

SAVE THE DATE

April 2014

Our first event of the year, Raise A Glass For Justice, will take place at Prince Michel Vineyards in April.

May 6, 2014

The Community Give
Find out more at:
<https://www.facebook.com/CommunityFoundationRRR>

Stay tuned for details about these and other upcoming events.

DON'T FORGET

40 FOR THE 40TH CAMPAIGN

Joining the Equal Justice Society is easy and rewarding, do it today! Find out how at www.rapplelegal.com.

HAIL & FAREWELL

Please welcome our newest staff member, Nely Guzman! Nely joined RLS in January, she is the Administrative Assistant in the Fredericksburg Office.

We bid a fond farewell to two wonderful colleagues:

Pat Coleman, Administrative Assistant in Fredericksburg, retired after 28 years with RLS. We wish her well and thank her for her many years of loyal service.

&

Julianna Bae, Staff Attorney in Fredericksburg, made a tactical career move to Northern VA. In addition to her litigation skills, Julianna will be missed as our social coordinator.

Best wishes to all!



RLS | *Because Justice Really Should Be For All*

Impact: Beyond the Universe of RLS Clients Children & Civil Legal Proceedings

Ordinarily the feature of RLS' newsletter tells the story of an individual client's struggle for equal access to justice, but this quarter we are widening the lens to illustrate the impact of your charitable donations to RLS from a more comprehensive perspective.

During FY-13, RLS closed 1397 cases. As you might imagine, the majority of those clients were not living in isolation; in fact, a total of 1865 minor children were directly impacted by RLS' advocacy. It has been well documented in scholarly literature that the adverse effects visited on children who are exposed to conditions such as violence in the home, homelessness or housing instability can be devastating, wreaking havoc on their physical, educational, emotional and social development.

So what role does RLS play in mitigating negative outcomes for children? In a domestic violence case, for example, RLS would seek a protective order as an initial step toward ending the cycle of violence. But in order for the victim and her children to make a complete break from an abusive relationship, RLS helps her to address her income needs through court-ordered child support. Without support in place, the child is likely to either be returned to a violent household, or deal with a myriad of other problems, most notably homelessness and food insufficiency. RLS helps navigate that frightening transition by constructing a legal framework so that clients can visualize the first step toward a safer, healthier future for themselves and their children.

Homelessness and housing instability pose similarly negative risks to children's health and welfare. According to the Department of Education's definition, there were 801 homeless children in Planning District 16 (Fredericksburg, Stafford, Spotsylvania, Caroline and King George) during the 2013 Point In Time Survey. Only a very small proportion of those children were actually living on the street or in emergency shelters, but those living in a hotel or "couch surfing" may find themselves at greater risk for becoming homeless, and certainly face additional problems related to current and future well-being. Housing instability mostly occurs as a result of a combination of overlapping disadvantages. Being housing unstable should not be viewed as simply a less extreme version of homelessness; it is a much more complex dynamic.



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RLS works to reduce the twin problems of homelessness and housing instability. Our homelessness prevention paralegal assists those who are already homeless to gain the knowledge needed to transition into stable housing, works with those who are at risk of losing current housing by providing them with resources to find temporary shelter, presents information about landlord-tenant law and refers individuals for more in-depth services when needed. Our housing attorney works to prevent illegal foreclosures and evictions and also takes cases involving disputes between landlords and tenants. In cases where the tenant is sued for fees and/or damages, it is the job of our attorney to assess whether a landlord’s claim is valid; and if not, to represent our clients to ensure their rights are not violated. Without representation in these matters, our clients would be much more likely to lose their case resulting in judgments that add new layers of complications to their housing situation and their income status.

While RLS is an organization dedicated to preserving the rights of our clients by ensuring that they have equal access to justice, one of the derivatives of that mission is a push back against poverty. RLS alone cannot solve the problem of poverty, but we can say, with a great deal of confidence, that we are making a tremendous difference in the lives of the children of our clients. The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness details the ways in which poverty produces the most detrimental outcomes for children; studies show that duration and timing are key factors in outcomes. The longer a child lives in poverty and the earlier in life it occurs create most difficult challenges for children to overcome. At RLS, we work to reduce the cluster of risk factors that plunge children deeper into poverty circumstances making it increasingly less likely for them to transcend the condition in adulthood.

