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# New York State Courts Access to Justice Program

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Providing New Pathways to  
Legal Services, Assistance and Information



2014

Report to the Chief Judge and the  
Chief Administrative Judge  
of the  
State of New York



# **New York State Courts**

## **Access to Justice Program**

### **2014 Report**

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Chief Judge of the State of New York  
Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals

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Chief Administrative Judge of the  
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Access to Justice Program

**Our Mission:** To ensure access to justice in civil and criminal matters for New Yorkers of all incomes, backgrounds and special needs, by using every resource, including self-help services, *pro bono* programs, and technological tools, and by securing stable and adequate non-profit and government funding for civil and criminal legal services programs.



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## MESSAGE FROM JUSTICE FISHER

I am pleased to present the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program's fifth annual report. Over the past five and a half years, the Access to Justice Program has had considerable success with its multi-faceted approach to the delivery of legal services, assistance and information to the unrepresented public. Last year, we reported on the continuum of the types and levels of legal assistance we offer, from self-help resources over the internet, to one-on-one, face-to-face full service representation.



This Report details our continued efforts to increase equal access to justice for unrepresented litigants through court, community and internet-based programs and services. In 2014, we forged and strengthened new and old pathways to justice with a special concentration on non-lawyer legal assistance. CourtHelp, the court system's website for unrepresented litigants, was given a complete makeover and now functions as an important resource for New Yorkers going to court without an attorney. Similarly, the new DIY Form program for Uncontested Divorces simplifies a complicated process so that litigants can complete the court paperwork on their own.

Once again, Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman's resolve to bridge the justice gap was instrumental in furthering the Access to Justice Program's accomplishments in 2014. This past year, Judge Lippman advocated the use of non-lawyers to provide legal services in simpler civil matters. In support of the Chief Judge's vision, the Access to Justice Program successfully implemented a court-based non-lawyer program, where volunteer "Court Navigators" assist unrepresented litigants with New York City consumer debt and housing cases. Judge Lippman's 50-hour *pro bono* service requirement for law students to be admitted to practice clearly bolstered law student participation in the Access to Justice Program's initiatives and court-based programs. Judge Lippman's tenets are woven through the pages of this Report. We are fortunate to have this champion of access to justice as our Chief Judge.

I am grateful for the tireless efforts of the Access to Justice Program's dedicated and talented staff, partners, and friends; the continuous determination of court personnel throughout the state; and the *pro bono* efforts made by our volunteer attorneys and non-lawyers. Until we are able to keep pace with the ever growing need for adequate and dependable legal services, the Access to Justice Program will endeavor to fulfill its mission to ensure that everyone has equal access to justice. Nothing is more essential to the constitutional mandate of the courts.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fern A. Fisher".

**Fern A. Fisher**  
January 2015



## NYS COURTS ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROGRAM GOALS

**Finding** long-term solutions to chronic lack of civil legal assistance for people of low-income and modest means in New York including finding a permanent public funding stream for civil legal services.

**Improving and increasing** the availability of criminal defense representation to people facing criminal charges.

**Gathering and reviewing** statewide data on legal services delivery and needs towards increasing and improving civil and criminal legal assistance.

**Coordinating** efforts between courts, legal aid organizations and other legal and non-legal organizations, administrative agencies and lawmaking bodies to expand access to justice.

**Analyzing, recommending and promoting** proposed legislation, court rules, codes of conduct, policies and systemic changes that will open greater access to the courts.

**Analyzing and addressing** the collateral consequences of criminal convictions.

**Fostering** the development of new low-income and modest means income *pro bono* programs and supporting and improving the quality of existing *pro bono* programs both court-based, and outside the court, using lawyers, law students and other professionals.

**Testing and developing** delivery of legal assistance models both court-based and non-court-based, including limited scope representation delivery systems to improve and increase availability of assistance.

**Expanding** access to justice for unrepresented litigants by increasing the availability of self-help tools using a variety of methods including, but not limited to, technology, plain language forms and signs, and informational materials.

**Providing** cultural competent access to justice for litigants of diverse backgrounds and languages.

**Addressing** access to justice for individuals with special needs or social services needs by expanding social work and social services in the court system.

**Providing** more opportunities for justice via community empowerment using outreach, education and training of government officials and offices, neighborhood agencies and community members.

**Fostering** awareness of the needs of unrepresented litigants and litigants of diverse backgrounds and special needs and insuring high quality service by both judicial and non-judicial personnel via education, training and literature.



## **2014 HIGHLIGHTS**

### **★ DELIVERY OF LEGAL SERVICES**

- Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program Consumer Debt expanded to Richmond County
- Volunteer Lawyer Lunchtime Assistance Program launched in Kings County
- Family Court Volunteer Attorney Program provides remote legal assistance to Onondaga and Ontario Counties
- Advocate Family Offense Petition Program used in 45 counties

### **★ DELIVERY OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE**

- DIY Uncontested Divorce program launched statewide
- Albany County Family Court Help Center opened
- CourtHelp website redesigned
- DIY Forms used in all 62 counties in New York State
- Court Navigator Program provides non-lawyer assistance in consumer and housing cases
- Columbia Law School's Technology Clinic creates NYC Housing Court Help Center database
- National Center for Access to Justice conducts DIY Forms study in Bronx County Family Court

### **★ DELIVERY OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS**

- Poverty Simulation held for Touro Law Center first year class
- ACP Project Internship Program created for law students to help NYC at risk seniors

### **★ TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS**

- Over 90 public presentations and trainings and 32 personnel trainings held
- Justice Fern A. Fisher heads delegation of judges to the Dominican Republic to share expertise

**Please read further for all of the Access to Justice Program's  
2014 accomplishments**



## INTRODUCTION

**This Report describes the numerous paths** that the Access to Justice Program has forged to deliver legal services, assistance and information to litigants navigating the New York State court system without an attorney. The basic operation and the year's highlights are summarized in Parts I-V for each of the Access to Justice Program's initiatives, programs and services.

Part I of this Report, entitled "**Delivery of *Pro Bono* Legal Services**," is divided by the various delivery methods employed by the Access to Justice Program to deliver legal services through its volunteer lawyer court-based programs. The programs offer free legal services for finite tasks, such as legal advice, court form preparation assistance or one day of courtroom representation. Categorizing this Part of the Report by the type of delivery method employed, rather than the name of the program or area of law, was done to attest to the many effective ways that access to the justice system can be achieved without providing full service representation. When traditional legal representation is unavailable, in certain types of case, there are litigants that can greatly benefit from unbundled legal services. The advantages of each delivery method are set forth in each section. Part I also summarizes the Access to Justice Program's emphasis on utilizing law students, law graduates, newly admitted attorneys and retired attorneys through various partnerships, initiatives and the Attorney Emeritus Program.

Part II of this Report, entitled "**Delivery of Legal Information and Assistance**," describes the non-lawyer assistance that the Access to Justice Program offers unrepresented litigants. This Part is divided into sections by where the services are provided, i.e., over the internet, in the courthouse or in the community. Providing assistance over the internet is a unique means of reaching people who may not be able to avail themselves of any other method. Through technology, the Access to Justice Program offers self-help assistance via the Access to Justice Program's CourtHelp website, DIY Form programs and social media websites. Delivery of assistance at the courthouse is ideal because litigants can benefit from resources they didn't even know existed and they weren't looking to find. Through the Court Help Centers, Court Navigator Program, and even through placing resources on the courthouse walls, litigants can find a path to success. The last section of Part II relays the importance of bringing the assistance into the communities. Indeed, the Mobile Legal Help Center is able to drive the courtroom right into a community's backyard. Community camaraderie can greatly facilitate a person's path to assistance. While the non-lawyer services and self-help tools described in Part II may not provide the access every litigant needs, furnishing the information, resources and tools can help a litigant feel more prepared, confident and less intimidated and an informed litigant will be better prepared to face the challenges in his or her case.

Part III of this Report, entitled "**Delivery of Services for Persons with Diverse Needs**," segregates the Access to Justice Program's initiatives and services directed at those litigants who may not be able to take the paths to assistance described in Parts I and II.

Cognizant of the needs of New York's more vulnerable litigants, the Guardian Ad Litem Program, Assigned Counsel Project, Integrated Part and Poverty Simulation Program endeavor to ensure equal access to justice to all New Yorkers.

Part IV of this Report, entitled "[Trainings and Presentations](#)," illustrates the importance that the Access to Justice Program places on education and training as a means to improve access to justice. In 2014, as detailed in Appendices "A" and "B," despite limited staff and resources, the Access to Justice Program conducted over 120 trainings and presentations for the public, program volunteers, court personnel and the civil justice community. The Access to Justice Program believes that heightening awareness through education and training on the inequalities that exist in accessing our justice system is an important pathway to change.

Equally important are the multitude of volunteers, partners, friends, and court personnel that assisted the Access to Justice Program in 2014. Without their dedication and generosity, there would be little to Report. Part V of this Report, entitled "[Recognition](#)" and the "[Partners, Friends and Volunteers](#)," section at the back of this Report attempt to do justice to this group. Appendix "D," entitled "[Access to Justice Efforts throughout New York State](#)," reports the impressive additional contributions of the New York City Courts and the Judicial Districts outside New York City.

Clearly, even with this tremendous support, the Access to Justice Program cannot meet the needs of the 2.3 million unrepresented New Yorkers that navigate the New York State court system each year. Accordingly, the Access to Justice Program targets the areas where there is the greatest need and delivers legal services and provides pathways to information and assistance wherever possible. This Report is offered to summarize the efforts made in 2014. In 2015, the Access to Justice Program will continue to develop greater delivery mechanisms and innovations to meet the challenge of providing equal access to justice and will continue to support the search for a permanent funding stream for civil legal services.

## **PART I: DELIVERY OF *PRO BONO* LEGAL SERVICES**

**The Access to Justice Program strives to improve access to justice** through the delivery of free legal services to unrepresented New Yorkers. Since providing legal representation from start to finish in every case is not possible at this time, the Access to Justice Program primarily employs a variety of “unbundled” legal service delivery methods to increase the availability of legal assistance to the public. Unbundled legal services is a practice where the lawyer performs only the agreed upon tasks, rather than the whole “bundle” of the work required in traditional full service representation. The litigant then performs the remaining tasks on his or her own. The Access to Justice Program concentrates its limited resources on providing court-based volunteer legal service programs in three general categories of unbundled or limited scope representation: advice only consultations, document preparation assistance and limited representation in court. Providing unbundled legal services programs enables the Access to Justice Program to assist many more litigants than would otherwise be possible with traditional full service legal representation. As explained in this Part, the court-based unbundled programs have proven to be beneficial for both unrepresented litigants and the court system.

The Access to Justice Program’s volunteer lawyer programs concentrate on case types where a large volume of litigants navigate the justice system on their own. This includes family, housing, consumer debt and divorce cases. The outcomes in these types of cases often impact the most basic necessities of life, threatening the loss of homes and livelihoods. Unrepresented litigants face a represented adversary in the overwhelming majority of these cases. Providing unbundled legal services helps to level the playing field.

Unlike most legal services and legal aid programs, the Access to Justice Program’s court-based volunteer programs do not income screen. The only threshold requirement for assistance is that the unrepresented litigant has a case in the New York State Courts. This enables the Access to Justice Program to assist litigants of modest means who do not qualify for legal aid, but do not have the wherewithal to afford traditional legal services.

Volunteer lawyers are required to attend substantive training prior to participating in a court-based unbundled program. The ethics of providing unbundled representation is part of every training course. All court-based unbundled legal services programs have an experienced supervising attorney available on-site to oversee the volunteers and answer questions. The training and supervision ensure the quality of the legal services provided. The supervision also extends the court’s indemnity to the volunteer lawyers. Every training program offers Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits in exchange for minimum volunteer hours in the program. Additionally, all volunteer lawyers are eligible to receive *pro bono* CLE credit for their service hours in the court-based unbundled programs.

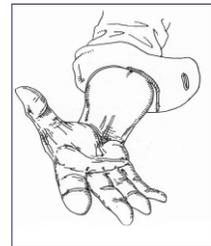
The Access to Justice Program, along with the Feerick Center for Social Justice, oversee the Attorney Emeritus Program where the lawyers volunteer in court-based programs as well as with legal services organizations throughout the state. The volunteer retired attorneys are able to assist with a greater array of legal issues and can perform unbundled or full service legal representation. The Attorney Emeritus Program (AEP) started by Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman has successfully seized upon New York's experienced senior attorneys and facilitated their *pro bono* service. Similarly, Judge Lippman's 50-hour *pro bono* service requirement for prospective lawyers has boosted the Access to Justice Program's law student and law graduate recruitment efforts.

In recognition of the many volunteers who go above and beyond in their service, the Access to Justice Program holds an award ceremony in their honor during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week (see Part V and the Partners, Friends and Volunteers section in the back of the Report). Each year, the dedicated efforts of the volunteer lawyers, trainers, and supervisors, who share their time and expertise with the Access to Justice Program's volunteer programs increases access to justice for thousands of New Yorkers who would otherwise have no representation.

Below is an overview of the Access to Justice Program's *pro bono* volunteer lawyer programs that assisted nearly 20,000 litigants in 2014.

## ADVICE ONLY PROGRAMS

The Access to Justice Program oversees several unbundled volunteer lawyer programs that provide legal advice to unrepresented litigants in the New York City Civil, Family and Housing Courts. The Access to Justice Program recruits, trains and places admitted attorneys, law graduates, and law student volunteers in Court Help Centers where they assist unrepresented litigants with pending court cases. Volunteers provide critical support without cost to thousands of individuals and families in order to help them preserve their homes, protect their rights as consumers and assist families with domestic controversies. Volunteer lawyers are supervised on site by experienced Help Center personnel. Help Center court personnel are available to provide legal information to unrepresented litigants; however, they are not permitted to give legal advice. Court personnel must remain neutral and cannot interpret the law or recommend a specific course of action. On the contrary, the volunteer lawyers provide legal advice, spend time reviewing court papers, notices, contracts, records, and other court-related documents, and are able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the case. The volunteers explain how the court process works, the legal implications of a settlement, what options the unrepresented litigants have and how they should prepare and proceed with their cases. Volunteer lawyers also help fill out court forms and instruct the litigants how to serve and file court forms and what to expect on the court date. These programs are



limited to advice only. The volunteer lawyers do not file legal papers or represent litigants in the courtroom.

Providing advice only, as opposed to full representation, allows these volunteer lawyer programs to assist a greater number of litigants who are representing themselves in court. Litigants can walk-in to the courthouse Help Center without an appointment and obtain legal advice about their pending cases and learn how to proceed so that they are empowered to continue on their own. A litigant is welcome to return to the Help Center at any time for additional advice. Litigants greatly benefit from the program by being better prepared for their day in court.

Better prepared litigants are a benefit to the Judge and the adversary because proceedings are conducted more efficiently. The advice provided by the volunteer lawyers spares Court Clerks from fending off requests for legal advice that they are prohibited from answering. Clerks benefit from having a valuable instant resource available to send a litigant in need. The Court also benefits because the litigant's awareness that free legal advice is available in the courthouse encourages the litigants' trust and confidence in the justice system.

The advice-only programs are an extremely attractive volunteer opportunity for lawyers because of the flexible time commitment. Lawyers can schedule volunteer hours at their convenience and volunteer at their own pleasure. At the same time, a volunteer lawyer is able to learn a new area of the law at a free CLE course and receive practical supervised experience while helping some of the hundreds of thousands of unrepresented litigants seeking advice in the New York City Civil, Family and Housing Courts.

### **Volunteer Lawyers Program - Consumer Debt**

After completing the mandatory training program, volunteer lawyers provide legal advice and information to unrepresented litigants with consumer debt cases in the Civil Court Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) program which operates in the Civil Court Help Centers in Kings and New York Counties. The volunteers are trained to demystify the legal process for unrepresented litigants who are confused and overwhelmed. Many have already had their bank accounts frozen and their wages garnished. Volunteers assist with court forms and advise litigants on how best to represent themselves in court, providing unrepresented litigants with information about their legal rights and options. Volunteers utilize the Access to Justice Program's Consumer Debt Advocate document assembly program to prepare papers to vacate default judgments. Litigants learn about their rights in the areas of debt collection, credit reports and identity theft.

In 2014, the VLP - Consumer Debt program was offered in Kings and New York Counties at least three days per week. More than 600 unrepresented litigants received advice and assistance from the volunteer lawyers. Fourteen trainings were held and a total of 223 attorneys and law students were recruited and trained (see Appendix "A").

The program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/vlp.shtml> and for unrepresented litigants at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/vlpselfrep.shtml>.

Due to the fact that so many unrepresented litigants visit the Civil Court Help Centers for assistance with matters other than consumer debt, in 2014, a plan was devised to expand the VLP to include help with name changes and small claims matters. An additional training program was designed for volunteers who already completed the consumer debt training. One training was held for volunteer attorneys (see Appendix “A”) and further expansion of the program is planned for 2015.

### **Volunteer Lawyers Program – Housing**

The Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) - Housing program was designed to provide free legal information and advice to owners and tenants who do not have attorneys as they represent themselves in court proceedings. The VLP - Housing program runs five days a week during regular Help Center hours in the five counties in New York City, including the Harlem Community Justice Center. Volunteers provide assistance by explaining what the court process entails, how to prepare for a court appearance in a Resolution Part, or how to handle a hearing or a trial. They also guide litigants in preparing court forms needed to start or answer proceedings. Volunteers also help by instructing unrepresented litigants on how to file Orders to Show Cause to ask the court for appropriate relief.

“Participating in the Volunteer Lawyers Program has also had a profound effect on my career. I have discovered that I enjoy landlord/tenant law more than the work I had been doing before I started volunteering. As a result, and with the benefit of connections I made while volunteering, I was able to get a new job with the Housing Court. Despite the new job, I still try and volunteer every week I am able because I enjoy the people at the Help Center and I feel a strong sense of fulfillment helping people navigate the court system.”

*VLP Housing Volunteer, N.Y. Co.,  
November 2014*

In 2014, the program offered seven prerequisite CLE training programs as well as four additional supplemental CLE programs to recent law graduates and admitted attorneys (see Appendix “A”). Volunteer lawyers contributed over 2,579 *pro bono* hours to the Program and were able to help more than 3,014 unrepresented litigants.

The Program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlp.shtml> and for unrepresented litigants at: <http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlpselfrep.shtml>.

## Volunteer Attorney Program - Family Court

The Access to Justice Program oversees the Family Court's Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP). Volunteer attorneys assist with initial pleadings in support, paternity, custody, visitation, family offense and guardianship matters. The availability of such services helps reduce delays, helps ensure a more efficient and fair outcome for unrepresented litigants and empowers litigants to pursue their cases to final resolution. Given the complexity of Family Court cases and the critical rights involved, the program is important to ensure that unrepresented litigants understand their rights. Better preparedness and fewer delays motivate litigants to pursue their cases to final resolution rather than abandoning their actions in frustration and confusion as so many do.

"It is incredibly difficult to create a pro bono project with not just staying power but also with the ability to grow and thrive. The NYS Family Court clinics have managed to do just that - grow, thrive, and serve literally thousands of unrepresented litigants. It has been and continues to be my great privilege to volunteer in the clinics. They make access to justice possible for so many in need."

*VAP Program volunteer, N.Y. Co.,  
October 2014*

Volunteer attorneys provide assistance to unrepresented litigants on a daily basis in the Family Court Help Centers of Bronx, Kings, Queens, New York and Richmond Counties. In addition to solo practitioners, VAP participants include many large law firms and corporations that have agreed to send associates on a regular basis. These firms include: Alston & Bird LLP; Arent Fox LLP; Banco Popular North America; Bank of America; Bank of New York Mellon; Barclays; Blank Rome; BNP Paribas; Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP; Citigroup; Colgate-Palmolive Company; Cooley LLP; Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP; Davis Wright Tremaine LLP; Debevoise & Plimpton LLP; Dechert LLP; DLA Piper LLP (US); Duane Morris LLP; Greenberg Traurig LLP; HSBC; Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP; JPMorgan Chase; Kirkland & Ellis LLP; Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP; Kroub, Silbersher & Kolmykov PLLC; McCarter & English; Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C.; Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP; Morrison & Foerster LLP; Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP; Pfizer Inc.; Proskauer Rose LLP; Ropes & Gray LLP; Shearman & Sterling LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP; Thompson Hine LLP; UBS Financial Services; Watson, Farley & Williams LLP; and White & Case LLP.

In 2014, more than 2,700 litigants were assisted by volunteer lawyers in the New York City Family Courts. The program offered six CLE trainings (see Appendix "A") and numerous additional trainings by DVD. A total of 218 volunteer attorneys were recruited and trained to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants in the New York City Family Court Help Centers.

In 2014, the VAP also provided assistance to 76 unrepresented litigants outside New York City via video conference to Onondaga and Ontario County Family Courts. This extension of the VAP to provide remote assistance was initially successfully piloted in Onondaga County with the Onondaga Bar Association on Wednesday mornings. New York City law firms provided the legal services for five months until a local law firm agreed to take over. The following New York City law firms participated: Duane Morris LLP, Greenberg Traurig LLP, Ropes & Gray LLP and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates. The VAP remote services program has since expanded to the Ontario County Family Court. With the assistance of New York City Family Courts' LAN Administrators and Pro Bono Net, advanced technology continues to be a vehicle to provide *pro bono* legal services and enhance access to the court for litigants across the state.

### **Lunchtime Assistance Program – Supreme Court**

The Lunchtime Assistance Program was created in late 2014 to assist unrepresented litigants on Mondays and Fridays when the Kings County Supreme Court Help Center is closed. The Kings County Supreme Court, along with the Access to Justice Program, Brooklyn Law School and the Kings County Law Library Board of Trustees, sought to meet this need by partnering to develop, train and staff an unbundled volunteer lawyer advice only program in the courthouse.

The Access to Justice Program identified the types of cases in Supreme Court where unrepresented litigants needed the most assistance and devised a 4.5 hour training program. Over two days, eleven volunteer attorneys and six Brooklyn Law School students completed the mandatory training program. (See Appendix "A"). The training consisted of civil procedure, divorce, lien, and Article 78 law, as well as how to explain the law in a concise and sensitive manner to litigants who are overwhelmed and frightened by the legal process. All volunteer attorneys and law students were also trained on using the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program.

Open Mondays and Fridays from noon until two in the afternoon, volunteer attorneys and law students are available to provide the public with advice and information on matrimonial issues, Article 78 concerns, and 201-A lien law. Volunteer attorneys also advise litigants how to represent themselves in court, explain rights and options, and assist in filling out court forms. Volunteer law students assist with initial intake and triage, explaining court procedure and giving out legal information. In addition, they provide referrals to helpful resources. Since this pilot program opened its doors in mid-October, attorneys and law students have volunteered 60 hours and assisted more than 60 unrepresented litigants. The majority of questions have been about divorce or divorce related issues.

## LIMITED REPRESENTATION IN THE COURTROOM PROGRAMS

The Access to Justice Program offers unbundled representation in the courtroom through its Volunteer Lawyer for the Day (VLFD) Program. The Access to Justice Program runs the VLFD Program for unrepresented litigants in consumer debt and landlord-tenant proceedings. The VLFD Program recruits, trains, and supervises volunteer lawyers in New York City Housing and Civil Courts. Unlike the advice only programs, the volunteer attorneys, law graduates and law students who participate in the VLFD programs meet their clients for the first time on the morning of the court appearance and sign and file a limited retainer agreement and notice of appearance. The representation begins and ends the same day. If a particular case is not resolved in a single appearance, the Program provides representation on adjourned dates by the same volunteer or by a different volunteer depending on availability. At each appearance, the volunteer and the client execute a new retainer agreement.



New York City residents sued in debt collection cases and housing nonpayment cases are overwhelmingly unrepresented by counsel and face major substantive and procedural obstacles to the fair adjudication of their cases. Unbundled representation during the settlement conference helps even the negotiating positions of the parties. Moreover, unrepresented litigants benefit from having assistance in discerning possible defenses and counterclaims that may never have been heard in court without the Program's involvement. Through the representation, litigants are provided with information about their case, educated about their rights, and, where applicable, referred to services to seek further assistance. The volunteer lawyer helps the litigant raise issues and assists the litigant in preparing to continue the case on their own, if necessary. Litigants feel empowered through the brief services they receive. The VLFD Program contributes to improving access to justice by providing free legal and practical support to litigants who would otherwise navigate the Court on their own. Not only does the volunteer enhance the litigant's understanding of the proceeding by breaking down the legalese and addressing any language difficulties, but the volunteer attorney also alleviates the litigant's nervousness by negotiating with the adversary in what is a typically adversarial and contentious exchange, communicating with court staff more effectively and by deftly arguing points of law and fact before the judge.

