their first interaction with CVLS a positive one.

Leo Feldman is one of the volunteers new clients get to meet. A retired partner at Teller, Levit & Silvertrust, P.C. Leo interviews prospective clients, learning their case, identifying the legal issues and brainstorming solutions.

Leo compares his post-retirement pro bono work to "going back to school." At CVLS, Leo is engaged in areas of law he has never dealt with before, including landlord-tenant cases, guardianships, adoptions ... the works.

Eighty-five years old, Leo was initially motivated to become an attorney by the principles of justice and his desire to resolve disputes. Overcoming childhood polio, Leo never let it hold

him back. His active life has included producing skits and acting for the theater.

Leo found that litigation was very much a performance in its own right—practicing law required understanding the clients and issues, or, in theater-speak, the characters and story.

He discovered that litigating was like being on stage. He had to project himself and convey his message in a way that his audience understood, both intellectually and emotionally.

Leo recommends that busy young attorneys make time for pro bono work. He says it is an incomparable way to learn a new area of law. It is also a way to refine your legal skills to help those that need it the most.

Having conducted hundreds of client intakes at CVLS, Leo is an expert on what a pro-bono attorney can bring to clients in need: Open-mindedness, patience and objectivity.

You can find Leo at CVLS most Mondays and Fridays. Clients may not know what to expect when they walk through our doors at first, but once they meet Leo and explain their problems to him, they are comforted knowing that a competent, caring attorney is on their side.

Volunteer Justin Wins Case, Earns High Praise

Volunteer attorney and CVLS Junior Board member **Justin From** recently completed a social security case for his quadriplegic client – and she couldn't be happier! Judy, who visited our Sidley Austin-sponsored **Salvation Army Legal Clinic**, had this to say about Justin:

"There are many things that I could write in terms of the professionalism, empathy, incredible competency, and diligent efforts that Justin put forth on my behalf. However, suffice to say that he was able to win the Social Security overpayment dispute with simply writing a brief that was so complete, eloquent, and persuasive that the overpayment issue was overturned by a judge without the necessity of a hearing!

"I am so grateful to him and to Sidley Austin for their generous opportunity that they provide by offering outstanding employees as individuals to work on pro bono cases! You are to be applauded and Justin should get a promotion!"

WOW! Read about Judy's case: <http://cvls.org/news/october-success-stories#From>

Elder Law Update

Volunteer **Steve Perlis** shared thoughts on Elder Law and volunteering with CVLS in a recent post for the Northwest Suburban Bar Association's newsletter! Steve has handled many Adult GAL and Elder Law cases through CVLS.

Steve outlines the process for handling an Adult GAL case through CVLS, and praises Managing Attorney Peter Ashmore in particular as "outstanding in providing support and guidance with any and all questions."

"I can say from personal experience that serving as a volunteer GAL is very rewarding. Generally the Court is very happy that the GAL has given of his or her time and says so during the hearing." He recommends lawyers, whether already versed in handling GAL cases or hoping to learn, look into volunteering as a GAL.

Read Steve's post: <http://bit.ly/1vGk4dw>

Announcing ... a New Collaboration with IDA!

We're excited to announce a collaboration between CVLS and the **Illinois Disability Association**, aimed at expanding and enhancing our ability to offer pro bono services to low-income persons with disabilities!

The Illinois Disability Association (IDA) is creator and co-trustee of the Illinois Pooled Trust (IDPT). The not-for-profit pooled trust allows more than 1,300 disabled persons throughout the state to maximize public and private resources during their lifetimes through self-funded and third-party-funded special needs trusts.

STAFF & VOLUNTEER SUPPORT:

Through donations made by and through the IDA, CVLS can accept more court appointments to serve as GAL (guardian ad litem) for disabled adults and can help more family members and caretakers petition for guardianship.

In addition, IDA attorneys will provide training, mentoring and legal assistance to CVLS program staff and volunteers.

SEMINAR SERIES: As part of this collaboration, the IDA will present a series of CLE seminars on guardianship, particularly as it pertains to persons with disabilities. Visit <http://www.cvls.org/cle> to register for or learn more about one of these seminars.

- Deconstructing the Role of a "Care-Manager", presented by IDA Executive Director Howard Berk (January 21, 2015)

- A Closer Look at Guardian ad Litem, presented by IDA Staff Attorney Vida Cruz (February 18, 2015)

- Special Needs Trusts, presented by IDA Staff Attorney Eileen Durkin (March 18, 2015)

- POA Abuse, presented by IDA Board Member Kerry Peck (April 22, 2015)

Visit http://ilpooledtrust.com/CVLS_Collaboration for more information and to support this exciting new collaboration!