RLS attorneys represent children as Guardians ad Litem. Local courts appoint a GAL in cases where an independent recommendation is sought by a judge to determine the best interests of the child. As a GAL, RLS’ advocates play a more direct role in ensuring the welfare of minor children through recommendations covering a wide range of issues such as custody, visitation, medical care, educational plans or other critical services.

In FY-13, RLS represented 86 children in this capacity.

By The Numbers: A Numerophile In Our Midst

RLS is fortunate to have a varied and remarkable group of board members, including the one featured in this newsletter: Deirdre Calanese. Deirdre is a senior accountant with PBMares, one of the largest regional accounting and consulting firms in the U.S. Deirdre, who graduated from the University of Mary Washington in 2009, completed an internship with PBMares (then PBGH) during her final semester. Recognizing her potential, the company offered Deirdre a permanent position upon graduation.

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RLS' Executive Director, Ann Kloeckner, met Deirdre while the two were working on a United Way campaign in 2011, and from there it was a short leap to the board of directors in early 2012. Given her financial acumen, Deirdre is well-suited to be treasurer of the board and glad to be using her expertise to help a nonprofit in service to the community. Deirdre's affinity for numbers is clear, particularly when describing financials as a story-telling device. But there are other stories that inspire Deirdre, too: the stories of RLS' clients. While Deirdre finds the work of RLS compelling, she is also impressed with the level of dedication that she has encountered on the part of so many people associated with RLS; Deirdre says that kind of commitment is infectious, and it's what keeps her own level of engagement so high. In addition to her number-crunching work as treasurer of the board, Deirdre attended every single RLS fundraising event in 2013. Wow!

As is the case with many accomplished individuals, Deirdre is adept at multi-tasking. Last October, she successfully completed the four-part CPA Exam which is a must-have credential for professionals in her field. It is a designation that represents an investment of discipline and initiative; and for Deirdre that was certainly the case as she logged between 20-30 study hours each week for 14 solid months, juggling both prodigious amounts of study time with a very demanding work schedule. But discipline and initiative take a CPA candidate only so far, achieving a successful result on the exam is not easily done, but Deirdre succeeded on the first try, a noteworthy achievement given that the pass rates range from 45%-55% depending on the section. Well done!

Thank you for your outstanding service to RLS and congratulations on your licensure, Deirdre!

Putting The Pieces Together

Hope Bunch, RLS' public benefits advocate in Tappahannock, is a very methodical person. It's a trait that serves her well in preparing cases for Supplemental Security Disability Income clients, which she describes as a process akin to putting together a large and intricate puzzle. The job is part detective work, part knowledge of the system, part understanding the nuance of the client's particular situation and part dogged determination. And Hope brings all those skills to bear in order to ensure that her clients get a fair hearing under the rules.

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Billy & Hope Bunch

It has been almost 18 years since Hope joined the staff of RLS, and it's a sure bet that her supervising attorney (the only attorney in the Tappahannock Office) is extremely grateful to have her, as are we all. In addition to SSDI cases, Hope also works on Medicaid, SNAP and TANF issues, as well as nursing home discharge cases. As an eligibility worker for a local social services program with additional experience in the insurance sector, Hope came to RLS with excellent credentials and a solid grounding in the complex maze of bureaucracy, as well as a particular knack for deciphering the opaque attributes inherent in any kind of claims form. For Hope, the job is deeply rewarding; assisting her clients in their search for the appropriate kind of help to stave off a bankruptcy, food insufficiency or a worsening health crisis deepens the well-spring of personal satisfaction she derives from her work.

Married to her high school sweetheart for more than 43 years, Hope has 2 children and 5 grandchildren. Genealogy, photography and cooking are some of Hope's hobbies outside the office. An active member of her church, one of Hope's efforts on their behalf involves the production of a full length Christmas comedy which she has done for twelve years. The concept of a Christmas *comedy* may not be familiar to everyone, but they've got the right person for the job as you can tell from the following exchange. Q: What brought you to RLS? A: I think it was a 1994 Volkswagen Jetta. RLS may have to consider a comedy production as a future fundraising vehicle with Hope Bunch as the head scriptwriter. In the meantime, she excels at her day job with precision and a whole lot of personality.

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