The court-sponsored VLFD Program promotes public confidence in the court system by improving perceptions of fairness and accessibility to justice. It demonstrates to the public the court's investment and concern about hearing and resolving the problems of ordinary litigants. The simple involvement of a volunteer often alleviates stress levels and contributes to a fairer or better experience with an adversary or the overall process.

Due to the high volume and legal complexity of cases scheduled on the court's calendar, it is difficult for court personnel to conference every single matter. Volunteer

lawyers free up the court staff's time to attend to other cases and reduce courtroom employees' time required to answer litigants' questions or explain procedures thus improving courthouse efficiency.

As the Program is an unbundled legal service, which begins and ends the same day, it is an attractive *pro bono* opportunity for volunteers who are not willing to make the more substantial time commitment often required to follow a proceeding through to its conclusion. The volunteer's commitment is finite and manageable as delineated in the limited retainer agreement and notice of appearance. The Program provides an opportunity for non-litigators or volunteers interested in a new area of the law to learn new skills under the guidance of a seasoned attorney sanctioned by the court and for those who merely desire to earn CLE credit or do *pro bono* work it gives them a way to do so without getting stuck in protracted litigation from which they would not be able to withdraw.

The foregoing structure allows the Access to Justice Program to train hundreds of volunteers and offer free CLE credit in return for a manageable *pro bono* commitment. Through leveraging volunteer resources to support this effort, the VLFD Program provides an invaluable community service at a difficult time for many New Yorkers.

### **Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program - Consumer Debt**

New York City residents who have been sued in debt collection cases are overwhelmingly unrepresented by counsel and face major substantive and procedural obstacles to the fair adjudication of their cases. The defenses available to debtors can be complex and the gross disparity in representation often means that defendants never raise the overwhelming majority of legitimate defenses. Creditors are able to obtain judgments against defendant debtors without ever needing to submit proof of the debt or amount owed. Many valid claims are lost because the unrepresented often do not present evidence or understand the law. The VLFD - Consumer Debt Program has a huge impact in assisting clients to favorably resolve these problems.

"This was so helpful. Such a relief! I've never been to court before and could not afford a lawyer and then received wonderful help! Thank you!!"

*VLFD Consumer litigant, N.Y. Co., October 2014*

Civil Court consumer credit cases are particularly amenable to a lawyer for the day approach. Lawyers are able to achieve dismissals, both with and without prejudice, and settlements in approximately 55% of cases on the same day of representation. In these situations, the representation for the day is essentially equivalent to full representation. In the remainder of the cases, lawyers request discovery on behalf of clients or take other steps to both put the clients in a better position to defend themselves or at least provide clients with a better sense of their options.

This Program runs four days a week and is conducted in partnership with New York County Lawyers' Association - operating in the New York County Civil Court; NYLAG - operating in Bronx and Queens County Civil Court; and the Brooklyn Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyer Program – operating in Kings County Civil Court. In late 2014, the program expanded to Richmond County one day a week in partnership with NYLAG. Partnerships with Cardozo Law School in the New York County program, St. Johns Law School in the Queens County program and CUNY Law School in the Kings and Queens County Programs have further expanded the services provided. Judiciary Legal Services funding received by program partners enabled the program to continue and expand its services in 2014. Approximately 5,020 litigants were assisted by this Program. This represents a 38% increase over 2013. This substantial increase can be attributed to the increased participation of law students and recent law graduates. This may be a result of the newly enacted 50-hour *pro bono* requirement for admission to the Bar. Using the lowest rate per case received by local legal services organizations, at \$1,200 per case, the value of legal services provided by the volunteers in 2014 was in excess of six million dollars. Lincoln Square Legal Services, Inc. at Fordham University School of Law, Consumer Debt Clinic, also provides assistance with motions in the New York County Civil Court. To date, the VLFD Consumer Debt Program has assisted over 15,000 litigants.

In 2014, the program offered thirteen CLE training programs and recruited and trained a total of 200 volunteer attorneys and law students to provide limited representation to unrepresented consumer debtors in the Civil Courts of Kings, Queens, Richmond, Bronx and New York Counties. The Program maintains webpages for- prospective and participating volunteers at:

[http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/vlfd\\_civil.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/vlfd_civil.shtml).

### **Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program – Housing Court**

The Housing Court VLFD Program helps prevent the eviction of hundreds of New Yorkers every year with the *pro bono* help of volunteers who step in to represent New York City rent stabilized tenants who have been sued in nonpayment proceedings. At the beginning of 2014, the Program operated in Bronx, Kings, New York and Queens Counties. However, due to lack of funding, the Program no longer runs in the Bronx or Queens Housing Courts. Volunteer lawyers assist unrepresented litigants for the day in New York County on Tuesdays and in Kings County on Mondays and Wednesdays. In the Second Department the Program runs in

“I learned so much from them and was very grateful for their assistance throughout this exhausting process. I was very lucky that the court had this program because I would’ve definitely lost this case going against the landlord’s high-paid lawyer and my family and I would not have been able to keep our home, and I don’t know what I would do or where I would go if I lost my apartment.”

*VLFD Housing litigant, Queens Co.,  
September 2014*

partnership with CUNY School of Law's Community Legal Resource Network (CLRN) and the participation of dedicated LaunchPad for Justice Fellows, as well as other volunteers recruited and trained by the Access to Justice Program.

In nonpayment cases involving rent-stabilized apartments, which are matters the Program focuses on, tenants are overwhelmingly unrepresented by counsel. They lack a fundamental understanding of their legal rights and defenses and often fail to raise issues that should be heard in court including legitimate defenses and claims relating to repair problems or the legality of their rent. Tenants are also typically inexperienced at negotiating and unschooled in settlement procedures, which can result in detrimental consequences to them when they agree to bargains they cannot uphold and fail to understand the legal implications of a Stipulation of Settlement.

The Program has a positive impact in getting more favorable outcomes by raising appropriate defenses and claims at the outset, negotiating fair agreements and avoiding the pitfalls of judgments where possible. Volunteer lawyers help tenants set themselves up to succeed in honoring settlements they can afford. In the event no agreement can be reached, the Program assists them in preparing for the trial.

Landlord-tenant proceedings in the New York City Housing Court are ideal for the lawyer for the day approach for a number of reasons. With no discovery as a right, the volunteer lawyer can read the Notice of Petition and Petition and Answer, interview the litigant and quickly ready him or her for the court appearance in the Resolution Part. Every case is calendared in a Resolution Part to see if it can be settled. The majority of cases in Housing Court are settled in the Resolution Part and matters can be resolved during a first appearance. Accordingly, the litigant may never have to go to court unrepresented. In the event the next court appearance requires preparation, the client is advised on what steps need to be taken.

In 2014, the program offered nine CLE training programs as well as four supplemental CLE programs to recent law graduates and admitted attorneys (see Appendix "A"). The approximately 200 volunteers who were trained served 3,650 hours and served approximately 246 litigants. The Program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at:  
[http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlfd\\_housing.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/vlfd_housing.shtml).

## **ADVOCATE DOCUMENT PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

Our legal system is built around written legal papers. Every action and proceeding is commenced with legal papers, relief is sought and granted based on legal papers and cases are resolved and finalized on legal papers. Unrepresented litigants face a myriad of challenges when completing legal papers for court, including language and comprehension difficulties. Accordingly, assistance with legal papers is one of the most requested and needed services for unrepresented litigants.

To combat these challenges, the Access to Justice Program offers assistance for litigants with the preparation of their court documents. Document assembly technology is employed for trained advocates to use to assist unrepresented litigants with completing court forms. With an advocate document assembly program, a trained advocate assists the otherwise unrepresented litigants with the preparation of court papers and is available to ensure that a *prima facie* pleading is produced and terms and concepts are explained. Currently, the Access to Justice Program oversees three advocate assisted programs in areas which have a high volume of unrepresented litigants: divorce, domestic violence and consumer debt. Two of these programs utilize document assembly programs created by the Access to Justice Program using HotDocs software. The third program licenses vendor software for use in court-based clinics.

This type of service delivery method is a sizable time saver for the court, the litigant and the advocate. When unrepresented litigants are assisted with document preparation the court papers produced are more complete and accurate, the unrepresented litigants are better advised of their rights and court procedures and are more prepared for court, and there is less rejection of papers. The programs greatly improve access to justice as well as court efficiency.

The advocates appreciate the document assembly programs because they provide a much faster method of interviewing a litigant and producing court papers. The document assembly programs can produce one or multiple court forms for the litigant, depending on which forms the advocate deems are required. Information only has to be inputted once regardless of how many times it may appear in the papers produced.

### **Uncontested Divorce Program**

The Access to Justice Program's Uncontested Divorce Program helps unrepresented litigants with the preparation of uncontested divorce forms at clinics in the Supreme Courts of New York, Queens, Kings, Bronx and Westchester Counties. Thousands of New Yorkers file uncontested divorces each year without an attorney and the divorce forms and court process are complex and bewildering. The Program helps ensure that the divorce process is simply explained and the documents that litigants submit are complete and accurately prepared. The Program recruits, trains and supervises volunteer attorneys to assist unrepresented litigants. The Access to Justice Program licenses a document assembly program that generates legal documents and simplifies the drafting process, producing personalized court forms for litigants that are ready to serve and file in the Supreme Court. Unrepresented litigants receive free assistance from the volunteer attorneys with the preparation of all the documents required for an uncontested divorce where the parties have no children. Appointments are made through Court Help Centers and if there is space, walk-ins are sent to the Program.

"A very patient and helpful staff. I am very grateful."

*Uncontested Divorce  
litigant, Queens Co.,  
September 2014*

In 2014, the Program ran on Tuesdays in New York and Queens Counties, Wednesdays in Westchester County, Thursdays (evenings) in Bronx County and Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in Kings County. Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School students also staff Tuesday and Wednesday day-time hours in the Bronx County Supreme Court. The Program also operated one additional day and one additional night in Queens County Supreme Court in partnership with St. John's Law School. These additional hours enable unrepresented litigants to complete their forms after working hours. The Uncontested Divorce Program conducted eight CLE trainings and trained 185 attorneys and law students who were recruited to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants. A total of 2,588 unrepresented litigants were assisted with their uncontested divorce proceedings.

### **Advocate Family Offense Petition Program**

Hundreds of thousands of Family Offense Petitions are filed in New York State Courts each year seeking orders of protection. Domestic violence has serious ramifications and the victims are in great need of advice and information to protect their safety. The New York State court system's Family Offense Advocate program allows trained domestic violence advocates to provide the guidance required in these delicate scenarios and easily assist unrepresented litigants with completing the Family Offense Petition and Address Confidentiality Affidavit, if needed.

The document assembly program is available to any domestic violence advocacy group once they have been trained and approved by New York State court system personnel. Access to the program is only available through Pro Bono Net's Family Justice/DV practice area ([http://www.probono.net/ny/family/fop\\_project/](http://www.probono.net/ny/family/fop_project/) membership and password required). Advocates must also join LawHelp Interactive to use the program, which is free. The program is not available for self-help to ensure that domestic violence victims get the support they need due to domestic violence's inherent safety dangers. By the end of 2014, 129 domestic violence organizations throughout the state were trained and approved to utilize the program.

The data collected in the document assembly program is electronically transferred to the Family Court's Universal Case Management System. The petition is not filed until the litigant or the advocate brings the signed Family Offense Petition into court. The electronic transfer of data directly into the Family Court's case management system is a major improvement in courthouse efficiency and eliminates hours of data entry time for Court Clerks and wait time for litigants.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program made a few modifications to the program. Three offenses, coercion, grand larceny, and identity theft, were made available in the HotDocs interview interface. Also, a change was made to the printed Petition based on a request from Domestic Violence advocates. The name of the domestic violence agency that helped prepare the papers was deleted from the Family Offense Petition to protect the agency and its advocates. The name of the agency still appears in the cover

sheet that is filed with the Petition in Court and in the instructions that are printed for the litigant.

The Family Offense Petition program was piloted in January 2013 in Bronx County Family Court. By June 2014, the program was expanded to all 62 counties in New York State with trainings conducted by the court system's Department of Technology completed for Family Court personnel and domestic violence advocate groups. Family Offense Petitions were electronically filed with the Family Courts in 45 counties. A total of 5,091 were successfully filed and docketed throughout New York State in 2014.

### **Advocate Consumer Debt Vacate Default Judgment Program**

The Access to Justice Program's advocate document assembly program is a HotDocs version of the Consumer Debt Vacate Default Judgment DIY Form program which prepares papers seeking vacatur of default judgments for failure to answer or appear in consumer debt cases. However, the advocate program helps New York City consumer debt attorneys prepare pleadings much faster when assisting a litigant. The advocate program does not contain explanatory screens and allows the user to view several fields of information at once. The program is password protected to prevent litigants from using the advocate program instead of the DIY Form version. The password is shared with consumer advocate groups in the New York City Consumer Debt Consortium, as well as the Access to Justice Program's VLP consumer debt program. In 2014, the program was assembled a total of 342 times.

## **ATTORNEY EMERITUS PROGRAM**

An unprecedented number of lawyers are now reaching retirement age every year. Estimates suggest that about a quarter of the nation's 1.1 million lawyers are over 65 and by 2020 they will account for about half of the legal profession. The increased life expectancy of this group, coupled with their generally improved health, means that many experienced, able lawyers will have the option of considering a long period of public interest work. The opportunity to utilize the skills and abilities they accumulated over a lifetime, as well as providing urgently needed assistance to many vulnerable people, is being considered by many of these lawyers. A wide variety of research confirms what retirees are discovering – the importance of meaningful work to the individual's well-being, and that people are happiest when they feel they are being effective and contributing to socially valuable goals. Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman tapped into this potential by creating the Attorney Emeritus Program (AEP) in 2010. Since then, over 1,200 lawyers over the age of 55 have committed to provide 60 hours of legal services assistance to some of the many individuals unable to afford an attorney to assist them with their urgent legal matters.



The opportunities in AEP include a wide variety of delivery systems – including one-on-one representation, clinical models (or unbundled legal advice) or mentoring or coaching others. Interested attorneys can search by location on the AEP website. All of the approximately 150 different opportunities around New York State involve a partnership with a significant civil legal services organization that provides training and supervision for each attorney. Those attorneys still actively practicing may also earn up to 15 of their 24 mandated CLE credits by doing *pro bono* work. Information is available at <http://www.nycourts.gov/attorneys/volunteer/emeritus/rsaa/>.

The AEP Program has also benefitted from the involvement of law firms, which have signed "Statements of Participation" and pledged to lend logistical and staff support to AEP volunteers at their firms. The law firms include: Chadbourne & Parke, Davis Polk & Wardwell, LLP; Debevoise & Plimpton LLP; Hiscock & Barclay; Hogan Lovells; Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP; Kaye Scholer LLP; Levelle & Finn, LLP; Proskauer Rose LLP, Reed Smith LLP; Simpson Thacher & Bartlett; Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates; Sullivan & Cromwell; Weil Gotshal & Manges; and Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP.

Each time the 60-hour commitment is completed, recognition is provided by both the organization and Chief Judge Lippman in the form of a personal letter of thanks for the important contribution that the lawyer has made to the effort to provide access to justice. The Access to Justice Program also recognizes AEP attorneys during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week. (See Part V).

## **LAW STUDENT AND NEW LAWYER INITIATIVES**

The Access to Justice Program involves law students, law graduates awaiting admission to the New York Bar, and new lawyers in public service early in their legal careers by encouraging their participation in court-based volunteer programs. The goal is to instill a life-long interest and dedication to *pro bono* work. The Access to Justice Program offers volunteer opportunities for law students to assist lawyers in making the transition from law student to law practitioner. This in turn benefits thousands of unrepresented litigants who are assisted by this energetic, enthusiastic expanding pool of volunteers.

Law students and law graduates are able to participate in the Access to Justice Program's court-based volunteer programs under Student Practice Orders issued by the Appellate Divisions of the First and Second Departments. The Practice Orders authorize a program of activities for law students and law graduates awaiting admission to the New York State Bar, as long as they act under the supervision of the Access to Justice Program.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program continued to target recruitment efforts at New York City area law schools, law graduate fellowships and law student internship public service programs. Fellowship and internship students participated from Benjamin N.

Cardozo School of Law, Brooklyn Law School, CUNY School of Law, Fordham University School of Law School, New York Law School, Pace University School of Law, St. John's University School of Law and Touro Law Center. Students volunteered in all of the court-based unbundled programs.

The Access to Justice Program obtained written permission for foreign LLM students to satisfy their 50-hour *pro bono* requirement by participating in the consumer debt and uncontested divorce programs. In 2014, the Access to Justice Program trained foreign LLM students for the first time from New York Law School and Cardozo Law School, in addition to LLM students from New York University Law School (see Appendix "A").

The collaboration of four New York City law schools: Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School, CUNY Law School, St. Johns Law School and The Touro Law Center, continued in 2014 through another judiciary legal services grant. The schools jointly developed and further expanded capacity and expertise for training and supervision of law students and recent law school graduates to provide *pro bono* civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers through the Access to Justice Program. Legal services are provided by law student and recent law graduates in existing court-based programs in the areas of uncontested divorce, landlord-tenant law and consumer debt law.

In partnership with the Access to Justice program, law students and law graduates of the Touro Law Center provided services in uncontested divorce and housing law in Suffolk County; Cardozo's law students and law graduates provided assistance in uncontested divorce in the Bronx County Supreme Court and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in the New York County Civil Court; St John's students provided assistance in uncontested divorce in Queens County Supreme Court and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in Queens County Civil Court; and CUNY law students and law graduates provided limited representation to tenants in Kings County Housing Court, provided assistance in uncontested divorce in the Queens County Supreme Court, and provided limited representation to consumer debtors in the Kings and Queens County Civil Courts. Touro Law Center law students also provided services on the New York Legal Assistance Group's (NYLAG's) Mobile Legal Help Center. This initiative works with the Access to Justice Program to coordinate training, recruitment and supervision of *pro bono* efforts across law schools enlisting significant numbers of law students and recent law graduates. In addition, this initiative facilitates best practices for addressing areas of unmet need that are amenable to law students and recent law graduates.

The Access to Justice Program offered its sixth and seventh Bridge the Gap CLE trainings in 2014. Through this free training law graduates are able to fulfill their CLE requirements, fulfill their 50-hour *pro bono* service requirements, and obtain supervised practical legal experience assisting unrepresented litigants in New York City Housing, Civil, Family and Supreme Court with their housing, family, consumer debt and uncontested divorce cases. The Bridge the Gap training continues to be extremely popular with increased interest now that the 50-hour *pro bono* requirement for newly

admitted attorneys is in effect. Since the program's inception over 750 recent law school graduates and newly admitted attorneys have signed up for this CLE series and provided *pro bono* service to more than 6,000 litigants. All participants in the court-based volunteer programs gain invaluable experience while helping some of New York's most disadvantaged civil litigants obtain access to justice.

## **PART II: DELIVERY OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE**

**There are many ways to deliver legal information and assistance** to unrepresented litigants that will greatly increase their access to the court system. On the spectrum, depending on the legal matter involved, there are resourceful litigants who may be able to adequately represent themselves after reading a plain language self-help publication, or surfing through legal and procedural information on the court's website, or visiting tables at a community fair. There are litigants who greatly benefit from quiet lay assistance empowering them to speak up because they are just too intimidated by court proceedings to assert themselves. When developing non-lawyer assistance programs and informational resources, the Access to Justice Program tries to keep in mind the varying depths of need and the varied obstacles that unrepresented litigants often face when navigating the court system. These obstacles include: the complexity of the legal system in light of the litigant's lack of knowledge, language and comprehension difficulties, financial hardships and the litigant's inability to get to the courthouse during business hours.

The Access to Justice Program seeks to maximize self-help and non-lawyer assistance wherever possible through the many innovative ways it delivers legal information and assistance at the courthouse, over the internet and in the community. Although these measures come short of legal representation, an informed litigant is better prepared to meet the challenges that come his or her way. As reported in this Part, in 2014, the Access to Justice Program substantially increased its multifaceted non-lawyer assistance by furnishing information and tools to New Yorkers going to court without a lawyer, making the promise of "justice for all" more meaningful.

### **DELIVERY OVER THE INTERNET**

The Access to Justice Program employs technology-based resources and services as a means of disseminating information and assistance to a large segment of the population since the internet is the first place many litigants turn to find answers. The internet is also ideal for litigants who cannot easily visit a courthouse or can only look for information when the courthouse is closed. With budget and time constraints, it is unrealistic for the court system to devote all available resources to services that require in-person court assistance; on-line delivery is a far more cost-effective mechanism.

Self-help internet-based resources are proven effective tools to assist the ever increasing numbers of unrepresented litigants in need of information, but it is not a substitute for counsel. Rather it is part of a continuum in which some matters can be resolved effectively. The Access to Justice Program makes every effort to produce user-friendly, plain language internet-based resources that maximize a litigant's chance of success.

## DIY Form Programs

Access to the justice system requires a litigant to prepare and file court forms. This requirement creates a myriad of difficulties



for unrepresented litigants who have no familiarity with law and procedure. Litigants who use the wrong form or cannot find the form they need will not obtain the relief they seek; litigants who leave out necessary information will not prevail; and litigants who do not know what to do after completing the form or are overwhelmed by the paperwork may just give up and never access the justice they seek. Litigants need information provided in a non-intimidating format to assist with language difficulties and comprehension, to know if they are using the correct form; to help properly complete the form, to locate missing information, and to understand next steps. The Access to Justice Program produces attractive, user-friendly document assembly programs, known as DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Forms that address *pro se* needs and alleviate many of these challenges unrepresented litigants face when creating their court papers.

DIY Forms are designed as a free and easy method for unrepresented litigants to prepare the court forms and instructions they need to proceed in court. The programs ask the litigant questions then use the answers to generate a completed personalized court form, which is ready to print, serve and file. The DIY Form programs are available to unrepresented litigants over the internet and in many courthouse Clerks' Offices and Help Centers throughout the state. DIY Form programs are available for litigants in Family, Supreme, County, Surrogate's, District, City, Town, Village, New York City Civil and New York City Housing Courts. A list of the 25 available DIY Form programs can be found on the CourtHelp website: <http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/DIY/index.shtml>.

The Access to Justice Program develops document assembly programs for unrepresented litigants by using a combination of A2J Author (free download) and HotDocs software. The Access to Justice Program contracts with Pro Bono Net to host completed programs on the LawHelp Interactive (LHI) website. The overall design of the DIY Form program makes the litigant's experience far less intimidating. Every program has the same attractive graphic appearance of a guide walking a litigant step by step along a path that leads to the courthouse. Keeping low literacy users in mind, a limited amount of information is presented on each screen. The experience is personalized by having the litigant choose a gender and then placing him on the path with the guide. The programs also address the litigant by his or her first name once this information has been collected.

DIY Form programs maximize an unrepresented litigant's chances of succeeding at the courthouse in a variety of ways. "Pop-ups" explain terms and "Learn More" buttons provide additional information to help the litigant understand the question. To ensure that the litigant does not omit a necessary element of the application, programs prompt the litigant to enter information if the litigant attempts to continue without completing a mandatory screen. DIY Form programs screen litigants for eligibility and exit them out

of the programs if they do not qualify. Litigants do not see questions unless they apply to their situation and do not need to repeatedly input information as is required when completing paper forms. The programs generate as many court forms as the program determines are needed based upon the litigant's responses to the questions in the guided interview. This includes any proposed orders, supplemental pleadings and affidavits of service. Thus, the litigant does not need to worry about choosing the correct court form to complete. Personalized instructions and information are generated which can include: filing and service instructions; courthouse locations and hours; court costs and fee waiver information; courtroom procedures; what the adversary may do next; what to do if there is a default; and where to find additional required documents, information or low-cost legal assistance.

DIY Form programs also assist users with language and comprehension difficulties. Some programs provide pop-up text in other languages or audio to make it easier for users who do not read well or who understand better through listening. Some programs offer graphics or hyperlinks for additional assistance. All programs are sent to a plain language specialist to simplify the text for readers with poor reading ability.