Volunteer Helps Client in Move to Safer Area

For years, Donald James watched with a heavy heart as his neighborhood decayed around him. Donald lived in Englewood, and over the years, violent crime in the area had skyrocketed. His home had been hit by gunfire on more than one occasion.

Fearing for their lives, Donald and his wife abandoned their home and moved to senior citizen housing in a safer neighborhood.

Unfortunately for Donald, the City of Chicago did not see his move as heroic. Instead, they issued fines for not keeping up the property and then for abandoning it.

Living on a fixed income, Donald could not afford to pay the fines or improve the home. When he came to Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, Panel Referral Program Coordinator Kristen Harrison, found him volunteers with the expertise to help. Kristen knew that **Riccardo A. Di Monte**, Managing Partner at the law firm of Di Monte & Lizak, LLC, (and a 30-year CVLS volunteer veteran), along with his colleague **Peter M. Follenweider**, would be invaluable in resolving Donald's legal predicament.

The city's lawsuit against Donald asked for civil fines, court costs, and reimbursement for demolition at a total cost between \$12,000 and \$25,000; astronomical amounts that Donald could not afford.

Ric and Peter settled the city's lawsuit against Donald. The city waived the fines and court costs in return for a lien on the property for the cost of demolition. The settlement was a win-win all around—the city got rid of deteriorating property and Donald was spared the upfront costs.

Asked why they took on this case, Ric and Peter stated that attorneys have a unique ability to help others with their legal difficulties and it is rewarding to help save people from that anguish.

Thanks to their efforts, Donald no longer fears for his safety or for the huge financial burden caused by an unsafe home in a violent neighborhood.



Volunteers Riccardo A. DiMonte (above) and Peter M. Follenweider (below) of DiMonte & Lizak, LLC



New Job & Volunteer's Diligence Helps Family in Foreclosure

When the economy tanked, Joe lost his job. With a loss in monthly income, he and his wife Rachel struggled to make ends meet. Unemployment benefits helped, but were not enough to cover the monthly mortgage payments. Their Forest Park home went into foreclosure.

After months of pounding the pavement, Joe eventually found work and the family's income significantly increased.

That's when CVLS volunteer **Julie Jones** took over.

Thanks to her negotiating skills and razor-sharp representation, coupled with the Millers' persistence and single-minded determination, the lender agreed to a modified, affordable mortgage payment. The couple is delighted to be celebrating this year's holidays in their family home. Well done Julie!

Upcoming CVLS Events

Wednesday, January 21

Seminar: Deconstructing the Role of a "Care-Manager"
Presented by Howard Berk, Illinois Disability Association
CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM to 1:25 PM

Howard Berk, Executive Director of the Illinois Disability Association, covers the where, when, why and how of "care-managers," also known as case managers, within the context of guardianships.

The Illinois Disability Association serves as co-trustee with The PrivateBank of the Illinois Disability Pooled Trust (IDPT). The IDPT serves as trustee of special needs trusts for its clients, trusts which exist to enhance the quality of life of the person with disabilities through trust disbursements that supplement government benefits.

Visit <http://cvls.org/seminar/seminar-deconstructing-role-care-manager> to register.

Thursday, January 8 & Thursday, February 12
New Volunteer Orientation
CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM to 1:15 PM

Susan Decostanza will cover the skills required to be a successful GAL for a minor as well as the issues that may come up during the case. This training is for new GALs working with CVLS.

Visit <http://cvls.org/orientation/gal-minors-training-25> for information and registration.

Wednesday, February 18
Seminar: A Closer Look at Guardian ad Litem
Presented by Vida Cruz, Illinois Disability Association
CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM to 1:25 PM

Vida Cruz, Staff Attorney at the Illinois Disability Association, covers the field of Guardian ad Litem within the context of adults with disabilities.

A Guardian Ad Litem is often referred to as the "eyes and ears of the court." A GAL is an extremely important player in guardianship proceedings. What comprises a good GAL report? What do probate judges expect from a GAL? What are some GAL pitfalls?

Visit <http://cvls.org/seminar/cvlsida-collaboration-seminar-closer-look-guardian-ad-litem> for information and registration.

Please visit www.cvls.org/cle to register for a seminar!

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