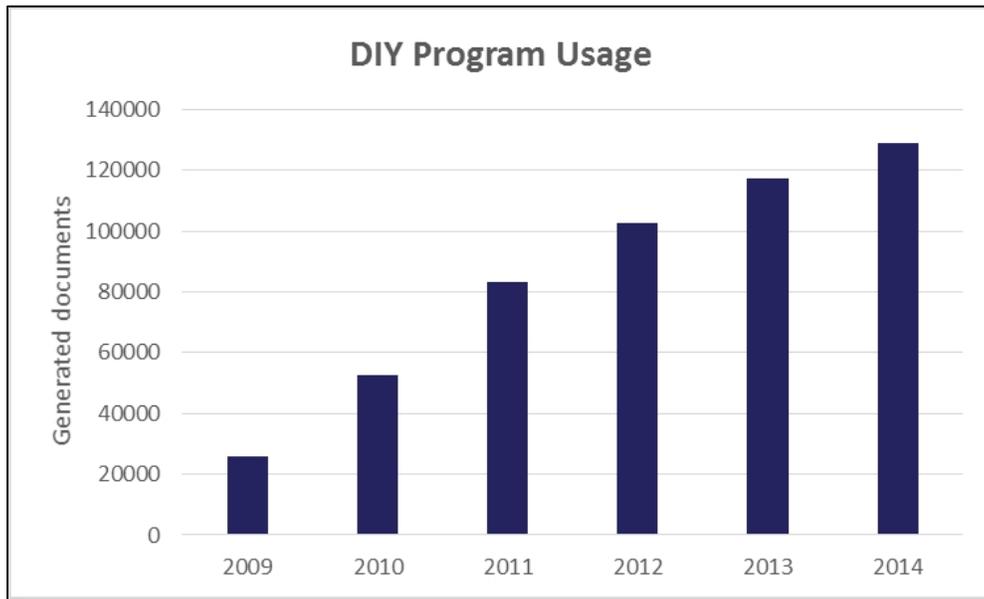
Court forms prepared using this type of document assembly program offer an unrepresented litigant far better assistance than a paper form or a fillable court form. The Access to Justice Program has found that DIY Form programs are an immensely helpful tool for increasing access to justice.

In addition to improving access to the justice system, the DIY Form programs have benefitted the court system by increasing court efficiency. The impact of the DIY Form programs on the NYS court system is delineated in a 2014 article, entitled "The Case for Court-Based Document Assembly Programs: A review of the New York State Court System's "DIY" Forms" published in the Fordham Urban Law Journal, available at: [http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/ny2j/pdfs/RochelleKlempner\\_Court-BasedDIYForms.pdf](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/ny2j/pdfs/RochelleKlempner_Court-BasedDIYForms.pdf).

### **DIY Form Program Usage**

The Access to Justice Program tracks DIY Form program usage and reviews the data to determine where and how to follow-up with program changes and personnel training and outreach. The Access to Justice Program primarily relies on DIY Form program usage data collected from two sources: Law Help Interactive (LHI) statistics and DIY User Surveys.

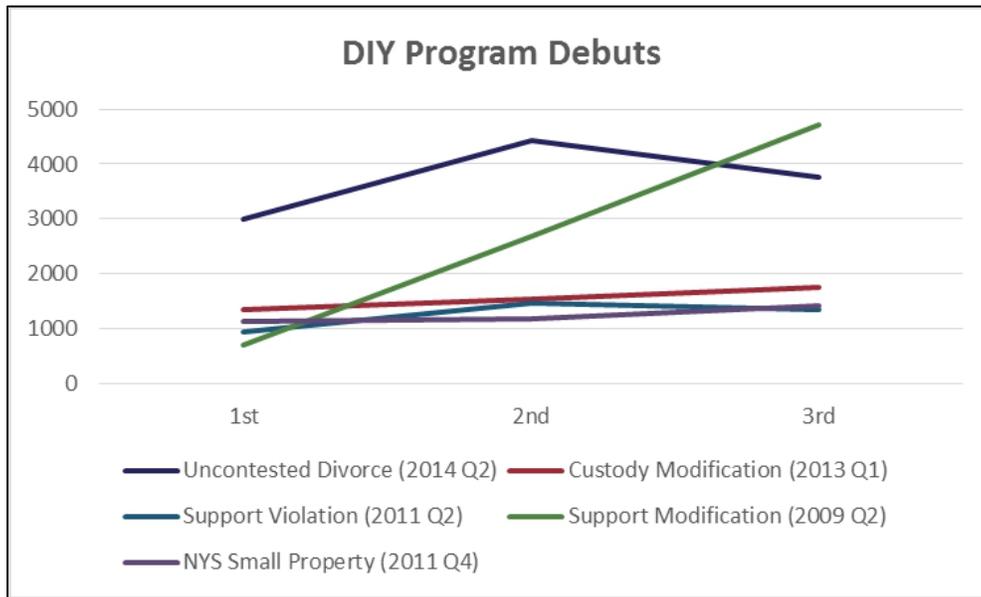
According to the LHI statistics, the New York State courts again lead LHI in the number of assemblies for the year. There were 129,024 assemblies from DIY programs; a 10% increase in assemblies from 2013 and the third consecutive year where over 100,000 assemblies were generated. The following chart shows the usage growth of the NYS DIY Form programs over the past six years.



New York State accounts for over 31% of the total assemblies generated on the LHI server in 2014.

The Family Court DIY Form programs in 2013 accounted for almost 52% of all assemblies generated from statewide DIY programs. The Support Modification Petition DIY Form program continues to be the most utilized DIY Forms program and was the most utilized program on the LHI server in 2014.

Of particular note was the new Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program (<http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/DIY/divorce.shtml>). This program was launched in April 2014 and had the best first quarter debut of any DIY Form program. There were 11,548 assemblies which account for over 13% of the assemblies from all statewide DIY Form programs. The following chart shows a comparison of the Uncontested Divorce program's initial assemblies, as compared to a sampling of other DIY Form programs when they debuted.



The anonymous User Survey data reviewed by the Access to Justice Program provides a wealth of feedback used to improve usage of the programs. A User Survey is generated every time a document is assembled from a DIY Form program. If the litigant chooses to fill it out it is returned to the Access to Justice Program by court staff. The User Surveys are programmed to provide the name of the DIY Form program used, the county and the court. From the User Survey data, the Access to Justice Program has confirmation that in 2014, for the first time, unrepresented litigants in every county in New York State successfully used a DIY Form program to produce and file court papers.

In addition, in 2014, DIY User Surveys data provided the following findings:

- 95% of litigants found that the DIY Form program saved them time
- 66% of litigants were referred to the DIY Form program by a court employee
- 60% of litigants used the DIY Form program in a court facility such as a Clerk's Office or Help Center
- 71% of litigants were between the ages of 18 and 44
- 33% of litigants had an income of less than \$19,999
- 98% of litigants said they understood the questions in the program

### DIY Family Court Study

In the spring of 2014, the Access to Justice Program partnered with the National Center for Access to Justice, the Bronx County Family Court and Pfizer, Inc. to devise a study to evaluate the impact of the Access to Justice Program's Support Modification Petition DIY Form Program on the court and the litigants. Four surveys were designed to solicit information about the DIY Form program experience from: 1) unrepresented litigants in

the Court Help Center, 2) unrepresented litigants appearing in the Support Magistrate's courtroom, 3) Family Court Help Center staff, and 4) Family Court Support Magistrate's.

In June 2014, two trainings were conducted to prepare volunteers to administer the surveys and assist the litigants with other Family Court DIY Form programs. The study was primarily staffed through the generosity of some New York City area law firms, Pfizer, Inc., and New York City Judges. The following law firms provided summer associate law students to participate in the study: Clifford Chance; DLA Piper; Kirkland & Ellis; Morrison & Foerster LLP; Ropes & Gray; and Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates. In addition, summer college and law student interns were provided by New York City Judges' chambers in Civil, Supreme, Surrogate's and Family Courts. Pfizer, Inc. provided paralegals to participate, as well as coordinating all the scheduling of the volunteers. A few volunteer attorneys from the Access to Justice Program also participated. Details of the trainings are contained in Appendix "A."

The volunteers administered the four surveys about the Support Modification Petition program throughout June and July 2014 in the Bronx County Family Court. The data was entered into an online survey program. Volunteers also assisted litigants in the Help Center with other DIY Form programs and had an opportunity to observe proceedings in the Support Magistrate's courtroom. Litigants were interviewed in the Help Center and Courtroom after they were completely finished in court for the day. A litigant could decline to answer any question. Both litigant surveys began with demographic questions, including, race, age, income and education. The litigants were asked questions about use of the DIY Form programs. There were also a number of subjective questions about how they felt about their court cases and the court system after using the program. The Help Center Court Clerk survey asked questions about the program and its impact on court efficiency. The Magistrate Survey asked the Support Magistrates their opinions about the DIY Form litigant users and DIY Form papers. A total of 223 Help Center Litigants, 165 courtroom litigants and 24 Help Center Clerks were interviewed. After the study was completed, the findings were sent to Global Strategy Group, an independent research firm that generously donated their time to analyze the responses. The National Center for Access to Justice will be publishing a comprehensive Report on the study sometime in 2015.

### **DIY Form Program Development and Implementation**

DIY Form development takes a considerable amount of time to produce legally sufficient court forms and instructions that will be accepted in any court throughout the state. The Access to Justice Program follows the practices for form development outlined in its own Best Practices Guide at [http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/BestPractices\\_courtsystemdocument\\_assemblyprograms.pdf](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/BestPractices_courtsystemdocument_assemblyprograms.pdf). Before a DIY Form program is released to the public, developer groups, comprised of both judicial and non-judicial personnel, private attorneys and stakeholders in the community provide input and feedback and conduct extensive testing. In addition, DIY Form programs are sent to a specialist to put the text into plain

language to help users understand the information better and avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Once a DIY Form program is launched, it is continuously maintained and updated based upon user feedback, changes in the law, and technological advances. Additional language options and features are often added where feasible and practical.

In April 2014, the Access to Justice Program launched the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program after a successful pilot of the program in the Kings County Supreme Court Help Center. This program is for unrepresented litigants with no children seeking a divorce on the grounds of irretrievable breakdown of the relationship (no fault). The DIY Form program greatly simplifies the process for completing the paperwork required in an uncontested divorce. The program is a two-part process where the litigant gets the initiating paperwork with complete instructions during Part I. After service of the Affidavit of Defendant has been returned, the litigant revisits the program for Part II for the concluding papers, which includes the Request for Judicial Intervention and Judgment as well as complete instructions. If the litigant does not qualify for this program, an information sheet is printed directing the litigant to the Supreme Court Clerk's Office in his or her county for more information. The papers and instructions generated from the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program are personalized to the litigant and print only those papers and instructions applicable to his or her situation.

"This program made it easy! Took a lot of the stress out of the process."

*Uncontested Divorce  
DIY Form user, NY Co.,  
September 2014*

Compared to the "paper" uncontested divorce forms and instructions, the papers generated from the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program prints on average 34 fewer pages. This program was greeted with great enthusiasm from the Clerks. To ready the counties for the debut of the program, a special Discussion and Preview was given to the Administrative Judges' Offices outside New York City, and the Supreme Court Supervising Judges and Chief Clerks in New York City. In addition, eight showcases were held for the Judicial Districts outside of New York City (see Appendix "B"). Since April 2014, litigants used this program 7,439 times to generate documents for Part I and Part II. In the third quarter of 2014, the Uncontested Divorce DIY made up 15% of all generated statewide DIY Forms.

The DIY Form program to vacate a default judgment in a consumer debt case for failure to answer or appear was updated with two new features. This one program works for cases in Supreme, County, City, District, Civil, Town and Village Courts. For Supreme and County Court litigants, the generated documents were modified to include an Affidavit in Support of Notification when an Order to Show Cause prints. Uniform Rule 202.7(f) requires that a party notify the opposing party before a request for a stay or a temporary restraining order is filed. The program was also changed for the eighteen Supreme Court counties where there is consensual or mandatory electronic filing through NYSCEF. Unrepresented litigants have the option of opting out of using the e-filing system either through a letter of declination from participation in consensual counties or the Notice of Opt-Out from Participation in Action Subject to Mandatory

Electronic Filing in mandatory counties. In addition, the Notice of Hard Copy Submission will print for those filing in an e-filing county.

In some counties, an Affidavit in Support of Modification of Support was also generated with a DIY Form Support Modification Petition. The Family Court Advisory and Rules Committee submitted an amendment to section 451 of the Family Court Act to eliminate the need for applicants to modify child support to file affidavits in addition to petitions in order to be entitled to hearings. This became effective in December 2014 and the DIY Form program was changed accordingly.

The DIY Form Support Modification Petition Program was also updated to provide alternative printed instructions for litigants utilizing the program inside the Bronx Family Court Help Center DIY terminal's area. The Help Center DIY terminal area has ten computers for litigants to use the six Family Court DIY Form programs. Bronx County warranted personalized instructions because of the large volume of support modification petitions generated by unrepresented litigants using the DIY Form program in the Help Center. Since the opening of the new and improved Bronx Family Court Help Center in July 2013, almost 57% of the support modification petitions filed were created using the DIY Form Support Modification Petition program. In the third quarter of 2014, 66% of the 2,455 support modification petitions filed in Bronx County were DIY Form petitions.

Based on feedback from Court Clerks and DIY User Surveys, additional windows were added to the DIY programs to make clearer the requirement of Microsoft Word or Word Viewer to open the generated document. In printed instructions for the small estate DIY program, further text was added to ensure that the litigant was viewing the document in the correct program.

To correspond to the changes on the CourtHelp and NYCourts.gov websites, all the hyperlinks in the DIY Form programs were checked for accuracy. The programming in many DIY Forms and printed instructions in many programs were updated with new hyperlinks.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program conducted extensive training on DIY Forms to familiarize court staff with the programs so employees can better serve the public. Twenty-one webinars were held to showcase the various DIY Form Programs (see Appendix "B"). In addition, one webinar focusing on the software used to create the programs was offered to court employees to cultivate volunteer DIY Form program developers. Two new webinars were also created to help court staff implement DIY Forms into court practice. The first webinar, entitled, "DIY Form Program Troubleshooting," discussed common issues that litigants and staff have when using DIY Form programs. In connection with this webinar, new questions and answers were added to CourtHelp's DIY Form FAQ section to help litigants troubleshoot problems (<http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/DIY/faq.shtml>). Additionally, new sections were added to the court system's intranet to address court employee inquiries about the program. The training debuted these resources, which primarily address why court papers might print

incorrectly, who to contact if there are technical issues, and the usage and necessity of the user surveys.

The Access to Justice Program also hosted a webinar entitled, “How DIY Form Programs Can Increase Court Efficiency.” This live webinar training was offered twice to all court staff and each time featured a panel of court employees who have successfully implemented DIY Form programs as an integral part of their courthouse procedure. After the panel presentations demonstrated how DIY Form programs can help in large, small, multi-bench and individual courts, open discussion was held. Over 75 employees attended these trainings, representing every Judicial District in the state. (See Appendix “B”).

The Access to Justice Program also presented at the Unified Court System Law Librarians’ Association meeting. This private presentation highlighted many of the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives with the primary focus on DIY form programs. (See Appendix “B”). In addition to webinars, in person visits were made to the Tompkins County Family Court, Kings County Family, Supreme and Housing Courts. Telephone outreach was conducted around the state.

The Access to Justice Program focused on creating more paths to the DIY Forms programs on the court system’s webpages to increase access for unrepresented litigants. Outside New York City, the Access to Justice Program continued to collaborate with several Judicial District Executives. Links were placed on the Third, Fourth, and Sixth Judicial Districts form’s webpages to add the new Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program. In addition, the Seventh Judicial District updated their Supreme and County Courts page to add Vacate Default Judgment in a Consumer Debt Case and Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program links. The Eighth Judicial District updated their Landlord Tenant main page, Landlord holdover page, Landlord Nonpayment page, and Tenant’s page by adding links the corresponding outside of New York City housing DIY Form programs and housing publications.

In New York City, Bronx County Supreme Court added the Uncontested Divorce DIY form program to matrimonial, general forms, and Help Center webpages. To help all unrepresented litigants coming to their Court the Bronx Supreme Court also added a link to CourtHelp on its main civil webpage. The Kings County Supreme Court added the new DIY program to the Help Center page and plain language text in the FAQs to direct litigants to the program. The Queens County Supreme Court added links to the new program to its Matrimonial and Forms pages, in addition to adding the DIY Form programs and new text on its Help Center webpages.

A New Uncontested Divorce DIY form program poster and flyer were created to accompany the new program. (<http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/DIY/DIY-Divorce.pdf>) New postcards were updated for Supreme Court as well. Posters and postcards were then distributed throughout the state. To better serve unrepresented litigants QR codes were added to all DIY form program posters and flyers. (See *infra*).

## CourtHelp

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program completely redesigned CourtHelp, the New York State court system's website for unrepresented litigants, in order to better assist users looking for information over the internet. The new site ([www.nycourthelp.gov](http://www.nycourthelp.gov)) provides easy to understand legal and procedural information and instructions to meet the ever increasing demand of litigants who come to court without a lawyer.



CourtHelp is still the main portal for the court system's DIY Form programs, as well as a place to find topical legal information, court forms, general court system information, and helpful links. However, CourtHelp's new design and features facilitate the delivery of information to the public in a more visually appealing and easily understood user-friendly format. New content is posted in simple to understand "plain language" aimed at users with little to no legal background who may have a lower reading proficiency. CourtHelp's banner and logo were replaced with graphics that attract the website's target audience. A tag line was added to the CourtHelp banner that states: "Find the help you need to represent yourself in NY courts." In addition, all new content is listed by subject headings that reflect the non-lawyer visitor's way of thinking in order to make the material easier to locate. For example, consumer debt information is found in the "Problems with Money" section because a litigant may have never heard of consumer credit transactions, but knows when he is being sued for money. Similarly, information is not arranged by court type because litigants do not necessarily know which courts handle which matters. For example, divorce information is found in the "Families and Children" section, rather than under a Supreme Court category because a litigant is more likely to intuit that matrimonial cases are heard in Family Court. Thus, the newly designed website increases a litigant's chances of understanding and finding the information that he or she seeks.

The Access to Justice Program added a substantial amount of new content in the subjects and areas of law where unrepresented litigants have the most questions. The old CourtHelp website, which had not been changed since it first debuted in 2003, contained only 11 pages on legal topics. The new site now has over 125 pages of legal and procedural information covering the basic steps in a court case (including discovery and motion practice) and many new legal topics, including debt-related matters and foreclosures. Additional content will be added in 2015.

Several new features were added to the website. A court locator box was placed on the right side of most pages for a litigant to find the contact information for his or her court. By in-putting the county and/or court type, the litigant can find the address, phone number and website for any New York State court. A quick links box was also added to each page for direct access to the most often requested pages. This includes links to pages on Find a lawyer, Court Help Centers and DIY Forms. There is also a quick link

to a new and complete plain language Legal Glossary and a link to LawHelp ([www.LawHelp.org/NY](http://www.LawHelp.org/NY)), a statewide website where litigants can find legal advice, in addition to legal information. Icons to the Access to Justice Program's Twitter, YouTube and DIY Form pages were placed on every page for quick access. Finally, at the bottom of the legal content pages, related information boxes were added, each containing tailored links that direct a litigant to other pages on similar topics.

The entire site was reprogrammed with a more comfortable visual experience in mind. For litigants using a computer screen, the width of the content is substantially increased. For litigants using a smartphone for internet access, the CourtHelp site is now mobile-device friendly, like the rest of the NYcourts.gov website. This was a priority of the redesign since studies show that each year more and more litigants own a mobile device and use it as their primary access to the internet.

In order to make the site easily viewed on mobile devices, CourtHelp's webpage addresses had to be changed. This necessitated a coordinated team effort with both OCA's website system team, as well as LawHelpNY to successfully launch the redesigned site. Webinars were held with both LawHelpNY and LAWNY to preview to site and coordinate the launch. A tremendous reprogramming of links was performed on the LawyHelpNY and NYcourts.gov site to insure that all links to CourtHelp continued to function. Many new links were added to the new content throughout the NYcourts.gov website.

Following the launch of the redesigned site, the Access to Justice Program held webinars for court personnel in order to showcase the new content and features and explain how staff can use the site to assist litigants and improve court efficiency. (See Appendix "B"). A sampling of comments from court staff set forth below reflects their thoughts and appreciation for the improvements:

- "I am thrilled with the ease of finding topics quickly and likely will use the main CourtHelp page to more efficiently direct litigants calling in for information. As a primarily Criminal [Court] Clerk, the added assist with Civil information is a Godsend."
- "Where do I start?? The glossary will be very useful as will be the statute of limitations chart. I love the new layout. It seems to me that Access to Justice just got a huge assist!"
- "Opening Portal - contains wealth of information all in one place"
- "As a NYS resident, I think this is a fantastic, comprehensive representation of what our State's Courts are about - assisting and educating the Court-using public"
- The website is really fine tuned to the needs of the average person. The ability to jump from one place to another to get a question answered (terminology) is wonderful. The glossary having Latin terms as well as the English is helpful

because sometimes people only know the Latin term. Great job on the ease of the website!

- “I am very impressed with how user friendly the new CourtHelp is..... Thank you.”
- “The information has been shared with Supreme/County Court Chief Clerk (who was most impressed with foreclosure and vacating a default judgment) and posters were printed and placed throughout the courthouse. The information was also shared with the County Clerk who is posting the information in her office, as they get many calls requesting information regarding court procedures, etc.”
- “Having all the information on the initial page is most helpful because it is faster to get to the information that the public is asking about.”
- “Website appears to be very user-friendly. I commend the way it's designed so that litigants can access information and be directed based on subject rather than on knowledge of what court does what.”
- “I loved the whole presentation, but I thought this was a good way for us to learn about "other" courts, as we get questions on "which court do I go to for.....? Now we can refer them to the new CourtHelp menu. It is very user friendly.”
- “The whole site is beneficial as we are a multi-bench facility. We will be able to direct litigants to the site to get them the information which will be much quicker than trying to give them info via telephone, etc.”
- “I believe the new website will be very helpful and will send the public to the site if they have any questions regarding representation.”
- “Easier to navigate! All info in one place.”
- “I work in the Supreme Court, so I appreciate all of the parts the new website has to offer that relate to this Court.”
- “Menu and the wording is very easy to understand for people who are not familiar with legal terms.”
- “I think the new website is very intuitive and clear. Good job!”
- “As a court employee, the layout will make it so easy for me to quickly get answers to litigants, both in person and by phone.”
- “What a wonderful website! Kudos to everyone who worked on it!”

By answering litigant questions, CourtHelp can free up staff time. Staff has a helpful resource to direct litigants without fear of giving legal advice. Litigants have a place to access information even when the court is closed. With continuing judiciary budget shortages and ever-rising numbers of unrepresented litigants, the CourtHelp website is an important tool to improve access to justice and court efficiency.

### **Social Media**

In 2010, the Access to Justice Program began using social media tools to disseminate information by establishing a YouTube channel (<http://youtube.com/user/NYCourtsA2J>), a Twitter page (<http://twitter.com/NYCourtsA2J>) and a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/NYCourtsVLP](http://www.facebook.com/NYCourtsVLP)). Since then, each of the platforms has provided

unrepresented litigants with a new pathway to legal services, information and assistance. There is no question that social media is a cost effective and simple means to disseminate information and reach thousands of people in a matter of moments. In addition, social media has the power to touch people who may never benefit from any other delivery method. For these reasons, the Access to Justice Program successfully heightened its use of social media tools in 2014 and will continue to expand usage in 2015.

## YouTube

The unprecedented reach of YouTube makes it an ideal platform to deliver legal information, especially for litigants who may have lower English reading proficiency and benefit from visual learning over printed delivery. In 2014, the Access to Justice Program added 11 new videos to its YouTube channel, making for a total of 26. Since 2010, over 14,000 minutes have been watched. In 2014, there was an increase of over 33.3% in the number of views since 2013.



In 2014, nine new video interviews that were conducted between 2012 and 2013 for the 40th Anniversary of the New York City Housing Court in 2013 were posted on the Access to Justice Program's YouTube channel. Six Judges or former Judges, Lorraine Miller, Jaime R. Rios, Peter M. Wendt, Jerald R. Klein, Harriet P. George, and Israel Rubin, and three landlord-tenant practitioners, Kent Karlsson, David Rozenholc and Daniel Finkelstein, share their recollections about the formation, implementation and advancement of the Housing Court. These preserved oral histories from the people who helped build the Housing Court, or were present at the Court's inception, provide a unique window to the past. Especially poignant is the video of Hon. Israel Rubin, former Administrative Judge for the Civil Court of the City of New York and former Appellate Division Judge, who passed away in 2014. The video was released in coordination with a memorial service held for Judge Rubin in the Appellate Division First Department. In the first month and a half on YouTube, Judge Rubin's video received 286 views. His interview, along with the other never-before-seen interviews complement the video interviews of Judges Fern A. Fisher and Margaret Cammer, and former court employee William Etheridge, which were posted in 2013.

In addition, English and Spanish versions of a video explaining the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form program were uploaded to YouTube to inform litigants that they can use the free program to easily make the court papers needed to request an uncontested divorce. In just four months, the English version garnered 435 views and the Spanish version was watched 83 times. These videos were made with the assistance of several talented volunteer court employees. The videos were made in a "fotonovella" fashion learned from Greater Hartford Legal Aid. Photos were taken of the actors and inserted into PowerPoint screens, then text bubbles were added to the photos and audio was recorded and added as well. The Spanish version was produced by using the same photos, replacing the English text bubbles with the Spanish translations and recording

Spanish speakers for the audio. This process makes it far easier to quickly make videos in multiple languages. It also makes it much easier to make changes to the videos when necessary. All of the Access to Justice Program DIY Form videos were updated in 2014 to replace images of the old CourtHelp website with images of the new site. The Support Modification DIY Form video continued to provide information to litigants who watched this video over 700 times in 2014.

## Twitter

The Access to Justice Program utilizes Twitter to notify the public about available resources, tweeting a total of 856 times since launching in May 2010. Tweet topics include notifications about the availability of DIY Form programs, community events, court related videos, court closings, locations for the mobile legal help center, where to find free legal advice and information and important changes in the law. In addition, the Access to Justice Program uses Twitter to disseminate information about volunteer opportunities and trainings in court-based programs, and to recognize volunteer contributions.



Throughout 2014, the Access to Justice Program's followers steadily increased and by the year's end, totaled 359, an increase of 112 since 2013. Followers include a number of legal services organizations throughout the state, from the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (@LASNNY) to Legal Services NYC (@LSNYC), as well as a number of law schools throughout the state, from Brooklyn Law School (@BLSLibrary) to Albany Law School (@AlbanyLaw). A number of Bar Associations, such as the New York State Bar (@NYSBA), and government organizations, such as the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (@NYCDCA), also follow Access to Justice Program tweets. Although 44% of followers are located in New York City, numerous followers are based in other states from a variety of organizations; including, Legal Aid Online in Illinois (@ILAO); the Florida State Bar Association (theflabar) and the San Francisco Bar Association's ADR Department (@sfbar); several courts and court systems; the Legal Services Corp. in Washington, D.C. (@LSCtweets) and an Access to Justice Commission from South Carolina (@SCATJ). Additionally, the Access to Justice Program has an eclectic mix of followers that help disseminate access to justice information to their own followers, allowing tweets to reach the litigants who will benefit most. A sampling of Access to Justice Program Twitter followers include:

- Pro Bono Net (@probono)
- LawHelp NY (@LawHelpNY)
- LIFT (@LIFTonline)
- Interfaith Center NY (@ICNY)
- LSNTAP (@LSNTAP)
- NCSC (@StateCourts)
- NYC Councilman Rory Lancman (@RoryLancman)
- Her Justice (@herjusticenyc)

- Rent Stabilization Association (@TheRSAnyc)
- Riverdale Tenants' Association (@461RiverdaleAve)
- A2J Author (@A2JAuthor)
- NYLAG (@nlag)
- NLADA (@NLADA)
- Advocates for Children (@AFCNewYork)
- New York Community Trust (@NYCommTrust)

There is no doubt that Twitter is a powerful mechanism for the delivery of information. A simple 144 character tweet is capable of reaching thousands. For example, during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, tweets on October 23, 2014 were delivered to the stream of 1,275 recipients.

In the fall of 2014, the New York State Court System joined the Access to Justice Program on Twitter, embracing social media as a means to keep the public informed about the court system. Since the NYS Court System (@NYSCourtsOCA) and the Access to Justice Program have different followers, retweeting each other's tweets broadens the delivery of court-related information to the public.

## Facebook

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program's Volunteer Lawyer Program Facebook page continued its momentum. "Likes" on page increased to 422, up from 346 in 2013. The Access to Justice Program uses Facebook as a vehicle to increase the pool of lawyers and non-lawyers available to provide volunteer legal services. The Facebook page provides one location for posting information for volunteers in multiple programs. It is a wonderful mechanism to promote *pro bono* work in the courts and reach many more potential volunteers. This is evidenced by the fact that the Access to Justice Program's March 12, 2014 single post announcing the Spring Bridge the Gap CLE training program reached 518 people. Similarly, a post on October 29, 2014 about a training for the Volunteer Lawyer Housing Program reached 331 people.



The Access to Justice Program also used Facebook to acknowledge volunteer contributions. During National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, posts on October 24, 2014 were delivered to the feed of 1,938 recipients. Like Twitter, it takes only seconds to write and post information on Facebook, reaping significant reward for the investment of time.

## DELIVERY IN THE COURTHOUSE

The Access to Justice Program works on programs and resources to provide legal assistance and information at the courthouse. As the primary hub of all case activity, the courthouse is the ideal location and opportunity to offer services that assist

unrepresented litigants. Going to court can be a very intimidating, bewildering and nerve-racking experience for anyone unfamiliar with the workings of the court system. Delivering information and assistance at the courthouse is a more immediate means to address these needs. The Access to Justice Program offers one-on-one assistance at the courthouse through Court Help Centers and the Court Navigator Program.

In 2014, the new Court Navigator Program was established via Administrative Order of the Chief Administrative Judge (<http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/SSI/pdfs/AO-42-14.pdf>) to provide *pro bono* non-legal services to unrepresented litigants in consumer credit and housing matters. By recruiting and training non-lawyers to help litigants “navigate” the court system, the Access to Justice Program has access to a much greater pool of volunteers and can offer litigants help at the courthouse where they may need it most.

In addition, the Access to Justice Program continued to explore methods for information delivery to litigants during courthouse “down time.” Slideshows, posters and lunchtime seminars take advantage of blank space on courthouse walls and court lunch breaks, and are a low-cost method of increasing access to justice that can reach large numbers of litigants.

### Court Help Centers

In an effort to provide equal access to the justice system the Access to Justice Program oversees 26 New York State Court Help Centers located in Surrogate’s, Supreme, Family, and Civil Courts, throughout the state. Court Help Centers are where unrepresented litigants can meet with a trained court employee or volunteer to get free legal information. Each year more than 2.3 million New Yorkers navigate their way through the court system without an attorney, most with little or no legal knowledge or idea how to proceed or where they can find out about their rights and remedies. Court Help Centers seek to meet this need by providing comprehensive information on matrimonial, family, guardianship, estates, special proceedings, consumer, foreclosure, housing and other civil issues.



Court Help Centers are staffed by Court attorneys or Court Clerks and Administrators. Help Center personnel explain orders, rights and ramifications of stipulations, distribute free sample forms, informational packets and publications and review court paperwork. Court staff also makes referrals to *pro bono* legal service providers for full representation. Help Centers provide a legal service for those who are unable to get counsel by educating and informing them of various court and social service support agencies. In addition to personal assistance from court staff, many Help Centers provide free internet for legal research, access to DIY Form programs, as well as connection to consultations with volunteer attorneys.

Help Centers provide information to unrepresented litigants so that they may protect their rights in court, even if they cannot afford an attorney. In Help Centers the public can learn what their options are, what their paperwork means, and how to fill out their court forms. When the public is empowered with legal tools, confidence and information they are better prepared to continue with their case on their own. In turn judges, court attorneys and court staff function more efficiently and effectively when litigants can navigate their way more easily through the court system. New York State Court Help Center locations can be found on CourtHelp at:

<http://nycourts.gov/courthelp/GoingToCourt/helpcenters.shtml>.

In 2014, the court system's Court Help Centers continued to expand and experienced a number of improvements, some new partnerships, and an overall increase in litigants helped. Throughout New York State, the Court Help Centers assisted over 135,000 unrepresented litigants, a 20.5% increase over the number assisted in 2013. This figure does not include New York City Family Court Help Centers. The Access to Justice Program held a Help Center staff meeting via webinar to follow-up on the group's idea to create a shared database and discuss what the site should contain. Working with the Department of Technology, the Access to Justice Program created a statewide Help Center sharepoint website on the court system's intranet. A Help Center staff training webinar was held to familiarize staff with the new resource (see Appendix "B"). This privately shared cloud based resource allows staff to upload publications they find or create, post questions, and share ideas, contacts and resources that staff believe may be helpful to other members and work collectively.

In New York City, over 32,000 unrepresented litigants received individual consultations in New York City Civil Court Help Centers. This is an increase of 28% over litigants seen in 2013. Civil Court Help Center staff assists in civil and housing matters by reviewing court papers, explaining orders and court procedure. On two nights, the Kings County Housing and Civil Court Help Center hosted the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) during evening hours at the Kings County Civil Court. This partnership allowed litigants who were visiting the Help Center to meet one on one with DCA staff about their financial empowerment centers, how to look up or file a complaint against a business, and New York City's new paid sick leave law. In 2014, the New York City Civil Court Help Centers also updated their English (<http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/pdfs/ResourceCenterBrochure.pdf>) and Spanish (<http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/SSI/spanish/pdfs/ResourceCenterBrochure.pdf>) language brochures and translated the brochure into Chinese (<http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/SSI/chinese/pdfs/ResourceCenterBrochure.pdf>).

The Access to Justice Program partnered with Columbia Law School's Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic to create a new New York City Housing Court database for the Help Centers. The law students worked closely with court staff to streamline and improve the Help Center's outdated intake process. The new database eases the speed of data entry and allows for faster searches. It also captures data that was previously unaccounted for, such as, litigants who were given written materials, directed to the

appropriate office or agency, or assisted with simple questions. The database piloted in the Kings County Help Center and will be expanded to the other courts in 2015.

The New York City Supreme & Surrogate's Court Help Centers assisted over 70,000 litigants, a 19% increase from last year. New York City Supreme and Surrogate's court staff help litigants to file divorce paperwork, foreclosures, small estates, article 78 proceedings, and a myriad of other issues in addition to answering general procedural questions. The Kings County Supreme Court added its "Lunchtime Assistance Program" to the Help Center. (See Part I). This program trained volunteer attorneys and Brooklyn Law School students to give out legal information on Art. 78, matrimonial matters, and 201-A lien law. The Kings County Supreme Court is now able to provide Help Center assistance five days a week.

As is detailed in Part IV, the Access to Justice Program conducted trainings and received a number of visitors from other state court systems who came to observe and learn about Access to Justice Program initiatives, including the successful NYS Court Help Centers. All interested visitors were escorted to the Bronx Family Court state-of-the-art Help Center which was completely remodeled in 2013. There, visitors observed unrepresented litigants create and file petitions, meet with volunteer Attorneys, receive copies of court orders, utilize one of the ten DIY Form terminals, and appear before a Court Referee, allowing many of their needs to be addressed right when they file.

Outside New York City, the Third Judicial District opened its first Court Help Center. The Access to Justice Program worked with Presiding Justice Karen Peters and former Administrative Judge Thomas E. Mercure of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District, the Albany County Bar Association, Albany Law School and the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York to open the Albany County Family Court Help Center. Staffed by volunteer attorneys, this Help Center assists unrepresented litigants with court forms, and legal and procedural information and advice on child support, custody, paternity and other family law matters. A total of 23 volunteer attorneys, seven recent Albany Law School graduates and two staff attorneys provided assistance to 727 unrepresented litigants since the Help Center opened in May.

"It is wonderful. It makes such a difference. Petitions are more complete and thorough. It gives the judges and the court more information."

*Court Clerk, Albany Co.  
December 2014*

Since it opened its doors in January of 2013 the Seventh Judicial District Help Center has assisted more than 2,800 unrepresented litigants. Now in its second year, the Seventh Judicial District Help Center served approximately 1,800 people in 2014, with 70% of the referrals coming from the Court. Although the Help Center provides information on family, landlord-tenant, and Supreme Court law, 27.4% of litigants had domestic relations questions, 23.4% were there for landlord-tenant issues, and 10.3% needed assistance with Small Claims. Many litigants were in need of help with Court

forms and procedure; 33.8% of unrepresented litigants needed help finding or filling out court forms and 31.7% of the public were there for answers to procedural questions.

The Eighth Judicial District Help Center assisted approximately 4,200 litigants in 2014 with various Supreme Court issues. Almost all assistance was provided in person on a one-to-one basis. The Westchester County Help Center in the Ninth Judicial District assisted approximately 6,968 people: 56% were assisted in person, 43% were helped over the phone, and 1% received assistance via email and regular mail.

In the Tenth Judicial District, the Nassau County Help Center staff assisted approximately 14,267 litigants. Of those assisted 49% were assisted in person, 3% had their issues addressed by email, and 48% were assisted over the phone. The two Suffolk County Help Centers assisted more than 7,223 patrons. The Riverhead Law Library assisted the remaining 1,679 and Central Islip Law library assisted 5,544 patrons. Suffolk County Help Center Director Christopher Tucker received both the District Administrative Judge's Award from the Amistad Black Bar Association and the Milton Mollen Commitment to Excellence Award, for his extraordinary service in the Suffolk County Help Centers.

### **Court Navigator Program**

The Court Navigator Pilot Program was launched in February 2014 to support and assist unrepresented litigants during their court appearances in landlord-tenant cases in the Kings County Housing Court and consumer debt cases in the Bronx County Civil Court. During the year, the Program expanded to Bronx, New York and Queens County Housing Courts. The Program is scheduled to expand in 2015 when York College students participate in a Court Navigator Program for uncontested divorce litigants in Queens County Supreme Court. The Court Navigator Program is an extension of the Access to Justice Program's RAP (Resolution Assistance Program) which ran for years in the New York City Housing Parts. The RAP was incorporated into the Court Navigator Program.



Specially trained and supervised non-lawyers called Court Navigators, usually college students, but also persons deemed appropriate by the Program, provide general information, written materials, and one-on-one assistance to eligible unrepresented litigants. In addition, Court Navigators provide moral support to litigants, help them access and complete court forms, assist them with keeping paperwork in order, in accessing interpreters and other services, and explain what to expect and what the roles of each person is in the courtroom. Court Navigators are also permitted to accompany unrepresented litigants into the courtroom. While these Court Navigators cannot address the court on their own, they are able to respond to factual questions asked by the Judge.

Nonpayment proceedings are cases where landlords sue tenants to collect rent. In these disputes, tenants and owners or landlords face the possibility of losing their

homes through eviction or foreclosure. The most common type of proceeding filed in the Housing Court is a nonpayment proceeding. In a nonpayment proceeding the landlord sues a tenant to collect unpaid rent. Over 99% of tenants and 15% of landlords involved in such proceedings appear in court without representation. Similarly, 99% of consumer debt defendants come to court without an attorney, while 100% of plaintiff creditors are represented by counsel. Consumer debt proceedings involve credit card companies, hospitals, banks or any other person or company that a litigant may owe money to. The majority of the litigants who appear in these types of cases without an attorney are unaware of their rights, and lack knowledge of the resources available to them. This is where Court Navigator Program volunteers are most helpful and necessary; they connect the unrepresented litigants to the resources and services they need most. Litigants who come to court are often unfamiliar with the process and uncomfortable speaking up for themselves. Court Navigator Program volunteers can report any inappropriate behavior or communication by an adversary and raise awareness about available resources including places where litigants can seek free legal information and/or advice, and apply for social services.

Court Navigator Program volunteers may play an instrumental role in helping a litigant alert the court about an important point of fact or law, which may have ramifications in the outcome of the case. The Program thereby boosts public confidence in the court system by improving perceptions of fairness and accessibility to justice.

The Program connects New Yorkers who wish to offer their time and skills to members of their community in need of assistance and support as they navigate the court system. In return, volunteers are provided with training, supervision and a unique opportunity to make contacts, and learn about courthouse procedures. The Program attracts college students with an interest and focus on legal, paralegal or social work studies who may want to pursue further studies or a career in that field. Students often volunteer to fulfill their school's community service or *pro bono* requirement and some serve in exchange for class credit. All participants are eligible to get a Certificate of Service in recognition and appreciation of their service and participation in the Program upon completing their 30-hour commitment.

“The most positive aspect of being a court navigator is knowing that I was able to make a difference in someone’s life by offering my help as well as letting the litigants know their rights. That is something that most litigants are grateful for.”

*Court Navigator, Bronx Co.,  
July 2014*

Through their participation in the Program, all participants become keenly aware of the needs of the vulnerable populations who come to Court without representation, which in turn brings light to the importance of doing *pro bono* work and sparks a greater commitment towards a deeper and longer involvement in doing volunteer service.

In 2014, there were nine *Housing* training programs as well as one additional supplemental *Housing* workshop. The 185 *Housing* Court Navigators trained contributed

about 3,400 *pro bono* hours to the Program and were able to help close to 2,000 unrepresented tenants or landlords. There were five trainings for Civil Court *Consumer* volunteers with a total of 116 *Consumer* Navigators trained. The Bronx *Consumer* Debt Court Navigator Program assisted over 1,300 consumer litigants in the consumer debt part. Training topics included, respectively, an overview of the Civil and Housing Court, basics of consumer debt cases and nonpayment proceedings, interviewing and communication skills, and using the DIY computers and LawHelp (see Appendix “A”).

The Program operates in partnership with LawHelp, and in Kings County Housing Court with the nonprofit organizations University Settlement, and Housing Court Answers. In 2014, the Program recruited volunteers from The City College of New York, Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies; the New York City Paralegal Association; Berkeley College; Medgar Evers College; Boricua College; Bronx Community College; The City College; College of New Rochelle; College of Mount St. Vincent; Hostos Community College; Hunter College; John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Lehman College; Manhattan College; Mercy College; and Monroe College.

The Program maintains webpages for prospective and participating volunteers at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/rap.shtml>

### **LiveHelp Pilot Project**

“LiveHelp” has become a popular method to remotely assist internet users as they navigate a website. The offer of LiveHelp assistance is placed on a webpage and users have the option of availing themselves of the assistance by typing their questions. In response, people type back responses, and so on. In 2014, LawHelpNY worked with the Access to Justice Program to incorporate LiveHelp into the DIY Form terminals in the Kings County Housing Court Clerk’s Office. The Access to Justice Program and the New York City Civil Court’s LAN Office facilitated the technical end and LawHelpNY staff were trained and prepared to supply assistance with the New York City DIY Form tenant programs. This pilot project is still ongoing and being evaluated; however, it is clear that LiveHelp assistance has great potential to assist litigants in the courthouse.

### **Community Seminars**

From time to time, the Access to Justice Program hosts free live seminars in the courthouses during the lunch hour that are aimed at the needs of the unrepresented public. Presenters may be private practitioners, legal services lawyers, or representatives from various government agencies. Presenters graciously volunteer their time and expertise. In 2014, the budget shortage prohibited holding numerous community seminars. One community seminar was held at the New York County Civil Court in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. (See Appendix “A”). More information on the Access to Justice Program’s community seminars is available at: [http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts\\_Community\\_Center/communityseminars.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/communityseminars.shtml).

## Court Tours and Visits

The Access to Justice Program oversees the Court Tours program in New York State. Court Tours are an excellent opportunity for the public to become familiar with the court system by observing the jury and trial process, learning about different types of cases and careers in the courts and by touring a courthouse. Visiting a court in session and having an opportunity to ask questions helps demystify the justice system, lessen apprehension that lay people sometimes experience, and promote public confidence in the judiciary. On a court tour, written information, instructional materials, and promotional items are distributed. Information on requesting a court tour is available on the Access to Justice Program website: [http://nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts\\_Community\\_Center/index.shtml](http://nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/index.shtml).

“A huge thank you to all of the court staff. I am honored and grateful to have the privilege to meet and hear every single one of your advices, comments, and extraordinary stories. I learned that the Supreme Court is filled with trustworthy, caring, honorable people that will go far beyond the courts to help people in need.”

*Student visitor, Supreme Court, Kings Co., Nov. 2014*

In 2014, the Court Tour's program continued to receive a high volume of requests for tours from various groups including, elementary, middle and high schools, colleges, law schools, summer youth programs, internship programs and community organizations. More than 10,000 students toured the New York State Courts.

In addition, international groups from all over the world requested tours of the New York State Courts. In 2014, delegations visited from Denmark, Norway, Korea, The Netherlands, China, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Sweden, Romania, and the Israeli Bar Association and Judges.

## Slideshows, Flyers and Posters

Using the walls of the courthouse to post information is an excellent way to promote self-help resources for unrepresented litigants. Litigants waiting to file papers, for cases to be called, or to meet with Help Center staff, are all “captives” while they wait. To take advantage of litigant “downtime” at the courthouse, the Access to Justice Program creates visually pleasing, plain language, informative slideshows, posters and flyers with the expectation that litigants will see them during their court appearances.

Slideshows play silently in the background on flat screens and provide small bites of information on each slide. In the past, the Access to Justice Program created short courthouse slideshows for DIY Form programs. In 2013, a 35 minute comprehensive slideshow was created for the New York City Housing Court to play on a continuous loop in all of the Court's Resolutions Parts. This slideshow explains court procedures and legal terms, and identifies various free resources at the courthouse. Feedback from court staff after the deployment of the slideshow is positive. Court Clerks remarked that

the slideshow decreased the time usually spent answering litigant questions. Help Center staff attributed increased traffic to the slideshow. DIY Form User Surveys indicate that litigants used the DIY Form programs after learning about them through the slideshow.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program expanded the Housing Court slideshow by translating each slide into Spanish and implemented the slideshow in additional locations. The 70 minute slideshow containing 344 slides now plays in every New York City Housing Court Resolution Part, as well as the Landlord-Tenant Clerk's offices in Bronx, New York, Queens and Richmond Counties. A sampling of Spanish slides is annexed as Appendix "C."

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program added QR codes (Quick Response Codes) to all the DIY Form Program posters and flyers. QR codes are machine readable optical labels that are used to convey information. The QR image of the code consists of square dots arranged in a square grid that can be read by an imaging device, like a smart phone camera. The Access to Justice Program uses the QR codes to provide shortcuts to the DIY Form program webpages on CourtHelp. This way, litigants can scan the code on their phone for later use, rather than finding pen and paper to copy a lengthy URL address. QR codes are an excellent way to deliver access to helpful information for unrepresented litigants. Examples of the DIY Form posters utilizing QR codes can be found on: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/diyforms.shtml#flyers>



## **DELIVERY IN THE COMMUNITY**

Bringing information and services directly into the community accommodates those litigants who are homebound, disabled or have other health issues, have childcare issues, cannot afford the trip to the courthouse, live too far from the courthouse, cannot benefit from information delivered over the internet, or are uncomfortable seeking assistance. Taking these needs into account, the Access to Justice Program delivers legal information and assistance directly into the communities it serves. Holding community events in familiar surroundings helps lower anxiety levels and facilitates the litigants' ability to digest and process information.

### **Mobile Legal Help Center**

The Mobile Legal Help Center was created through a partnership between NYLAG and the Access to Justice Program. The Mobile Legal Help Center is New York's first-ever legal services office and courtroom on wheels. Aboard the Mobile Legal Help Center, unrepresented litigants receive information, unbundled advice and counseling, assistance with document preparation, and direct representation without leaving the vehicle.

The Mobile Legal Help Center has three private meeting areas so attorneys and clients can consult in a confidential and comfortable setting. The vehicle is equipped with high-speed Internet and state-of-the-art technology. The Access to Justice Program facilitates the communication between the Courts and the Mobile Legal Help Center. A video link with the courts enables access to judges for emergency hearings, including domestic violence and eviction cases. In 2014, Microsoft Lync was added to the vehicle for direct video conferencing with Judges on the bench, interpreters and Court Clerks.

In 2014, the Mobile Legal Help Center traveled throughout the five boroughs in New York City, Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties, focusing on hard to reach areas with limited public transportation. NYLAG and the Access to Justice Program work together to coordinate the vehicle's scheduling. The Mobile Legal Help Center, staffed by NYLAG employees, assisted New Yorkers with the following legal issues; civil law, family law, housing law, public benefits, advance planning, health law, financial counseling, immigration, income maintenance cases, consumer law case, employment cases, and many unidentified cases. Thousands were provided with services from legal information, consultations, living wills and full legal representation.

"I went to the community center looking for a social worker for help, when I showed them the papers from my landlord they said you need an attorney. The Mobile legal Help Center will be here let me make you an appointment. I am glad the attorney gave me good advice and steered me in the right direction. This is the first time I ever went through anything like this."

*MLHC client, Kings Co., Nov. 2014*

The Mobile Legal Help Center is publicized by community partners and through Facebook, Twitter, the NYLAG website and the Access to Justice Program's website ([http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts\\_Community\\_Center/mobilelegalhelpcenter.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/mobilelegalhelpcenter.shtml)).

### **Community Law Day**

On May 1, 1958 President Eisenhower proclaimed Law Day to honor the role of law in the creation of the United States of America. Three years later, Congress passed a joint resolution establishing May 1<sup>st</sup> as "National Law Day." In observance of National Law Day, the Access to Justice Program sponsors and hosts annual Community Law Day celebrations to offer New York residents the opportunity to receive legal advice and information from experienced attorneys and organizations, free of charge. Music, entertainment and refreshments make Community Law Day not just a legal information fair but a festive social event. More information can be found on the Access to Justice Program's website at [http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts\\_Community\\_Center/lawday.shtml](http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/Courts_Community_Center/lawday.shtml).

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program, together with the New York State Court Officers Association and the New York City Bar Association's Legal Referral Service, held free Community Law Day events in Kings County on April 29, Queens County on April 30, New York County on May 1, and Bronx County on May 2. A Law Day scheduled for Richmond County was postponed twice due to poor weather and was canceled. All four community Law Day events took place either inside the Civil Court or directly outside of the Civil Court building in the respective counties. These were perfect locations to attract people within the community, jurors, court employees and litigants appearing in court. Over 25 agencies from various bar associations, social service agencies, government agencies and fraternal court organizations participated in each location, including; NYLAG; MFY Legal Services, Inc.; NYC Commission on Human Rights; Better Business Bureau; Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC; the Kings County District Attorney's Office; the Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, Inc.; Housing Court Answers; LIFT; the Legal Aid Society; and many more. Between 200 and 250 people stopped by in each location to obtain free legal and social service information and some took the opportunity to speak to an attorney free of charge.

### **Free Legal Clinics**

The Access to Justice Program participates in legal clinics in an effort to provide free legal counseling and information to underserved sectors of New York City's diverse communities. Legal clinics are held at the community-based organizations that host the events. In 2014, over two days during National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the Access to Justice Program partnered with NYLAG, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Council Member Antonio Reynoso to provide free housing, divorce and domestic violence counseling to community members in New York and Kings Counties.

### **Community Information Fairs**

The Access to Justice Program assists communities with local fairs. Depending on the needs of the community, outreach assistance includes staffing tables and providing information on Access to Justice Program initiatives, providing organization assistance, tables and chairs, donating promotional give-away items, or arranging for the Mobile Legal Help Center to be present. In 2014, the Access to Justice Program assisted with the following Community Information Fairs: a Health and Wellness Fair held in the Bronx County Family Court; a "Night Out Against Crime" Fair in Kings County, Borough Hall; and a Boys & Girls Club of Harlem Fair in New York County.

## PART III: DELIVERY OF SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

**The Access to Justice Program is dedicated to providing fair and efficient** justice for individuals with diverse backgrounds or special needs. Toward this end, the Access to Justice Program oversees a number of programs and initiatives aimed at assisting litigants who, due to age, physical or mental impairments, financial or other limitations are unable to meaningfully avail themselves of court-based programs or self-help. It is the responsibility of the justice system to ensure that everyone who comes to and before the court is treated respectfully, fairly, and equally.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program focused its energy on enhanced Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) training, promoting awareness of the GAL Program for landlord-tenant practitioners, expanding the number of GALs available to accept *pro bono* appointments, and offering social work and advocacy assistance to facilitate the Judges and GALs' ability to be responsive to the needs of mentally and physically impaired litigants in danger of eviction. Moreover, the Program contributed to Governor Andrew Cuomo's Legal Services Initiative Think Group as a means of promoting access to justice for older adults, people of all ages with disabilities, and their caregivers. The Access to Justice Program continued its efforts toward homelessness prevention by targeting comprehensive assistance to litigants living in high risk communities. The Access to Justice Program also continued its efforts to foster awareness of the difficulties faced by litigants living in poverty, by conducting Poverty Simulation training and education.

The programs described in this Part strive to equalize the playing field for all litigants by staying mindful of the myriad of difficulties that these litigants face, which are often the very root of their legal problems. This holistic approach greatly improves access to justice for this vulnerable segment of the public.

### GUARDIAN AD LITEM

The Access to Justice Program oversees the operation of the New York City Housing Court Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Program. The GAL Program recruits, trains, supervises and maintains a pool of GALs for Housing Court Judges to appoint on behalf of people facing a Housing Court proceeding who are disadvantaged due to age or disability. Such impairments place the litigant at a disadvantage because they are not able to fully participate in resolving their New York City Housing Court case. Instead, they might be more likely to enter into unrealistic agreements, forego viable defenses, agree to unfavorable terms, fail to explore all options, or may not follow through with the terms of the agreement entered into, thus heightening their risk for eviction.



Once appointed, GALs attend every court appearance, work to secure One-Shot-Deals to pay for arrears owed, set-up heavy duty cleanings to render an apartment safe, reinstate lost entitlements or secure new ones, or connect the litigant to services to prevent court recidivism. Litigants who are appointed a GAL do not have to pay for these services; they are free of charge. Litigants greatly benefit from the appointment of a GAL. GALs provide the needed assistance to litigants who are unable to advocate for themselves due to a physical or mental impairment.

Judges who are made aware of the need for a GAL appointment can request names of GALs who are willing to accept appointments in their county through the Access to Justice Program's GAL Program. GALs are trained by a panel of experts in the fields of legal and social work advocacy and landlord-tenant law. Attorneys attending trainings receive CLE free of charge. To safeguard the interests of the population served, GALs must undergo a background check and successfully complete an interview and reference check before being invited to participate in the Program. This results in a highly qualified select group of people being added to the list. Given the increased need for *pro bono* work city-wide, prospective GALs must also agree to accept at least three *pro bono* appointments per year. Many GALs accept cases well beyond this number and are recognized by the Access to Justice Program for outstanding *pro bono* service rendered in the Court (see Part V).

The GAL Program's Special Counsel plays an active role in advocating for GALs facing unique challenges in resolving their wards' court cases by acting as an intermediary in securing information for GALs and facilitating communication between GALs and outside organizations that play an instrumental role in the resolution of a ward's Housing Court case. Without such advocacy, GALs encounter a multitude of bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining documents needed to effectively advocate and protect their wards from needlessly becoming homeless. The Program's advocacy results in the successful resolution of countless cases, protecting tenants and remaining sensitive to the pressures experienced by GALs and impaired litigants alike. Information on the GAL program for prospective and participating GALs, landlords, and tenants is available at <http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/GAL.shtml>.

In 2014, approximately 65% of the number of litigants appointed a GAL were facing a nonpayment proceeding, 33% involved holdover proceedings, and 2% HP proceedings. More than 34% of the judicial requests for GALs were made due to concerns that the litigant was mentally impaired, 15% were due to physical impairment concerns, while 51% were due to both. In addition, over 62% of the people appointed a GAL were age 60 and above.

“Being a GAL is one of the most gratifying things I have ever done. It gives me a sense of purpose that I never dreamed possible. Every case I handle is challenging and provides me with an opportunity to help someone not only to retain their home but provide them with a sense of hope that they are not alone.”

*GAL, October 2014*

As is detailed in Appendix “A,” many trainings were offered to GALs. Two free general trainings to become a GAL in Housing Court were held. A total of 19 GALs were trained. The GAL Program also offered five CLE workshops to enhance the GALs' ability to provide quality services to their wards, expand their knowledge-base, and learn new ways to place their ward in a position of strength. The workshops were specifically tailored to address patterns of concern expressed by GALs and the Court alike that are not completely addressed in the initial GAL training. Throughout the year, the GAL Program also conducted lay GAL training for family members of physically or mentally impaired litigants in need of a GAL as a means of preparing such lay GALs to effectively advocate for their family members. In 2014, a total of 11 lay GALs were trained to better assist their impaired family members in court.

The need for more GALs willing to accept *pro bono* appointments increased in 2014, as the number of eviction proceedings against litigants staying in nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, or hospitals, increased. These litigants are not eligible for assistance from Adult Protective Services (APS), therefore GALs are not compensated for their work in such cases. In an effort to remain responsive to the pressures faced by the Court and GALs in meeting this need, the Access to Justice Program partnered with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP to train their associates to accept *pro bono* appointments involving impaired litigants residing in New York County. Volunteer attorneys received free training from a panel of experts in the fields of social work advocacy and landlord-tenant law before accepting GAL appointments.

As set forth in Appendix “A,” the GAL Program Coordinator served as a panelist in a New York City Bar sponsored CLE program entitled “To GAL or not to GAL, Ethical Considerations in Housing Court.” The panelists provided information for landlord-tenant practitioners about the availability and valuable function of GALs in Housing Court.

The GAL Program continued its partnership with the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, supervising a social work intern. The social work intern assisted GALs with securing needed resources or services in particularly difficult cases. GALs who are having trouble finding a service for a ward or linking a ward to assistance that would be helpful upon resolution of the case enlisted the assistance of the social work intern who not only had more time to research what is available, but also has specialized knowledge in social work advocacy, programs, and resources. Similarly, the social work intern assisted impaired litigants by helping them navigate the court system. The intern also alerted the Court of the possibility of the need for a GAL appointment. Housing Court litigants with mental or physical impairments were thus able to receive comprehensive help and follow-up, to avoid any future risk for eviction.

Keeping GAL work challenges in mind, the GAL Program also collaborated with New York County Supervising Judge and New York County Deputy Chief Clerk to implement a New York County GAL liaison. This liaison is able to assist GALs visiting the New

York County Clerk's Office to obtain information or submit papers more efficiently. This has reduced the amount of wait time experienced in the past.

## INTEGRATED PART

Often summary proceedings in Housing Court can work to the disadvantage of tenants whose unique difficulties may be overlooked. There are many litigants with physical and mental disabilities who undermine their own best interests. With these litigants in mind, the Access to Justice Program oversees the New York County's Integrated Guardianship/Landlord Tenant Part, known as Part I.

The purpose of the Integrated Part is to appoint guardians for incapacitated people facing eviction because petitions have been filed in Housing Court. Petitioners for guardianship, predominantly the NY Human Resources Administration, seek appointment of a guardian to provide for the personal needs and financial management of an alleged incapacitated person (AIP) on grounds that the AIP cannot provide for him or herself and cannot understand the nature and consequences of his or her disability.

The challenge of the Integrated Part is unique. Alone among guardianship parts, this part hears cases of New Yorkers confronting illness and isolation, often compounded by conditions of poverty, at imminent risk of homelessness for nonpayment or nuisance. Following trial on the guardianship petition, the Part works directly with the guardian and the landlord to resolve the tenancy dispute. As required by statute, the guardianship must be the "least restrictive form of intervention" to serve the needs of the incapacitated. From initial filing to post-judgment, the Part works with the Department of Human Resources, court evaluators, assigned counsel, landlords, and social service agencies to marshal meager resources and safeguard the individual needs of New York's most vulnerable.

"Over the last year I have served as court evaluator, assigned counsel, and permanent guardian in the Integrated Guardianship Part. This part is a godsend to a population that is often forgotten and unable to maneuver in the legal system."

*Integrated Part Practitioner, NY Co, December 2014*

In 2014, Part I handled approximately 1,408 appearances, including motions and conferences. Over that same period, 231 cases were disposed. More information is available at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/diverseneeds/integratedpart.shtml>.

## ASSIGNED COUNSEL PROJECT

The Access to Justice Program continues its partnership with the Department for the Aging (DFTA) to provide free legal and social work services to seniors facing eviction or owners or tenants whose safety is threatened by a tenant or roommate. Seniors facing New York City Housing Court proceedings often live in apartments that are rent controlled or rent stabilized, have Section 8 subsidies, or are the recipients of

entitlements such as SCRIE. Under these protective laws and subsidies, seniors are able to afford rent payments notwithstanding limited income. Yet, with increased age, many seniors find themselves in a position where, due to their deteriorating health, they are no longer able to manage their responsibilities in the same way, at times resulting in a Housing Court proceeding being brought against them.

Established in 2005, the Assigned Counsel Project (ACP) provides eligible seniors with an attorney and social worker, or social work intern, who work as a team to help seniors resolve their Housing Court cases. Seniors must be sixty years of age or older, have an identifiable social service need, and a pending Housing Court case in order to be assisted by the Program. Legal representation is provided by the following sub-contracted legal service providers: MFY Legal Services, Inc.; Brooklyn Legal Services of NY; Brooklyn Legal Aid Society; JASA Queens Legal Services for the Elderly; and Bronx Legal Aid Society. More information on the program can be found at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/services.shtml>.

"I thank ACP for giving me the opportunity to make a real impact in preventing an already vulnerable population from losing their homes."

*ACP volunteer, Kings Co.,  
March 2014*

The Access to Justice Program's Special Counsel conducts overall program coordination and advocacy, and facilitates communication between the partners; ensuring that Judges refer seniors to the ACP and that seniors are aware of the existence of the ACP. The Special Counsel, an attorney who holds an MSW as well, also continued the Access to Justice Program's partnership with the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, supervising a social work intern who takes on ACP cases and works with the assigned attorney in resolving the Housing Court case and addressing any unmet social service needs. The Civil Court Housing Court Attorneys conduct initial screening to determine if a senior is appropriate for services and to coordinate with DFTA and the legal service providers so that seniors are successfully linked to an attorney and social worker once their referral is accepted. The partners also continue to work diligently to connect those who are not accepted by ACP to other available resources for help. Seniors who may otherwise find it challenging to obtain help in the processing of renewal applications or delivery of information necessary to remain in their apartment are assisted through informal but effective advocacy efforts. In 2014, 130 seniors were assisted in such a way.

In 2014, the ACP served a total of 540 seniors facing Housing Court proceedings in New York, Kings, Queens and the Bronx. Out of this total, 66% of the seniors faced a nonpayment proceedings while 34% faced a holdover proceeding.

To support this effort, the Access to Justice Program's Housing Court Initiatives, Help Centers, and Court-Based Interdisciplinary Programs collaborated to create an ACP Pilot Project Internship Program to recruit, train, and supervise law students and recent law graduates to conduct intake and assess the legal and social services needs of

vulnerable seniors at risk of eviction. Once they successfully interview, the volunteers complete a comprehensive training and then complete their 50-hour service commitment alongside experienced court attorneys in the Help Centers located in the courts where they serve. In light of the success of the pilot inaugurated by three law students in Kings County at the beginning of 2014, two other classes of volunteers participated in this initiative, which has now become an established Access to Justice Program. The ACP Internship Program, now in operation in three counties: Queens, Kings, and New York provides volunteers with an opportunity to give back to their community while meeting their *pro bono* requirements. Visit: <http://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/intern.shtml>, to learn more.

## **COURT NAVIGATOR HOMEBOUND PROGRAM**

Many individuals are unable to leave their homes due to disability or illness and cannot attend a court appearance. For those who are unable to afford to hire an attorney, starting or responding to a lawsuit can be an overwhelming challenge. As announced in Chief Judge Lippman's 2014 State of the Judiciary Address, the court system is seeking to make use of non-lawyers and technology to help homebound individuals. (<http://www.nycourts.gov/whatsnew/pdf/2014-SOJ.pdf> , p. 9). In this spirit, in 2014, through a partnership with JASA, a non-profit agency serving older adults in the New York City region, the Access to Justice Program extended the Court Navigator Program to offer a Homebound component.

The Court Navigator Homebound Program utilizes social service providers to give legal information and access to litigants restricted to their home. JASA caseworkers who pay home visits to seniors and disabled people are in a unique position to identify homebound litigants. The Court Navigator Homebound Program trains the caseworkers on how to assist the litigants and connect them to the Civil and Housing Court Part Clerks. The Program runs in Queens County. Two training sessions were held for JASA caseworkers, and Civil and Housing Court Clerks using Microsoft Lync, a video conferencing, online meeting, and instant messaging system, on the topics of landlord and tenant and consumer debt issues, social services resources and on the role of JASA caseworkers on how to recognize and assist homebound litigants with filing court papers (see Appendix "A").

## **HOUSING HELP PROGRAM**

In 2004, the New York City Housing Court partnered with the United Way of New York City, the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and Legal Service NYC to establish the Housing Help Program (HHP), the nation's first court-based homelessness prevention program. Since 2009, the Access to Justice Program has partnered with DHS, Robin Hood, The Legal Aid Society and various community based organizations, continuing the HHP's provision of integrated legal and social services to threatened families at the greatest risk of homelessness in the Bronx, Kings and Queens Counties.

Upon entering the courthouse, litigants from designated zip codes are referred to the Court Help Center where a Clerk confirms eligibility. Attorneys, paralegals and social workers from the Legal Aid Society then interview the family, exploring all of the issues that have led to their housing crisis. The HHP then helps the family answer the landlord's petition and develops a comprehensive legal and social service plan to prevent the family from becoming homeless. Services range from full representation by an attorney throughout the Housing Court case to brief assistance from a paralegal with obtaining rental arrears to obtaining long-term supportive services through a social worker. On the return date of the petition, a single judge hears all HHP cases in a designated Part where HHP staff is available to all families. This unique approach allows for greater judicial oversight, meaningful negotiations between the parties and far more equitable settlements. With the population in New York City homeless shelters rising, the HHP promotes housing stability.

The HHP's innovative approach to homelessness prevention continues to be an overwhelming success. In 2014, HHP served over 2,000 families citywide and prevented approximately 97% of these clients from entering shelters, saving the City at least \$300,000. In 2013, the John F. Kennedy's School of Government at Harvard University recognized the HHP as one of the top 25 programs in that year's "Innovations in American Government Award" competition.

## **POVERTY SIMULATIONS**

The 2014 the federal poverty level guideline for a family of four is \$23,850 a year. Add or subtract \$4,060 for each person to compute the poverty level for larger or smaller families. In New York State, 15.6% of the population, which is equivalent to 2,955,389 people live below the poverty line. Across the state more than a fifth of all children under the age of 18 live in poverty. In New York City alone, 45.6% of the population lives in poverty. With statistics like these it is imperative to recognize the limitations that people living in poverty have when interacting with the court system. Many litigants lack the resources to access transportation to the courthouse and social services agencies, let alone the ability to fully deal with their cases when they appear in court. The Access to Justice Program conducts trainings to educate and sensitize the legal community about how economic privilege affects the justice system and to encourage the provision of services in a more respectful and understanding manner. For more information about the Poverty Simulation visit the Access to Justice Program's website at: <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/povertysimulation.shtml>.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program conducted a Poverty Simulation training for the entire first year law class of Touro Law Center. (See Appendix "A"). The first year class was divided into two sections for two half day trainings. Each section was then subdivided even further into groups of 1 to 5 students, with each group representing an impoverished family. The roles of different governmental and community organizations that these "families" interacted with were played by faculty and second and third year law students. The three and a half hour simulation exposed the students to the effects

that poverty can have on an individual's life. Training future lawyers to understand and recognize the dire straits that impoverished New Yorkers live in and how these limitations affect their interaction with the courts, the more equitable the justice system becomes. Although the poverty simulation is only a glimpse into the real hardships that families in poverty endure, many of the law students and volunteers felt as though the training was transformative. Below is a sampling of comments from the law students who participated in the training:

- "I am just writing to let you know that the Poverty Simulation this afternoon was one of the most profound experiences I have had at Touro. The program itself was organized meticulously, and ... was ah-maz-ing! I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and hope that the school will endeavor to keep this program running in the future. It was an eye opener and an incredible learning experience. Thank you!"
- "The most valuable aspect for me was how real everything was made. The situations and the way we were treated were things that can happen in the real world. It was a good experience."
- "[The most valuable part of this experience was] [t]hat it gave insight to other people's reality."
- "[The most valuable part of this experience was] [g]iving the real-life situations of people in the poverty level and actually having to "live" their lifestyle. To utilize "community" help, which not many of us did during the simulation, but now know that should be a place to turn to for assistance."
- "[The most valuable part of this experience was] becoming emotionally connected to an aspect of life I never encountered before."
- "[The most valuable part of this experience was] [r]ealizing that help exists, but that people don't know how to access the help (i.e. free transportation vouchers or child care vouchers)."
- "Many times we empathize with people but having an idea of what it was actually like in the Day to Day was extremely important because it gave a better understanding of how difficult it really is."
- "I spoke to several students after the simulation. Most agreed that this was an eye-opening experience. It's easy to think that clients don't care about their situation because they don't always respond to their attorneys, but there are probably other issues that they are dealing with at the same time. I think this program would be beneficial to all students, not just 1-Ls."
- "This is great. I think every human being should do this simulation, not only lawyer candidates."
- "I think it was an excellent exercise and should be more widespread especially in schools."

A sampling of comments from the faculty and second and third year students who assisted with the simulation are as follows:

- “[The most valuable part of this experience was] “[t]o see the change in the students over the four ‘weeks.’ Many came in with a ‘this is just a game’ attitude but over the course of the ‘weeks,’ they reacted with the same stress, fear, and anger that I experienced when I lived in poverty.”
- “The whole simulation just put a real world perspective of how everyday people have to live their lives. I understand that people have difficulties in many aspects of their lives, but all kind of living it even for the brief 2 hours as we did, was overwhelming. It was a real eye opener for me and gave my group a lot to discuss afterwards.”
- “Having experienced real-life adverse financial conditions myself, the simulation reminded me that poverty is a very real socio-economic problem in our society today and that we need to have more supportive social welfare programs in place to serve the needs of those (families, single parents, the elderly) who so desperately need it.”
- “It exposed me to situations that I previously thought people would have control of and realized that maybe they really don't and sometimes people are really victims of circumstance.”

## **PART IV: TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS**

**A key component of the Access to Justice Program's work** throughout the year is training lawyers and law students, members of the access to justice community, legal services providers, advocate groups, bar associations, public officials, community leaders, librarians, and court system personnel about access to justice initiatives. Education is necessary to increase and strengthen awareness of the inequalities that exist in accessing the justice system and to provide the tools for assisting the unrepresented public. Education and heightened awareness of the obstacles that unrepresented litigants face can promote change and support for measures that level the playing field for the 2.3 million New Yorkers who must navigate their way through the court system on their own. To that end, the Access to Justice Program conducts various educational programs both inside and outside the courthouse. A variety of training methods are employed; live training programs with the opportunity for discussion or hands-on use of technology are ideal. However, to keep costs down and reach a greater audience across the state, the majority of in-house trainings are conducted via webinar and many volunteer trainings are conducted via video replay. A summary is set forth below and a more detailed chronological listing of the trainings and presentations conducted by the Access to Justice Program in 2014 is contained in Appendices "A" for public trainings and presentations and "B" for personnel trainings.

### **VOLUNTEER TRAINING**

A significant part of the Access to Justice Program's training regiment is devoted to educating volunteers in court-based programs so that they are fully prepared to assist the unrepresented public. As is previously noted in this Report, the Access to Justice Program regularly recruits volunteers and conducts trainings which offer free CLE to volunteer lawyers who participate in the court-based unbundled legal services programs where they are supervised by experienced practitioners. Completion of training is a prerequisite to program participation. The substantive legal training and supervision help ensure the quality of services provided.

The Access to Justice Program offers frequent training sessions in order to keep up the cadre of qualified volunteers who give up their free time to help relieve the unrepresented in crisis. Training dates and details for the VLFD, VLP, Court Navigator, GAL, VAP, and Uncontested Divorce Programs are contained in Appendix "A." As can be seen, a number of Programs (GAL, VLP Housing and VLFD Housing) also offered additional trainings and workshops to existing volunteers to supplement the basic education and further hone skills.

The majority of the training is conducted in the New York County Civil Court. In 2014, a number of trainings were graciously hosted by participating area law firms, corporations, bar associations and schools, including; Paul Hastings LLP; St. John's University School of Law; Hostos Community College; Debevoise & Plimpton; Morrison & Foerster LLP; JPMorgan Chase & Co.; Medgar Evers College; Bank of New York; Touro Law

Center; Brooklyn Law School; and the New York City Bar Association. The trainings were conducted by a combination of court staff, program directors and volunteer attorneys from private practice or government agencies. Guest presenters graciously shared their expertise and time without compensation. (2014 presenters are included at the end of this Report under “Partners, Friends and Volunteers”).

An appreciable number of hours is devoted to preparing law students, law graduates and newly admitted attorneys to participate in the court-based unbundled legal services programs and instilling a desire to continue *pro bono* work long into their legal careers. The Access to Justice Program partners with several participating law schools through a judicial civil legal services grant, to teach law students the skills needed to assist the unrepresented public. The Access to Justice Program also offers a multi-day, multi-program Bridge the Gap training series, twice a year, which emphasizes education of law students and new lawyers and encourages continued participation in volunteer programs. In 2014, the Access to Justice Program conducted its Poverty Simulation Training for the entire first year class of Touro Law Center students to give them an understanding of life in poverty. (Law student and new lawyer trainings are detailed in Appendix “A”).

## **PERSONNEL TRAINING**

Equally important to the Access to Justice Program’s training agenda is education of judicial and non-judicial court system employees. The importance of training court personnel cannot be overemphasized. The men and women who tirelessly work in the notoriously short-staffed New York State court system are the public face of the court. They must be properly educated and provided with the tools needed to assist the confused and bewildered unrepresented litigants that come through the courts on a daily basis, many of whom are intimidated by the legal process. The Access to Justice Program offers a variety of training programs for court personnel throughout the year. Trainings are conducted for Help Center personnel, Court Clerks, Public Access Law Librarians, and Judges and Court Attorneys.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program held 32 trainings for court personnel. In particular, considerable time was spent on training court employees about the DIY Form programs since staff promotion plays a large role in the high usage of the programs. The more court system personnel are educated about the DIY Form programs, CourtHelp, and other court resources, the greater the benefit to access to justice and courthouse efficiency. (See Appendix “B” for a listing of personnel training conducted in 2014).

## **PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS**

Public presentations are another important component of the Access to Justice Program’s training efforts. Presentations about the Access to Justice Program’s initiatives and current access to justice topics of concern are vital to spread the

message about injustice and promote discussion and brainstorming of ideas to facilitate increased access to justice. Justice Fern A. Fisher and Chief Counsel Rochelle Klemptner sit on many committees and panels, both national and in New York that work to address litigant challenges, provide assistance to other jurisdictions and plan in-person and webinar trainings on access to justice issues. In 2014, Justice Fisher and Access to Justice Program staff presented at numerous conferences and webinars discussing various topics, including; unbundled legal services; the Access to Justice Program's available services for the public; social justice; procedural fairness; the use of technology to support access; civil legal services; and more. A list of the presentations made in 2014 is included in Appendix "B."

## **TRAININGS FOR OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

The Access to Justice Program makes every effort to share the practices that have proven successful in increasing access to justice in the New York State Courts. Accordingly, throughout the year, live trainings are conducted for other jurisdictions and access to justice advocates in an effort to provide guidance for court systems contemplating or undertaking replication of some of the Access to Justice Program's initiatives.

In 2014, the Access to Justice Program presented information about the DIY Form programs and Court Help Center services to state court officials who visited from Kansas, Montana, California and the New Jersey State Courts. Both the Kansas and Montana court systems received Technical Assistance Grants from the National Center for State Courts to visit the Access to Justice Program. Subsequent to attending the two-day training program, the Johnson County District Court in Kansas opened its first Court Help Center (<http://www.jocogov.org/press-release/new-court-program-offers-free-assistance-family-law-cases>). The Access to Justice Program was also visited by the Coordinator of the national Self-Represented Litigation Network, Katherine Alteneder, who wanted to learn about the Access to Justice Program's initiatives and to observe their implementation in the New York City courts.

Internationally, Justice Fern A. Fisher was invited by the United States Embassy in the Dominican Republic to head a delegation of judges from New York State to meet with members of the Dominican judiciary system. While they were there, the delegation worked to identify best practices for increasing access to justice and furthering program replication in the Dominican Republic.

Information about all trainings and visits is more fully detailed in Appendix "A."

## **RAISING AWARENESS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Approximately 68,000 Family Offense Petitions are filed in the New York State Family Courts each year by litigants seeking protection from domestic violence. Additional orders of protection are filed in Criminal Court. Domestic violence thrives when people

do not speak out. In honor of the litigants that bravely come to the New York State Courts for assistance and in support of those who suffer in silence, the Access to Justice Program co-sponsored a number of trainings during October 2014 in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

These programs included a community seminar for the public, a five part CLE series for domestic violence attorneys, and domestic violence training for court personnel. The community seminar was co-sponsored with the New York Women's Bar Association's Employment & Equal Opportunity for Women Committee and the New York Women's Agenda's Domestic Violence Committee. The CLE series was co-sponsored with Safe Horizon, the Appellate Division First Department, the Bronx County Family Court, the Gender Fairness Committee and the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project. The personnel training was co-sponsored with the New York Women's Bar Association Domestic Violence Committee, and the New York County Civil Court Gender & Fairness Committee. See Appendices "A" and "B" for more information.

## PART V: RECOGNITION

**The NYS Courts Access to Justice Program could not assist thousands** of unrepresented litigants each year without the commitment of hundreds of volunteers. The law firms, solo-practitioners, corporations, government attorneys, non-profit organizations, law schools, non-attorneys, and court personnel who give so much of their time and energy are essential for providing assistance and improving access to the courts for litigants who do not have counsel.

It is important to spotlight the difference these organizations, individuals and court employees make in peoples' lives. Therefore, every year, the Access to Justice Program acknowledges the volunteers who are integral to the success of the court-based programs and who go above and beyond and extend themselves on behalf of others. Their *pro bono* service is trumpeted during National *Pro Bono* Week with deep appreciation for their contribution. Volunteers are also featured on the Access to Justice Program's Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/NYCOURTSVLP> and Twitter feed: <http://twitter.com/NYCOURTSA2J>. Individual court employees and Court staffs are recognized for their contributions to the DIY Form programs at Star Award ceremonies held throughout the year.

Equally important to recognize are the contributions of judicial and non-judicial staff throughout New York State who continuously further the Access to Justice Program's goals through their own efforts.

This section reports the contributions deserving of recognition in 2014. In addition, the names of Access to Justice Program Partners, Friends and Volunteers are set forth at the end of this Report.

### NATIONAL *PRO BONO* CELEBRATION WEEK VOLUNTEER AWARDS

*Pro Bono* Celebration Week is a national event that takes place every year in late October with events all over the country acknowledging the extraordinary contributions of volunteer attorneys. During the sixth annual *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, the Access to Justice Program, the New York State Bar Association, and the New York County Lawyers' Association (NYCLA) co-sponsored a *pro bono* volunteer recognition event on Thursday, October 23, 2014 at NYCLA. Awards were presented by Carol A. Sigmond, President-elect, NYCLA, Partner, Horowitz, Sigmond LLP; Seymour W. James, Jr., past president, NYSBA, Attorney-in-Chief, The Legal Aid Society; and Fern A. Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts and Director, New York State Courts Access to Justice Program. All of the honorees performed over 50 hours of *pro bono* services in a court-based program throughout 2014. A complete list of all the volunteers



who were recognized for their outstanding *pro bono* service is listed in the back of this Report and is available online at:

<http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2j/pdfs/AwardsProgram-2014.pdf>. A photo gallery from the event is posted on the Access to Justice Program Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/NYCcourtsVLP](http://www.facebook.com/NYCcourtsVLP).

Special recognition was given to a number of exceptional attorneys and non-attorneys for their dedication and commitment over the past year. The NYS Courts Access to Justice Program honorees included Stanley Pruszynski, Esq., who received a Superstar Award; William Brick, Esq., Michael Massmann, Esq., Kinshasa K. Hillery, and Eugene Chen, Esq., for their participation in the Housing and Consumer Debt Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Programs; Joellen Valentine, Esq., Gastron Kroub, Esq., Adam S. Waldbaum Esq., and Amy G. Davis, Esq., for their contribution advising unrepresented litigants in the Family and Housing Court Help Centers; Rafael Tassy, Esq., Maria La Macchia, Esq., and Tamekia Hosang, Esq., for their work in the Uncontested Divorce Program; Betty Ware Hayes, for her extraordinary service to the Guardian Ad Litem Program, assisting our most vulnerable population in danger of eviction; Christopher K. Lee for his work in the Housing Court ACP; and Sagar Sharma, Susan Herskovits, Jennifer Velez, and Camille Prince-Mercado for helping consumer debt and housing litigants “Navigate” the courts.

“...Ms. Hayes had very difficult cases and wards with numerous challenges, and she constantly gave so much of herself... limitless hard work & compassion...She appeared on adjournment days, met with her wards outside of court, and was constantly available for them to call and speak with her...She is a decent, kind-hearted person and she did as much for her wards as she possibly could...This amazing woman should be canonized a saint...”

*Housing Court Judge, October  
October, GAL*

Pfizer, Inc. was also presented with a plaque in recognition of its contribution to the National Center for Access to Justice’s study of the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program’s DIY Forms in the Bronx County Family Court during the 2014 summer. Justice Fisher stated that, “Pfizer is the model for corporate responsibility that all corporations should replicate.” The Pfizer award was accepted by Connie Matteo, Senior Corporate-Counsel-Litigation.

## DIY FORM PROGRAM STAR AWARDS

From time to time, the Access to Justice Program recognizes court system personnel and courts that have made exceptional contributions to the successful development and implementation of the DIY Form programs. The DIY Star Award applauds the individuals or courts whose



actions are critical in creating lasting change in court culture and work environment. The DIY Star Award also boosts employee morale and fosters court competition which improves the success of the DIY Form programs. Quarterly statistical information, litigant User Surveys, and nominations by fellow employees are reviewed to choose the winners. DIY Star winners earn large touchscreen monitors and computers for their courthouses to use as public access terminals. The computers are customized for ready access to the DIY Form programs. The touchscreen monitors enhance the user experience. Only DIY Star Award winning courts have these monitors.

In 2014, DIY Star Award ceremonies were held in July and March recognizing the Tompkins County Family Court staff, Kings County Civil Court L&T Clerk's Office staff, Kings County Civil Court Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk Melinda Alexander and King County Civil Court Retired Chief Clerk of the County Lydia Grima. A summary of the celebrations is below. More information about the recognition events and the DIY Star Awards is located at <http://www.nycourts.gov/ip/nya2/diyawards.shtml>.

### **Tompkins County Family Court**

The Tompkins County Family Court Clerk's Office Staff received the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program's prestigious DIY Star Award, becoming the first Family Court outside New York City to achieve this honor. The Tompkins staff won the award for their exceptional efforts facilitating usage of the Family Court DIY Form programs. Sixth Judicial District Administrative Judge Robert C. Mulvey, Tompkins Family Court Judge Joseph Cassidy and NYS Courts Access to Justice Program DIY Outreach Coordinator Tracy McNeil, Esq., all spoke about the recipient's outstanding efforts furthering equal access to justice for unrepresented litigants. Judge Mulvey spoke about how proud he was of the Family Court staff to earn this award when they have been short-staffed for so long. Justice Fern A. Fisher, Director of the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program, presented the award via video conference from New York County. She stated, "Tompkins Family Court personnel often meet litigants who are grappling with difficult and stressful family problems. The staff's effort to assist unrepresented litigants is most deserving of this award." District Executive Karen Ambrozik was also present to relay her congratulations. Chief Counsel Rochelle Klempner and Attorney Technologist Sun Kim from the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program attended the presentation via video conference, as did Principal LAN Administrator Pete Nowacki. A reception in the staff's honor was held following the ceremony.

The Tompkins County Family Court staff is headed by Chief Clerk Cheryl Lidell-Obenauer, and includes: Deputy Chief Clerk Adel Terris, Court Assistants Steven Tillotson, Janet Wiese and Michele Abbott and Senior Court Office Assistants Colleen Tubbs and Maryett Malchak.

## **Kings County Civil Court**

Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk Melinda Alexander and the Kings County Civil Court L&T Clerk's Office Staff received the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program's DIY Star Awards for their hard work and efforts in successfully implementing and promoting DIY Form programs in the Kings County Civil Court. The Star Awards were presented at a ceremony held at the Kings County Civil Court in Brooklyn. NYS Courts Access to Justice Program Director Justice Fern A. Fisher, Supervising Judge of Kings County Housing Part Jean Schneider, Chief Clerk of the Civil Court Carol Alt, and Chief Counsel to the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program Rochelle Klempner all spoke about the recipients' outstanding efforts furthering equal access to justice for unrepresented litigants. Following the award presentation, guests were treated to cake provided by the Civil Court.

The Kings County Civil Court L&T Staff DIY Star winners include: Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk Melinda Alexander; Associate Court Clerks Lisa Oliveri and Theresa Pon; Senior Court Clerks Donna Bennett, Gladys Jusino Cruz, Evans Delva, Fred Eisenberg, Robert Feuer, Deborah Giddens, Lisa Keitt, Menachem Keller, Suzanne Neysmith, Liana Rivers, Nora McGuckin-Santana, Laurana Springer, Danielle Vialet, and Debra Wheaton; Court Assistants Gloria Brooks, Cytoplasm Gundersheimer Catalyst, Kim Falvey, Tanya Faye, Matthew Galler, Yehuda Hirsch, Roberta Sumpter, David Trachter, and Sonia Walker; Senior Court Office Assistants Charlene Philip, Leonard Rosenblatt, Kenneth Terry, and Charlotte Wilson; Court Office Assistants Christopher Arvelo, Barbara Chase, Robert Reed, and Linda Sajkoski-Marentes; and Data Recording Assistant Anna Victor.

### **Lydia Grima, Kings County Civil Court Clerk of the County (Retired)**

Lydia Grima, Retired Kings County Civil Court Clerk of the County, was surprised with a DIY Star Award presented at the DIY Star Award ceremony for the Kings County Civil Court L&T Clerk's Office staff. Justice Fern A. Fisher spoke about how leadership comes from the top on down and how Lydia's management and vision made the implementation of DIY Forms a priority in the courthouses where she served as the Clerk of the County. Lydia's contribution is proven by the fact that over the past three years, two of the New York City Civil Courts where she was the Clerk of the County were chosen out of the entire state to receive DIY Star Awards for their assistance to unrepresented litigants through the use of the DIY Form programs. Justice Fisher stated that, "although Lydia recently retired from the court system in April 2014, this ceremony would not feel right if she was not here to share in this honor." Lydia received a standing ovation from the 75+ guests at the ceremony.

## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE EFFORTS THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE**

In addition to the Access to Justice Program's measures taken to provide equal access to justice, many other judicial and non-judicial personnel throughout the New York State Court system act to assist unrepresented litigants and improve access to justice. These accomplishments should not go unrecognized. Attached as Appendix "D" is a compilation of these efforts, as contributed by the various Judicial Districts and New York City Courts. This sampling of the wonderful programs, services, presentations, community events and fairs held in 2014 could not have happened without the care and commitment of so many hard working court employees who strive to provide equal access to justice.

## APPENDIX A: PUBLIC TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS

### January

#### **Assigned Counsel Project Internship Program Training**

This comprehensive two-day training was held at the New York County Civil Court through the collaboration of the Access to Justice Program's Housing Court Initiatives, Help Centers, and Court-Based Interdisciplinary Programs. Three law students participated in this pilot program's multi-day training, which included an 8.5 hour CLE credit video-replay training on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), Introduction to the Help Center (1 CLE credit), Holdover Proceedings (3 CLE credits), HP Actions and Harassment Law (1 CLE credit) and a segment on Ethics (.5 CLE credit). In addition to this basic training, the law students learned about "Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)" (1 CLE credit), and the One Shot Deal through a video replay, and attended two newly designed live trainings on How to Identify Social Services Needs, and How to Conduct Intake in ACP Cases. The training was offered in exchange for 50 hours of volunteer service conducting intake for the Program and assessing the legal and social services needs of vulnerable seniors at risk for eviction.

#### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

Uncontested Divorce Program live training was conducted at St. John's Law School for six law students and their supervisor in conjunction with the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The two hour training provided an overview of uncontested divorce law and a demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce software program. In exchange for the training, students perform 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance in the Uncontested Divorce Clinic in the Queens County Supreme Court.

#### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

A two hour live training was conducted for a total of six lawyers at the New York County Civil Court to prepare volunteers to participate in the Uncontested Divorce Program in any county. Volunteers were trained in the law of uncontested divorce; how to communicate with litigants and how to use our computer program to prepare uncontested divorce papers for litigants needing assistance. Two CLE credits and 10 *pro bono* credits were awarded for participation.

### February

#### **Lay GAL Training**

Free specialized training was provided for two court appointed GAL family members of a physically or mentally impaired litigant. This training is an abbreviated version of the training provided to those seeking to be on the Housing Part GAL list. Family members view a 5.5 hour video replay of the most recent live GAL training. The training was held in New York County Civil Court.

#### **State Department Visit to the Dominican Republic**

Justice Fern A. Fisher headed a delegation of NYS judges to meet with senior representatives of the judiciary system. The trip was arranged by the United States Embassy in the Dominican Republic. The judges toured the Community Legal Services Center of Santo Domingo and discussed teaching and learning methodologies for increased access to justice.

#### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing)**

Two inaugural separate training sessions were given for a total of 27 college students, other approved volunteers, and staff and/or interns from partner organizations at the Kings County Civil Court in exchange for 30 hours of volunteer service in a Resolution Part of the Housing

Court. The 2.5 hour session, which included both a video replay of role play scenarios with commentary and a training on the One Shot Deal as well as a live segment, provided an overview of the Housing Court with a focus on issues arising out of nonpayment proceedings.

#### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training**

A video replay training was conducted for four law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. Attendees must provide at least 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance in the Help Center or limited representation in the courtroom in the court-based unbundled consumer debt programs.

#### **Court Navigator Program Training (Consumer)**

The 2.5 training took place at Hostos Community College in Bronx County and trained 34 college students to provide assistance to Consumer Debtors in the Bronx County Civil Court. Training topics included an overview of Civil Court, Basics of Consumer Debt proceedings, Interviewing and Communication Skills, and using DIY computers and Law Help.

#### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

A two hour live training was conducted for four law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The training prepared the student volunteers to assist unrepresented litigants in the New York and Bronx County Supreme Court Uncontested Divorce Program. These trainings staffed an additional day once a week for the Program.

### **March**

#### **To GAL or Not to GAL, Ethical Considerations in Housing Court**

This three hour live CLE program was held at the New York City Bar Association in New York County. The Coordinator of the GAL Program, along with four other expert panelists, explored the ethical issues that arise in Housing Court when working with an unrepresented and mentally ill litigant. A number of legal topics were discussed, including: risks to attorneys who fail to identify someone in need of a GAL, how to identify when a GAL is needed, and how legal practitioners and the court can work together to better direct litigants and expedite litigation.

#### **Lay GAL Training** (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

#### **Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training**

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was offered at the New York County Civil Court to 13 recent law graduates and admitted attorneys. The training included a CLE on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), Introduction to the Help Center (1 CLE credit), Holdover Proceedings (3 CLE credits), HP Actions and Harassment Law (1 CLE credit) and a segment on Ethics (.5 CLE credit). VLFD Program training attendees committed to volunteer two days within three months in exchange for this training, and VLP Program participants pledged to give free legal advice for 12 hours in one of the Housing Court Help Centers within three months of the training.

#### **Court Navigator Homebound Program Training**

A live webinar training was given for 11 JASA caseworkers on the topics of landlord/tenant and consumer debt issues, and on the role of JASA case workers when identifying and assisting homebound litigants. Training was also provided on social services resources thanks to a collaboration with the Human Resources Administration's Office of Community Affairs. There was also a demonstration involving role play exercises, in which six Court Clerks from the Queens County Civil Court also participated.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training** (see February)

A video replay training was conducted for four law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium.

### **Consumer Debt VLFD Training**

A video replay CLE training was conducted for one attorney at the New York County Civil Court. The training provided instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation (1.5 CLE credits). In exchange for the CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys agree to provide 20 *pro bono* hours of limited representation in the VLFD Consumer Debt Program.

### **Uncontested Divorce Training** (see February)

Live training was conducted for seven law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium.

### **Montana and Kansas State Court Officials Training**

This live two-day training held in New York City was given to judges and administrators from the Montana and Kansas state court systems. Both court systems received grants from the National Center for State Courts' Center on Court Access to Justice for All, to travel to New York and study the NYS Courts Access to Justice Program for possible replication in their jurisdictions. The morning of the first day of training consisted of presentations and discussions about the development and implementation of DIY Form programs and running a Court Help Center. In the afternoon, attendees were given a choice of attending a hands-on DIY Form programming session or a more in-depth session on Help Center Best Practices. On the second day, attendees were taken on a guided tour of the Bronx County Family Court Help Center and its DIY Form program room.

## **April**

### **Limited Scope Representation 2014: Ethical & Practical Challenges**

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented a live web-cast for a PLI seminar. Justice Fisher spoke about Best Practices and Policies in Limited Scope Programs on a panel with Brenna K. DeVaney and Lauren J. Donnelly. The program was recorded and is available for free viewing on PLI.

### **Enhancing Social Justice through the Development of Incubators & Residency Programs**

Justice Fern A. Fisher was the Keynote Opening Speaker at this two-day conference in Suffolk County discussing post-graduate training and support programs for attorneys who will help resolve the unmet legal needs of litigants in their communities.

### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing)** (see February)

A training session was offered to one volunteer, and two members of partner organization University Settlement staff members or interns at the New York County Civil Court.

### **Bridge the Gap Training**

A comprehensive live basic training for the VLP and VLFD Housing and Consumer Debt Programs, Family Court VAP and the Uncontested Divorce Program was offered at the New York County Civil Court over four days. In return for CLE training, participants were required to complete a 60-hour supervised *pro bono* practicum assisting litigants in New York City Housing, Civil, Family and Supreme Courts, within nine months of training, assisting litigants with housing, family law, consumer debt law and uncontested divorce in the Access to Justice Program's unbundled court-based legal services programs. Over 80 recent law graduates and attorneys were trained on each day. This training fulfills the first or second year mandatory CLE requirements for recent law graduates and newly admitted attorneys.

### **VLP Civil Court Training**

Training was conducted for 20 attorneys in Small Claims Court, names changes and other common issues presented by Help Center litigants. The two hour live training took place at the

New York County Civil Court. In return for training and 2 CLE credits attorneys provided 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance to litigants in the Civil Court Help Centers in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

#### **Meeting with California Court System Official**

The Access to Justice Program staff met with Bonnie Rose Hough, Managing Attorney, Center for Families, Children & the Courts, Judicial and Court Operations Services Division. Ms. Hough toured the Bronx County Family Court's state of the art Help Center, observed the Family Offense Petition electronic filing advocate program, and visited the Red Hook Community Court in Kings County.

### **May**

#### **Enhancing Procedural Fairness Roundtable Discussion**

Justice Fern A. Fisher was a panelist at this presentation at the University of Miami School of Law. The panel discussed procedural fairness and communication in the courts. The event was sponsored by the 11<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit of Florida and the University of Miami School of Law HOPE Public Interest Resource Center.

#### **Forging Equal Access Partnerships: Judges, Legal Aid and the Private Bar**

Justice Fern A. Fisher presented on a panel at the Equal Justice Conference in Portland, Oregon which discussed bringing stakeholders like the courts, legal aid and the bar, together to address access to justice challenges.

#### **The Economic Impact of Legal Aid and *Pro Bono*: Raising the Potential for Expanded Funding**

Justice Fern A. Fisher was a presenter at the Equal Justice Conference in Portland, Oregon on a panel relating the economic benefits of investing money in civil legal services. Justice Fisher discussed New York's experience cultivating and expanding funding streams.

#### **Challenges & Strategies of Maintaining Multi-Lingual Forms & Resources**

Rochelle Klempner, Esq. presented at the Equal Justice Conference in Portland, Oregon on a panel exploring the difficulties updating, tracking and disseminating multilingual resources, including document assembly programs, written self-help materials, training materials, videos, webpages, posters, flyers, signs, and more. The PowerPoint focused on the challenges that the New York State court system has faced in the past and provided tips on how to keep resources current.

#### **Supplemental GAL Workshop**

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled "GAL Work: Views from the Bench" was held at the New York County Civil Court for 12 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program. Kings County Housing Court Judge Elenora Ofshtein offered best practice suggestions on how GALs can seek to resolve commonly faced challenges from the point of view of the judges. Insight was provided on issues of concern to court personnel in order to strengthen the court/GAL relationship and better serve the wards.

#### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)**

A training session was offered to 12 volunteers at the New York County Civil Court.

#### **VAP Family Court Training**

A live training was conducted for 13 attorneys at the offices of Debevoise & Plimpton. The two hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training**

A video replay training was conducted for five attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The 5.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation. The attorneys provided *pro bono* limited representation in the VLFD Consumer Debt Program in return for CLE credit.

### **VAP Family Court Training**

A live training was conducted for 17 attorneys at the offices of Morrison & Foerster. The two hour CLE training provided an overview of child custody, visitation and family offense. In exchange for 2 CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

### **Court Navigator Training (Consumer) (see February)**

Training was conducted for 27 college students at Bronx Civil Court.

### **VAP Family Court Training**

A live training was conducted for 57 attorneys at the offices of JP Morgan Chase. The two hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

### **Consumer Debt VLP Consumer Training**

A video replay training was conducted for five attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The three hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law including ethics. The attorneys provided *pro bono* advice in the Civil Court Help Centers in Brooklyn and Manhattan in return for CLE credit.

### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

A live training was conducted for five attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The 1.5 hour training included presentations on the Issues and Pitfalls in Uncontested Divorce, Interviewing Litigants, and an overview and demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce Software program to be used by the volunteers in the Uncontested Divorce Program. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance to unrepresented litigants in the Uncontested Divorce Program.

## **June**

### **Technology Tools to Enhance Legal Services for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Communities: Website, Videos and More (see May)**

Rochelle Klempner, Esq. reprised her presentation on Challenges & Strategies of Maintaining Multi-Lingual Forms & Resources given in-person at the Equal Justice Conference. This live webinar was part of the LSNTAP Community Training Series.

### **Supplemental GAL Workshop**

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled "Remaining Family Members" was held at the New York County Civil Court for 13 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program. Lucy Newman, Staff Attorney at The Legal Aid Society offered suggestions for how to identify relevant information and use it to successfully advocate on behalf of tenants/wards facing NYCHA Administrative hearings due to an alleged violation of NYCHA's remaining family member rules and regulations.

### **Supplemental Training on FEPS and the One Shot Deal (see January)**

Ten volunteers were trained at the New York County Civil Court during these optional additional sessions.

### **Assigned Counsel Project Internship Program Training (see January)**

A training was conducted for three law students at the New York County Civil Court.

### **Family Court Study Training**

A live four hour training was held in New York County for summer associate law students from Clifford Chance; DLA Piper; Kirkland & Ellis; Morrison & Foerster LLP; Ropes & Gray; and Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates. The training was to prepare the students to participate in the Bronx County Family Court DIY Form Summer Study Project. The students were given an overview of the access to justice movement, an introduction to DIY Form programs, an overview of support proceedings in Family Court, and training on the Family Court DIY Form programs. Presenters included David Udell, Esq., Executive Director of the National Center for Access to Justice, Justice Fern A. Fisher, Rochelle Klempner, Esq., George Cafasso, Chief Clerk of the New York City Family Court, Tracy McNeil, Esq., and Connie Matteo, Pfizer, Inc., Senior Corporate Litigation Counsel.

### **Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training (See March)**

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was offered at the New York County Civil Court to 15 recent law graduates and admitted attorneys.

### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)**

A training session was offered to 11 volunteers at Medgar Evers College.

### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)**

Two training sessions were conducted at the New York County Civil Court. A total of 54 volunteers were trained.

### **New York City Housing Court DIY Form Program Training**

A live tutorial on the landlord-tenant New York City DIY Form programs was conducted for seven volunteer attorneys and eight college students or other approved volunteers, and three members of partner organizations, who were trained to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants at New York City Housing Court DIY Form terminals.

### **GAL General Training**

The GAL Program offered free live training to prospective GALs in the New York County Civil Court. The GAL Program training consists of 7.5 hours of training including "Introduction to Housing Court/What is a GAL" (1.0), "Housing Court Nonpayment and Holdover Proceedings" (1.5), "Adult Protective Services and GAL Work" (1.0), "Advocacy and Negotiation in Housing Court Nonpayment and Holdover Cases" (1.0), "Short Guide to Emergency Assistance in New York" (1.0), "Overview of Mental Illness and Engagement Strategies" (1.0), and "GAL Practical Issues" (1.0). Attorneys were provided with free CLE credits (including 1 Ethics credit) upon completion of the training. All new GALs are expected to accept three pro-bono appointments over the course of the first year following training. Although many applied, nine people successfully interviewed, completed background checks and reference checks and attended the training and were added to the GAL list.

### **VAP Family Court Training**

A live training was conducted for 13 attorneys at the offices of the Bank of New York. The two hour CLE training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law with topics including: "Introduction to Family Court," "Introduction to Family Court Paternity" and "Introduction to Family Court Child Support." In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

### **Family Court Study Training**

A three hour live training was held at the New York County Civil Court to train volunteers to participate in the Bronx County Family Court DIY Form Summer Study Project. Summer college and law student interns from New York City Judges' chambers in Civil, Supreme, Surrogate's and Family Courts, as well as a few volunteer attorneys participated in the training. They were given an overview of the access to justice movement, training on interviewing skills and training on the Family Court DIY Form programs. Presenters included

David Udell, Esq., Executive Director of the National Center for Access to Justice, Tracy McNeil, Esq., and Connie Matteo, Pfizer, Inc., Senior Corporate Litigation Counsel.

## July

### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

A live training was conducted for 11 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court. The two hour training included presentations on the Issues and Pitfalls in Uncontested Divorce, Interviewing Litigants, and an overview and demonstration of the Drafting Libraries Uncontested Divorce Software program to be used by the volunteers in the Uncontested Divorce Program. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide 20 hours of *pro bono* assistance to unrepresented litigants in the Uncontested Divorce Program.

### **Court Navigator Program Training (Homebound Component)** (See March)

A training session was given through Microsoft Lync, a platform for webinars, to 16 JASA case workers. One Court Clerk also took part in the session.

### **VLFD Housing Program Training**

A CLE program was held at the New York County Civil Court. The session was offered to both recent law graduates awaiting admission to the New York Bar and admitted attorneys who took the training to become eligible to represent litigants in certain nonpayment proceedings in the Housing Court VLFD Program. The 3.5 hour VLFD training includes a CLE on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), and a segment on Ethics for Volunteer Attorneys (.5 CLE credit). The training was offered in exchange for two days of volunteer service in the Resolution Part.

### **Lay GAL Training** (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training** (see July)

A video replay training was conducted for five attorneys at the New York County Civil Court.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training** (see February)

A video replay training was conducted for two law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium.

## August

### **Supplemental Multi-dimensional Problem Solving CLE Workshop**

This 1.5 credit interactive live CLE training, a collaboration between the Housing Court Initiatives and the Guardian Ad Litem Program, provided six Housing Court Volunteer Attorney Program volunteers and 15 GALs with a forum to discuss ideas on how to problem solve when facing challenging or unique situations while attempting to advocate for their client or ward. The concepts of “thinking outside of the box,” as well as strategies for enlisting the help of available resources, and trying new creative approaches were also explored.

### **Lay GAL Training** (see February)

Two court-appointed GAL family members were trained.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Trainings**

Three video replay trainings were conducted for eight law students from area law schools at the New York County Civil Court. The 5.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation.

### **Court Navigator Training (Consumer)** (see February)

Training was conducted for 14 college students at Bronx County Civil Court. Students provide assistance to Consumer Debtors in the Bronx County Civil Court.

## September

### **Evaluations and Outcomes Through Online Forms**

Rochelle Klempner, Esq. co-presented a PowerPoint with David Udell, Executive Director of the National Center for Access to Justice for the Law Help Interactive monthly call for the LHI community. The presentation discussed the preliminary findings from the summer 2014 study of the New York State court system's DIY Form programs.

### **Touro Law Center Poverty Simulation**

A Poverty Simulation was conducted for the first year law students attending Touro Law Center. Over two half day trainings, approximately 150 students were assigned a fictitious identity, family and financial situations in order to simulate a one month period living in poverty. Second and third year students and law school faculty played the role of community groups and government office staff. After the simulation, all parties engaged in a lively group discussion to share their experiences and conclusions.

### **Uncontested Divorce Training**

Live two hour training was conducted for 12 law graduate fellows at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with CUNY Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The training prepared the fellows to assist unrepresented litigants in the Queens and Brooklyn Supreme Court Uncontested Divorce Program

### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing)** (see February)

A training session was offered to 12 volunteers at Medgar Evers College.

### **Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training**

A comprehensive four day training was offered at the New York County Civil Court to 14 CUNY School of Law LaunchPad for Justice Fellows. The training included the basic VLFD and VLP Housing training (see March), and "How to Analyze Rent Breakdowns," "How to Conduct Intake in VLFD Cases," "Basics of the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)" and the "One Shot Deal." The fellows were also given an opportunity to observe proceedings in the Housing Part for a half day. The basic and additional training was offered to the fellows in exchange for 50 hours of *pro bono* service in the Housing Court VLFD Program.

### **Lay GAL Training** (see February)

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training** (see February)

A video replay training was conducted for 11 law students at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium.

### **Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training**

A video replay training was conducted for 14 law graduate fellows at the New York County Civil Court in conjunction with CUNY Law School and the Law Student Initiative Consortium. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation.

## October

### **Legal Services Corp. Forum on Access to Justice**

Justice Fern A. Fisher participated in a live panel presentation at the NYS Court of Appeals in Albany County held in conjunction with Legal Services Corporation's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The panel, comprised of Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Vermont Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Reiber, and Justice Fisher, discussed access to justice initiatives in New York State.

### **Supplemental GAL Workshop**

A 1.5 hour live CLE workshop entitled “Housing and Benefits Available to People With Mental Illness” was held at the New York County Civil Court for 23 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program. Dinah Luck and Lisa Collins, both senior staff attorneys at MFY Legal Services, offered insight on the different types of benefits, housing, and reasonable accommodations and modifications available for people with mental illness.

#### **Kings County Supreme Court “Lunchtime Assistance” Help Center Training**

Over two half days 11 volunteer attorneys and six Brooklyn Law School students were trained for the new Kings County Supreme Court “Lunchtime Assistance” Help Center program. The training prepared the volunteers to provide legal information on Art. 78 cases, matrimonial matters, and 201-A lien law in the Kings County Supreme Court.

#### **VLFD Housing Program Training**

Eight prospective volunteers attended a CLE program held at the law offices of Paul Hastings LLP. The session was offered to both recent law graduates awaiting admission to the New York Bar and admitted attorneys who took the training to become eligible to represent litigants in certain nonpayment proceedings in the Housing Court VLFD Program. The 3.5 hour VLFD training includes a CLE on Nonpayment Proceedings (2 CLE credits), Negotiating and Drafting Stipulations of Settlement (1 CLE credit), and a segment on Ethics for Volunteer Attorneys (.5 CLE credit). The training was offered in exchange for two days of volunteer service in the Resolution Part.

#### **Court Navigator Program Training (Housing) (see February)**

A training session was offered to 23 volunteers at the New York County Civil Court.

#### **Domestic Violence Awareness Month Training Series**

In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the Access to Justice Program co-sponsored a five-part CLE trainings series with Safe Horizon, the Appellate Division First Department, the Bronx County Family Court, the Gender Fairness Committee and the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project. The series was open to domestic violence advocates for free. Topics included: Vicarious Trauma, The Effects of Intimate Partner Violence on Babies and Young Children; The Intersection of Orders of Protections and Immigration; Litigating Trauma: How Trauma impacts Courtroom Experience; and Cultural Competency. The live CLE was held in the Bronx County Family Court and each presentation was attended by 50 plus people.

#### **Bridge the Gap Training**

In honor of National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week, a comprehensive live basic training for the Housing, Consumer Debt and Uncontested Divorce Program was conducted for 60 attorneys at the New York County Civil Court over three days. In return for the full CLE training which included ethics of unbundled representation, participants were required to complete a 50 hour supervised *pro bono* practicum assisting litigants in New York City Housing, Civil and Supreme Courts within six months of training, assisting litigants with housing, consumer debt and uncontested divorce matters in the Access to Justice Program's unbundled court-based legal services programs. This training fulfills the first or second year mandatory CLE requirements for recent law graduates and newly admitted attorneys.

#### **Domestic Violence Seminar in Honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month**

This hour long community seminar given at the New York County Civil Court was co-sponsored with the New York Women’s Bar Association’s Employment & Equal Opportunity for Women Committee and the New York Women’s Agenda’s Domestic Violence Committee. The seminar speakers discussed what domestic violence means, how it affects victims and their families. The seminar also covered the legal rights of victims and survivors, including information on where to file orders of protection, accommodations employers can make to protect victims’ safety, and where to find support and resources, and get safety advice.

#### **Uncontested Divorce Presentation**

A live presentation was given at Brooklyn Law School to a total of 15 attorneys on the law of uncontested divorce in New York State. Attorneys were given a brief overview of the law of divorce and taught which documents are needed for an uncontested divorce.

**Court Navigator Training (Consumer) (See February)**

Training was conducted for 24 college students at Bronx County Civil Court. Students provide assistance to Consumer Debtors in the Bronx County Civil Court.

**CourtHelp Website Preview Presentation**

Webinars were held for three staff members from LawHelpNY and LAWNY to preview the new CourtHelp website and coordinate necessary url changes on LawHelpNY in connection with CourtHelp's launch.

## November

**Managing Document Automation Content**

Rochelle Klempner, Esq. and Sun Kim, Esq. participated in a Law Help Interactive national webinar conducted by Pro Bono Net and Capstone Practice. Ms. Klempner's A2J Author presentation highlighted some of the best practices that the New York State court system employs when making DIY Form programs and Ms. Kim's PowerPoint shared a number of technology tips to improve maintenance of the programs.

**Supplemental GAL Workshop**

A two hour live CLE workshop entitled "Elder Abuse, Criminal Justice and Mental Health" was held at the New York County Civil Court for 17 GALs participating in the Housing Court GAL Program. Donna Dougherty, Attorney-in-Charge, JASA/Legal Services for the Elderly in Queens and Arlene M. Markarian, Executive ADA, Elder Abuse Unit / Domestic Violence Bureau, Kings County District Attorney's Office explored the challenges in responding to elder abuse cases when the mental health of the victim and/or the abuser is an issue. The presentation covered factors and approaches considered by criminal law enforcement and social service and legal professionals in their efforts to pursue remedies and resolve the abuse.

**Assigned Counsel Program Internship Training (see January)**

A training was conducted for two law graduates at the New York County Civil Court.

**New Jersey Newark Municipal Court Visit**

Technical court staff from the New Jersey Newark Municipal Court were taken on a guided tour of the Bronx County Family Court Help Center to learn how to expand their own court services to unrepresented litigants. Focus was primarily on DIY Form programs, case management systems and physical plant integration.

**Lay GAL Training (see February)**

One court-appointed GAL family member was trained.

**Combined VLFD Consumer Debt and VLP Consumer Debt Training (see August)**

A video replay training was conducted for four law students at the New York County Civil Court. The 4.5 hour training provided an overview of Consumer Debt Law, including ethics and instruction on Courtroom Skills and Settlement Negotiation.

## December

**GAL Specialized Training**

Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP partnered with the Guardian Ad Litem Program to train their associates to accept GAL *pro bono* appointments involving impaired litigants residing in New York County. Seven volunteer attorneys received free training from a panel of experts in the fields of legal and social work advocacy and landlord-tenant law before accepting GAL

appointments. Free CLE credits were awarded. The training took place at the NYC Bar Association.

**GAL General Training** (see June).

A video replay of the GAL Program basic training was offered in New York County Civil Court. Ten people who successfully interviewed, and passed background and reference checks attended the training and were added to the GAL list.

**Meeting with Self-Represented Litigation Network Coordinator**

The Access to Justice Program staff met with Katherine Alteneder, Coordinator of the Self-Represented Litigation Network to discuss the Access to Justice Program's work in New York State. Over two days, Ms. Alteneder observed and visited a number of programs and courts, including the Red Hook Community Court in Kings County, the Volunteer Lawyer for a Day Program in Kings County Housing Court, and the Help Center in the Bronx County Family Court.

**Combined VLFD Housing and VLP Housing Training** (see March)

An 8.5 hour CLE credit two-day video-replay training was conducted at the New York County Civil Court to 15 recent law graduates and admitted attorneys.

**VAP Family Court Training**

A comprehensive live four hour CLE credit training was conducted for 38 attorneys. The training provided an overview of the basics of paternity and child support law, child custody, visitation and family offense. In exchange for CLE credits awarded for the training, attorneys provide *pro bono* assistance in the Family Court Help Centers.

**Court Navigator Training (Consumer)** (See February)

Training was conducted for 17 college students at Bronx County Civil Court. Students provide assistance to Consumer Debtors in the Bronx County Civil Court.

## **APPENDIX B: PERSONNEL TRAININGS**

### **February**

#### **DIY Form Programs Troubleshooting Webinar**

This new live webinar was offered to all UCS employees to discuss common issues that litigants and court employees have when interacting with DIY Form programs. Focusing on frequently asked questions, the training also introduced newly created intranet FAQ pages to address court employee concerns. It was attended by 33 employees.

#### **Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Showcase**

Over two dates, this live webinar showcased the Uncontested Divorce DIY Program for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts, before the program's roll-out in April. Each webinar was customized for the counties in the specific Judicial District. In addition, each webinar ended with a discussion that addressed the procedures and particulars of the individual county. Approximately 20 employees from Supreme Court, Help Centers, and law libraries attended.

### **March**

#### **Introduction to DIY Form Programming**

This live webinar training was offered to all court personnel. It highlighted the actual software used in creating the front-end of the DIY Form programs and focused on basic programming techniques and the use of litigant-friendly features. Most participants had no programming experience. Five people attended this training including one Chief Clerk, a Law Librarian and three Court Clerks.

#### **Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Discussion and Preview**

Before the Uncontested Divorce DIY Program debuted in April 2014, the Administrative Judges' Offices outside New York City, and the Supreme Court Supervising Judges and Chief Clerks in New York City were invited to a special webinar showcasing the new DIY Form program. The webinar included a demonstration of the program, and discussion of logistics for a successful roll-out to the counties.

#### **Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Showcases (See February)**

Over six dates, this live webinar showcased the Uncontested Divorce DIY Program for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts and Suffolk County, before the program's roll-out in April. Approximately 75 employees from Supreme Court, Help Centers, and law libraries attended.

#### **Help Center SharePoint Training**

A live webinar was hosted for Help Center staff statewide to introduce them to the new Help Center database. Taught by a representative from the Department of Technology, the webinar explored the site and explained how Help Center staff could create new pages, share content, and use discussion boards. Court staff from City, Supreme, Family, and Surrogate's Court Help Centers from around the state attended.

### **April**

#### **How DIY Form Programs Can Increase Court Efficiency**

Offered to all UCS staff, this new live webinar training featured a panel of court employees who have successfully implemented DIY Form programs as an integral part of their courthouse procedure. The presentations included: "Thinking Outside the Box: How to Use Your Space the Most Efficiently" by Mike Williams, Clerk of the Court, Bronx County Family Court; "The Power of Triage: Rethinking Court Staffing, Express Lanes and Dynamic Roles" by Monica Dingle,

Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk, Queens Civil Court; “Inside the Courthouse: Signage, Spacing & Individual Initiative” by Dawn Maletta, Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk, Suffolk County Family Court; and “Outside the Court: Email, Phone, and the Power of an Informed Public” by Maureen Ball, Chief Clerk, Fulton County City Court. The presentations were followed by a lively group discussion and question period. Over 45 employees attended.

**Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part A Webinar Showcase**

This live webinar outlined Part A of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. The Part A training explained the criteria to use the program, the initial filing paperwork and instructions for next steps. A total of 27 employees from around the state participated in this training.

**Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part B Webinar Showcase**

This live webinar outlined Part B of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. The Part B training explained what happens if the defendant defaults, submits an answer or the defendant’s affidavit, the second set of papers to be filed and instructions. Twenty-six court employees from around the state attended this training.

## May

**Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part A Webinar Showcase** (see April)

This live webinar outlined Part A of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. A total of 29 employees from around the state participated in this training.

**Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part B Webinar Showcase** (see April)

This live webinar outlined Part B of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. Twenty-six court employees from around the state attended this training.

## June

**Outside NYC Landlord-Tenant DIY Form Program Showcase**

This live CLE credit webinar was for City, Town and Village Court Judges, Court Attorneys and other non-judicial staff. The webinar demonstrated the Tenant Vacate Default Judgment, Nonpayment Petition, Licensee Holdover Petition, and Squatter Holdover Petition DIY Form programs. The 12 attendees were also reminded of UCMS protocols, promotional materials, and where to find additional assistance on the Access to Justice Program intranet pages. One CLE credit was awarded.

## July

**How DIY Form Programs Can Increase Court Efficiency Training**

Offered to all of UCS employees, this live webinar trained over 30 UCS staff about how to effectively integrate DIY Form programs into their courthouse procedures. Court employees from around the state made presentations. This included: “Thinking Outside the Box: Kaizen and the Efficient Courthouse” by Mike Williams, Clerk of the Court, Bronx County Family Court; “One man Courthouse: How DIY Saves Time, Energy, and Resources” by Deborah Berry, Chief Clerk, Orleans County Surrogate’s Court; and “The Power of Triage: Rethinking Court Staffing and Spacing” by Melinda Alexander, Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk, Kings County Civil Court.

## August

### **Surrogate's Court DIY Form Programs Showcase**

This live webinar highlighted the three DIY Form programs for Surrogate's Court. The webinar was attended by Surrogate's Court employees, Help Center staff, and Public Access Law Librarians. A total of 28 employees attended the training.

### **Family Court Part 1: Support DIY Form Program Showcase**

This live webinar highlighted the two Family Court support related DIY Form programs, the Support Enforcement Program and the Support Modification Program. Open to all Family Court, Help Centers, and Public Access Law Librarian employees, this review training was attended by 17 UCS staff.

### **Family Court Part 2: Custody and Paternity DIY Form Program Showcase**

This live webinar outlined the Spanish and English Paternity DIY Form programs in addition to the Custody and Visitation Modification Program and the Custody and Visitation Enforcement Program. This training was open to all Family Court, Help Centers, and Public Access Law Librarian employees. A total of 15 people attended this review training.

## September

### **Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part A Webinar Showcase** (see April)

Offered twice, this live webinar outlined Part A of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. A total of 26 employees from around the state participated in this training.

### **Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program: Part B Webinar Showcase** (see April)

Offered twice, this live webinar outlined Part B of the Uncontested Divorce DIY Form Program. A total of 26 court employees from around the state attended this training.

## October

### **UCS Law Librarians/Pro Se Association Meeting**

This live webinar presentation at the UCS Law Librarians annual meeting discussed numerous Access to Justice Initiatives with the primary focus on Court Help Centers, DIY Form programs and CourtHelp.

## November

### **New CourtHelp Showcase Webinar**

Offered over three dates this live webinar highlighted many of the new features, legal topics, and helpful links on the newly redesigned CourtHelp website. In addition, the webinar showcased how court staff can use the site to improve efficiency. A total of 58 court employees from all around the state attended.

### **Overview of Domestic Violence Issues in the Civil Court**

This 1 credit CLE Program, co-sponsored by the New York Women's Bar Association Domestic Violence Committee, and the New York County Civil Court Gender & Fairness Committee gave court employees an overview of domestic violence, its impact on victims and survivors who visit the Court to file court papers or appear in a Civil or Housing Part. The speakers also addressed the tools and resources available to court employees when working with victims and survivors, including relevant statutes, court forms, and memoranda of law. There was also a discussion of the Unified Court System's Domestic Violence Policy. A total of 15 employees attended this event.

## December

**New CourtHelp Showcase Webinar** (see November)  
Twenty employees from around the state attended.

## APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OF NYC HOUSING SPANISH SLIDES

**Si necesita información sobre la corte de viviendas, visite:**

[nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/spanish](http://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/spanish)



**Un abogado voluntario puede ayudarle a:**

- **revisar sus documentos legales,**
- **rellenar formularios,**
- **prepararse ahora que esta en corte, y**
- **darle referidos legales.**

**Una estipulación (“stip”) o acuerdo es un documento escrito entre ambas partes de un caso.**

**Una estipulación o acuerdo dice lo que cada una de las partes debe hacer (por ejemplo, hacer pagos, hacer reparaciones) y para que fecha deben hacerlo.**



¿Quiere saber más sobre las cortes?

¡Síguenos por Twitter! 

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**Para más información relacionada con el Programa de Tutores Legales (GAL), visite:**

[nycourts.gov/nyc-gal](http://nycourts.gov/nyc-gal)

¡Si usted es una persona mayor y tiene un caso ante la corte de viviendas, existe la posibilidad de que el **Proyecto de Abogado Asignado (ACP)** pueda asistirle!

 Use el **programa DIY Propietario Menor**, para generar documentos jurídicos e iniciar un caso por falta de pago. Comience ahora en el Centro de Ayuda, en el salón 104.

## **CENTRO DE AYUDA**

Los “**Centros de Ayuda**” se encuentran en todas las cortes. En este edificio, su ubicación es el salón **104.**



## **Aplazamiento**

### **DEFINICIÓN:**

Un **aplazamiento** es cuando la corte pone cita para una nueva fecha.



**Vea vídeos informativos sobre temas legales en **YouTube:****

[YouTube.com/user/NYCourtsA2J](https://www.youtube.com/user/NYCourtsA2J)



**“Housing Court Answers” se encuentra en el segundo piso en el salón 225.**



## APPENDIX D: ACCESS TO JUSTICE EFFORTS THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE

### 3<sup>RD</sup> Judicial District

The following are Access to Justice Activities for the Third Judicial District in 2014:

- The Capital District *Pro Bono* Coordinators Committee met approximately every 6 weeks in order to plan events and discuss *pro bono* activities/services by the providers. Committee Members include representatives from: New York State Bar Association; Albany County Bar Association, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, The Legal Project, Prisoners' Legal Services of New York, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Albany Law School's *Pro Bono* Program, and Third Judicial District.
- Two Day Community Law Day Event on Mother's Day Weekend at the annual Albany tulip Festival where the Third District, along with *pro bono* providers had a table where various legal information was available to festival attendees. Due to the crowd and lovely weather, the event was a success. Regina Treffiletti, Esq., and Erika Hanks participated on behalf of the Third Judicial District.
- The Committee also prepared a double sided flyer highlighting where either legal help or information is available in the Capital District.
- On May 6, 2014, the Grand Opening of the Help Center at Albany Family Court was held, with Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division, Third Department, Karen Peters and Hon. Fern Fisher hosting the event. The Third District has provided the location and certain computer equipment to assist the Help Center.
- On October 9, 2014, Third District Administrative Judge Thomas A. Breslin hosted a breakfast at the Albany County Courthouse for Capital District Attorneys to promote *pro bono* service by law firms and lawyers in the Third Judicial District. Over 40 attorneys representing a wide-variety of law firms attended the event.
- On October 14, 2014, Regina Treffiletti, Esq., who has served for many years as the representative for the Third Judicial District on the Capital District *Pro Bono* Coordinators Committee was one of seven attorneys recognized at the National *Pro Bono* Week Reception Awards Ceremony hosted by the New York State Bar Association. Ms. Treffiletti was recognized for her efforts in promoting *pro bono* work in the Third Judicial District over the past many years as she has been the inspiration behind many of the Third District efforts.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

In Schenectady County, Law Day 2014 was marked by a ceremony "opening" the new Supreme Court offices and courtroom at the Shaffer Heights building in downtown Schenectady. The Schenectady County Bar Association partnered with the courts to host several Law Day events at Shaffer Heights, which included volunteer attorneys providing informal consultations with members of the public about their legal issues or concerns. The program was a great success!

## 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

The Fifth Judicial District partners with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Inc. (OnVLP) to provide court-based *pro bono* programs in Family Court and Surrogate's Court in Onondaga County, as well as Syracuse City Court and East Syracuse Justice Court. A new Jefferson County Family Court *pro bono* program is in development as well.

The Family Court Clinic uses local *pro bono* attorneys to provide low-income *pro se* litigants assistance with drafting custody, visitation, child support and paternity petitions as well as advice and counsel regarding court process. In 2014, we piloted a remote access Family Court Clinic as well, using *pro bono* attorneys located in New York City Family Courts to provide advice and counsel to *pro se* litigants in Onondaga County Family Court. The Family Court Clinic is operated in a conference room in Family Court building and has become an important resource for *pro se* litigants. The Family Court Clinic now operates a day and a half every week. The Jefferson County Family Court Clinic will also operate in a conference room in the Family Court, and will operate twice a month. In the first ten months of 2014, these programs assisted 400 clients.

The Surrogate's Court Clinic uses local *pro bono* trusts and estates attorneys to provide low-income *pro se* litigants with assistance drafting petitions for Surrogate's Court and advice regarding elder law, special needs, and estate planning. The Surrogate's Court Clinic operates in the Surrogate's Court Jury Room once a week. In the first ten months of 2014, this program assisted 95 clients.

OnVLP's Eviction Defense program provides an attorney (or sometimes two or three attorneys) every day in Syracuse City Landlord Tenant Court to help indigent tenants. OnVLP also has a presence in East Syracuse Justice Court twice a month to represent tenants through the eviction process. OnVLP's attorneys work to efficiently and effectively negotiate settlements that help tenants avoid eviction or give tenants additional time to relocate, and when necessary, represent the tenants in hearings on eviction matters. In the first ten months of 2014, these programs have assisted 780 clients.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

The Sixth Judicial District remains completely committed to all those who wish to access justice through any of the courts in our ten county area. We do this in a number of ways.

Our District Office has been directly involved in the implementation of each county's Counsel at Initial Arraignment Program. Not all counties within the District have participated in the program to date but with the settlement of the civil litigation addressing this issue, we hope that all will be availing themselves of an opportunity to aid indigent defendants at their first appearance in local courts. Programs currently in existence in Broome and Tompkins Counties were implemented with our direct involvement which consisted of our meeting with local Magistrates' Associations, prosecutors and defenders to make the programs work as seamlessly as possible. Our Administrative Judge, Hon. Robert C. Mulvey, attended many meetings on the issue and became directly involved in seeing to it that the problems encountered in the earliest stages were addressed quickly and efficiently. These problems included early misunderstandings on the part of our Town and Village Judges as to their affirmative obligations to insure that defendants appearing before them were represented before the arraignment could take place. Since then, reports confirm an excellent response and very encouraging results.

In other areas, we encourage local bar associations to devote significant time and resources to the unrepresented in their communities. The Broome County Bar Association is especially committed to this process. That group has continued to carry on the work of the *Pro Bono* Task Force which was defunded by the State several years ago. The BCBA continues to devote significant time and attorney effort to provide legal services to the poor. That same organization supports an annual Senior Legal Clinic at local malls or other place of public accommodation and encourages local attorneys to assist the elderly with their legal problems when the clinic is not in session. Tioga County operates a similar program through the assistance of a large local law firm. The District Office provides literature and referrals to the Bar Associations when called upon to do so.

Binghamton City Court is exploring the creation of a Specialty or Problem Solving Court directly related to the legal needs of our Armed Service Veterans. While still in the planning stage, the District Office is anxiously awaiting and anticipating progress on this new program. Veterans assistance programs are also offered by several local bar associations.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Judicial District**

Help Center: In January of 2013, the Seventh Judicial District in collaboration with Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County opened the Court Help Center. The Court Help Center, located in the Law Library was established to assist the growing number of unrepresented litigants in our court system. The Help Center is open Monday through Friday, 10:00 A.M.-12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M - 4:00 P.M. It is staffed Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings by trained 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial District staff. The remaining shifts are staffed by paid VLSP attorneys and volunteers. Since the opening of the Court Help Center in 2013 over 2600 people have been served. In the first 10 months of 2014, over 1600 people were served. The Court Help Center has provided procedural and legal information on more than 18 different areas of law, the top three areas being domestic relations, landlord-tenant and small claims. In 2014, over 225 volunteers have donated 400 hours staffing the Help Center. These volunteers are mainly comprised of attorneys from firms, solo practices, corporations and universities as well as retired judges and retired court personnel.

In May of 2013 the Seventh Judicial District Court Help Center was recognized statewide by receiving the New York State Bar Association President's *Pro Bono* Service Award. In July 2014, the Court Help Center was mentioned in the White Papers, a report of the American Association of Law Libraries Special Committee on Access to Justice titled "Law Libraries and Access to Justice." The goal of this White Paper was to discuss the many valuable ways Law Libraries are an active part in promoting and improving access to justice.

Help Center Advisory Committee: consist of 7<sup>th</sup> District Judges, Chief Clerks, attorneys and agency representatives. The committee collectively offers guidance and support of the operational needs of the Center, strategies to enhance public awareness of available services and ongoing outreach opportunities to increase attorney participation.

Court Tours / Student Ambassador Program / Court Awareness / Community & Outreach: The 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial District has an active student ambassador-internship program, community outreach and court tour programs. These programs promote community engagement and educational partnerships through the collaborative efforts of the 7<sup>th</sup> District with numerous high schools, colleges and universities. This program model offers students opportunities for personal and professional growth as well as cultivate knowledge of the NYS Court System.

A multidiscipline Internship Committee is dedicated to continuous improvement of the ambassador program, community outreach and raising awareness of the NYS Court System.

The participation of individuals in these programs will in turn assist in enhancing community knowledge and access of the courts.

Diversity: Throughout the year public informational display/resource tables are set up at the Hall of Justice: Black History, Martin Luther King, LGBTQ and Hispanic Heritage

### **8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District**

- The District staffs a Court Help Center which is located at the Supreme Court Law Library in Buffalo. At the end of this year, we will be facing the loss of the attorney who staffs the Help Center. We have requested through PARS approval to hire an attorney to be assigned to the Help Center. The Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo has agreed to assign a staff member on a part-time basis to assist with coverage.
- The District participates in the CLARO Project which is coordinated through SUNY Buffalo Law School and Buffalo City Court to provide assistance for civil legal services for consumer credit transactions.
- The Volunteer Lawyers Project assigns attorneys to assist Family Court litigants with the filing of Petitions in Erie County Family Court.
- Erie County continues to celebrate annually Law Day. Students from several area high schools participate in mock trials and are given tours of the courts.
- The District continues to maintain a very active schedule of court tours for area high schools, colleges and community groups.

### **9<sup>th</sup> Judicial District**

- Court Tours: The court tours provide an opportunity for students of various grade levels to visit court facilities, observe court proceedings, and participate in educational forums that seek to promote the work of the courts and educate students about the legal system. The courts sponsored 25+ court tours that hosted an estimated 450 students. Some of the schools included but were not limited to: Van Wick High School, Maria Regina High School, John Jay High School, Roosevelt High School, Middletown Christian School
- Educational Outreach: Judicial and Non Judicial Personnel conduct presentations to schools regarding court programs and/or legal topics. The educational outreach often takes place at an off-site venue. 75+ educational outreach activities were conducted in 2014. Pace Law School, Monroe College, Ossining High School, Yonkers Public School System, Kent Elementary School, Ossining High School, Iona College, Boces High School, Rockland Community College, Church Street School, St. John Fisher College, Mahopac High School, and Middletown Christian School.
- Civic Outreach: Judicial and Non Judicial Personnel conduct presentations for civic groups regarding court programs and/or legal topics. Boys & Girls Club, Greenburgh Youth Academy, Brewster Rotary, Westchester County Youth Voice Empowerment Program, and Boys Scout of America, Girls Scout.
- Professional Organization: Judicial and Non Judicial Personnel serve as speakers, panelist to promote the work of the courts. Westchester County Black Bar Associations, Westchester County Bar Association, Westchester Magistrates Association, Estate Planning Council of Westchester; Dutchess County Bar Association, Putnam County Bar Association, Rockland County Bar Association, and Westchester County Public Library Director's Association.

- **Community Outreach:** Judicial and Non Judicial Personnel serve as speakers, panelist to promote the work of the courts. A Community Stakeholder Forum was conducted in 2014. The DAJ Office in Conjunction with the Mount Vernon Adolescent Diversion Part hosted “GANG” 101 Training. The training was open to criminal justice partners and community stakeholders.

## **10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Nassau County**

INITIATIVES – 2014 - Supreme Court, County and Surrogate Court, Family Court, District Court

**Court Tours:** Organized and scheduled student tours of the District Court, County Court and Supreme Court have been ongoing upon request for many years. Generally, and, as staffing permits, the Courts in Nassau County will entertain and accommodate tour requests from law schools, colleges, high schools and elementary schools (5<sup>th</sup> grade and above) throughout Nassau County. In addition to traditional schools, tours have been offered to a myriad of organizations ranging from the Cub Scouts to the Institute for the Learning in Retirement, a senior group based on the SUNY Farmingdale campus.

The goal of the Court Tours is to educate. By inviting students of all ages into the court system from across the county, they witness firsthand the positive image and attributes of the Nassau County Courts. The program maintains a level of consistency in order to encompass an overview of the Supreme or County Court. Although the courtroom activity is the main focus, a strong emphasis is placed on educating students as to the jury system and diversity in the workplace. With the steadfast cooperation from the bench, many different Judges make themselves available to provide additional instruction and to entertain questions from students.

To maintain success and meaningfulness, the Court tour program requires the active participation, assistance and dedication from many judicial and non-judicial employees.

The purpose of these activities is to remain an integral and constructively visible part of the community as well as to inform and educate the public, in particular young adults as to the workings and purpose of the Court system.

**Judicial Speaker’s Bureau:** Judicial and non-judicial volunteers from every Court in Nassau County participate in the Speaker’s Bureau. The Speaker’s Bureau accommodates Middle School, High School and collective community organizations by sending volunteer speakers out into the community across Nassau County. Ranging from town hall meetings, whereby Judges and/or other court personnel travel to venues to speak with residents, to career day programs that are designed to educate students about employment opportunities in the court system and the legal profession, programs are tailored to address a specific school curriculum or a particular audience.

**P.E.A.C.E. Program:** The Nassau County Courts collaborate and host a PEACE (Parent Education and Custody Effectiveness) program held in the Supreme Court several times per year. Since its founding in 1992, PEACE has served thousands of families across New York. It is a multi-disciplinary educational program designed to provide free information to parents about divorce and separation process with the goal of resulting in improved parent/child relationships in the reorganized family and reduction in the number of contested custody, visitation and support disputes that face our courts. Several Court Officers have been recognized for their extraordinary courtesy, kindness and sensitivity to the often emotionally charged participants as they provide security when the program is in progress.

When overtime restrictions threatened the viability of the program, we successfully coordinated efforts to obtain reimbursement for all overtime costs needed for the continued support of the program.

Court Information Center/Public Web Page Enhancements: Located in a newly redesigned area of the Supreme Court Public Access Law Library, the Center undertakes broad informational outreach to both attorneys and those individuals attempting to navigate the complex legal system without an attorney.

Enhanced automation and the centralized and consolidation of this department has permitted the Court to absorb a significant number of vacancies while maintaining and improving service to a growing population in need of vital information and assistance. We are particularly proud of our improvements in delivering forms and updated information through the internet and the integration of this resource with the efforts of the staff in the Court Information Center towards the improvement of efficiency and quality in the delivery of their assistance.

Mobile Legal Help Center: On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Nassau County Courts made available a state-of-the-art Mobile Legal Help Center offering Nassau County residents legal assistance for a myriad of legal issues including: Housing, Public Benefits, Healthcare, Immigration, Family Law, Employment, Consumer Protection and Advance Planning. The Mobile Legal Help Center is a partnership between NYLAG and the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program. The Mobile Legal Help Center is available to everyone in a variety of languages and is fully wheelchair accessible.

“Providing unparalleled access to justice and ensuring that the resources of our court system are made accessible to all residents of Nassau County is a priority of the Nassau County Courts,” said Nassau County Administrative Judge Thomas A. Adams. “The Mobile Center is an extraordinary and forward-thinking initiative that will greatly benefit many Nassau residents who would otherwise not have access to our court system.”

The Mobile Legal Help Center initiative was established to assist residents of New York with low incomes who are in need of legal assistance and may not have access to a courthouse. The Mobile Center serves as a fully functioning legal services office with a team of attorneys and court staff present to provide legal assistance with a wide array of civil legal issues. The center also includes separate meeting areas to ensure clients’ privacy.

## **10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Suffolk County**

With a recognition that navigating a courthouse can be an overwhelming experience, the Suffolk County District Administrative Judge C. Randall Hinrichs, in partnership with New York State Courts Access to Justice Director, Justice Fern A. Fisher, has remained committed to ensuring access to justice in Suffolk County. In keeping with the Access to Justice Program’s goals of increasing access, improving the delivery of justice and promoting public confidence in the courts, Suffolk County engages in meaningful collaboration with key stakeholders including academic institutions, bar associations and non-profit advocacy organizations. These efforts, which are outlined below, seek to improve court access for those visiting the Suffolk County Courts.

Community Outreach Initiatives: On May 13, 2014, the Suffolk County Courts held its annual Law Day at the Cohalan Court Complex in Central Islip with opening remarks by Hon. Fern Fisher. In keeping with the “Every Vote Counts” theme, representatives from the League of Women Voters of Huntington were on hand to assist members of the public visiting the courthouse register to vote. Additionally, a symposium was held with staff members representing nearly 30 advocacy organizations who serve the public in Suffolk County. Each agency was invited to discuss the services provided by their organizations and highlight new program initiatives. Chief Clerks from Suffolk County Courts were also represented to provide participants with a better understanding of who is responsible for facilitating access in the

different courts. The event provided the participants an opportunity to learn from one another, network and exchange information and ideas.

The Suffolk County Courts continues its partnership with housing agencies, especially the Homeowners Protection Program (HOPP), coordinated by the Empire Justice Center. This agency assists homeowners at risk of foreclosure to understand their finances, connect them to free legal services, and speak with the bank on their behalf. This service is available free of charge and assists the Suffolk County Courts ensure that homeowners receive information about statutorily required conferences in residential foreclosure actions. These notices are available to litigants in both English and Spanish.

Self-Help Services: The Library Resource for the Public Program (LRPP) remains a vital component of Suffolk County's commitment to access to justice. Operating in the law libraries in the Central Islip and Riverhead court complexes, the help centers were designed to improve support services for unrepresented litigants in the Suffolk County courts by adding a procedural help component to the existing reference assistance provided by our libraries. Despite limited staffing, the LRPP is heavily used. In 2014, an average of 657 people used the program monthly. Non-English speaking litigants have access to a bilingual representative or the language line so that the information provided is understood. Additionally, written procedural instructions for completing forms in numerous proceedings are also available in Spanish, furthering the goal of access to justice. The LRPP also maintains an up-to-date library of community-based program literature which allows for additional support to litigants. The Family Court in Riverhead having recently moved to the Cromarty Court Complex where the LRPP is located, it is anticipated that the litigants using the program will increase significantly.

The Suffolk County Court System has embraced the use of technology to assist litigants filing common forms in Family, Surrogate and Supreme Courts. During the implementation of the Statewide DIY Program Initiative, conversations with advocacy groups took place to advise them of this new resource. Additionally, computer kiosks have been set up in the Clerk's Office of Family Court to assist litigants in preparing forms.

Access to Quality Legal Representation: In March of 2014, the Women in the Courts Committee celebrated Women's History Month with an event honoring women who have made significant contributions to providing access to justice and *pro bono* services. The program, which included a welcome and introduction of the honorees by Suffolk County District Administrative Judge C. Randall Hinrichs, highlighted the tremendous efforts made by the honorees in securing access to justice and free legal services to litigants in Suffolk County. These honorees served as an inspiration to others in attendance to become more engaged in *pro bono* services.

The Suffolk County District Administrative Judge's Office is represented at Touro Law Center's Public Advocacy Center quarterly meetings. The Center, which encompasses representatives from many public advocacy agencies, strives to streamline service delivery and increase access to legal services for Suffolk County residents.

The Suffolk County Courts continues to work collaboratively with Touro Law Center on a number of curricula models which incorporate court observation. Among the most coveted of these courses is an externship program in which about five students per semester are assigned to judges who have expressed a strong interest in promoting academic endeavors. This program, like the summer internship program, fosters a deep appreciation by the students of the way in which the courts function and the need to ensure that all litigants are afforded an equal opportunity to gain access to justice.

The office of the District Administrative Judge continues its long-standing relationship with the Suffolk County Bar Association - *Pro Bono* Foundation through continued membership and active participation. The Foundation strives to ensure that everyone, regardless of their means, receives the highest level of professional representation. Toward that end, the

Foundation honors those who volunteer their services to indigent clients. The presence of a court representative on the Board of Managers allows for a free exchange of information from those in the best position to provide it, as to the status of *pro bono* efforts throughout the County.

Litigants with Diverse Needs: The Suffolk County Court System continues to collaborate with the Long Island Language Advocacy Coalition, an organization promoting access to courts and other governmental institutions for those lacking English proficiency. The Suffolk County Courts' Principal Court Interpreter has served as this organization's court liaison and has ensured appropriate language interpretation and translation of court documents. The Suffolk County Courts continue to provide *Language Line* interpreting services for those litigants who need assistance at the Clerk's Office, Law Libraries, as well as other locations.

The Suffolk County Women in the Courts Committee is in the process of coordinating a Domestic Violence Program for 2015. A meeting was held in November of 2014 to discuss potential topics and speakers for this program. The goal is to coordinate an event that will appeal to attorneys by offering free Continuing Legal Education credit, as well as service providers in the community who work with survivors of domestic violence in the court system.

## **New York City Supreme Courts**

**Bronx County**: As the number of users navigating the court system without benefit of legal representation continues to increase, Bronx Supreme Court remains committed to making access to justice for all court users a priority. In response to the number of litigants who appear in court without representation, the following offices and programs remain in place to assist litigants who cannot afford legal counsel, or who elect to exercise their fundamental right to self-representation:

Help Center: The Help Center is a multifaceted office that provides free procedural and legal information in various areas pertaining to civil matters in various courts such as Supreme, New York City Civil, Small Claims, Housing, Surrogates, and Family Court. The office also distributes forms and instructions, and pamphlets and brochures to assist the unrepresented as they navigate the courts. Referral information and resources from various legal and government organizations are also provided. The Help Center contains two kiosks for public access to the NYS Courts' website which contains access to court forms and the DIY programs offered by the various courts. Printers are also available. The Help Center is staffed with an on-site Spanish interpreter who is readily available to assist Spanish-speaking customers. This on-site assignment saves valuable court time, and is a convenience to court users

As the majority of customers visiting the Help Center seek assistance with uncontested divorce, a Help Center Annex staffed by one clerk was created to provide additional assistance in this area. In the annex, users can access the DIY program for uncontested divorce on two additional kiosks, while having a Clerk available to answer questions. The Clerk also provides a review of uncontested divorce documents prior to filing to ensure that they are sufficient, and to prevent the user from being required to make an additional visit to the courthouse to correct papers. In addition, while simple corrections required on cases that have already been filed are handled by the Matrimonial Clerk's Office, the Help Center Annex provides additional forms and instructions in cases where the corrections required by the court are more complex. This ensures that customers with more difficult issues are still afforded equal access to justice, while aiding in the prevention of increased backlogs in the Matrimonial Department.

Divorce Clinic: The Divorce Clinic in Bronx Supreme Court provides users with free assistance in preparing documents submitted to the court in furtherance of uncontested divorce. The clinic is staffed with two attorneys and several student volunteers from Cardozo

Law School. The clinic offers a daytime session twice a week, and an evening session every Thursday. Since the inception of the program, the clinic has served over 2500 court users.

**Bronx Residential Foreclosure Center:** The Bronx Residential Foreclosure Center provides free legal assistance to court users who are in danger of losing their home. The center is staffed by attorneys and paralegals from various legal services including Legal Services NYC-Bronx, The Legal Aid Society, and NYLAG. The assistance provided includes legal advice about the steps in the foreclosure process, counseling about legal options, answering the summons and complaint, assistance with legal motions, reviewing legal agreements and loan modifications, challenging wrongful denials of loan modifications, assistance in the recovery of funds from loan modification scams, and help applying for property tax exemptions for seniors and disabled homeowners. The center also connects home owners with free housing counseling and free loan modification application assistance.

**Kings County:** In conjunction with Access to Justice Program and Brooklyn Law School, the Court started a lunchtime assistance program. Attorneys volunteer on Mondays and Fridays between the hours of 12 and 2PM to lend assistance to the unrepresented. Though the attorneys answer questions on any civil matter within their practice or expertise, the program is concentrated on giving assistance with Art. 78s in New York City Housing Authority Cases (NYHCHA), matrimonials and lien law. The goal is to expand the concentration to other civil law categories in the future.

**New York County:** Our Help Center responded to 18,254 in-person inquires and countless telephone inquiries, albeit we did not keep a running count of the telephone inquiries. The Help Center works closely with our Public Access Library at 80 Centre Street (4th floor), and many unrepresented litigants were referred to that library in 2014 and were assisted by our court staff there. All of our other Back Offices also provide assistance to unrepresented litigants, especially our Ex Parte Support Office, Matrimonial Support Office, General Clerk's Office and Guardianship and Fiduciary Support Office. Our court processes between one half and two thirds of all of the uncontested divorces granted each year in New York City. Many unrepresented litigants were assisted by our Matrimonial Support Office. In 2014 a total of 101 "clients" were assisted in our uncontested matrimonial law clinic.

Once again our court hosted many tour groups from all manner of schools, primary schools to law schools, and from courts and bars all over the world. In 2014, all in all, 1628 persons, including students, judges and attorneys, were provided tours in our court. Senior Court Clerk Yasmin Beydoun is our local director of tours and she has been a truly outstanding, gracious and an extremely well informed host for all of these many groups.

Our Gender Fairness Committee (Co-Chairs, the Hon. Deborah Kaplan and Gregory Testa, Esq.), provided a number of programs which were open to the public and very well attended, including our Domestic Violence Awareness program, Women's History Month Program, Caren Aronowitz Unity in Diversity Program, Take Our Children to Work Day program, and many others.

## **New York City Family Courts**

The following projects are part of the New York City Family Court effort to expand the use of technology to provide greater access to justice for our litigants:

Utilizing video technology to ease access to the court, we are preparing a pilot to enhance the E-Share program wherein DV advocates assist litigants filing Family Offense petitions remotely from their offices. Currently the data is passed directly to UCMS but the

litigant must appear personally in the court to secure a TOP. We will be utilizing new software made available when we converted to Office 365 - LYNC - to allow these petitioners to remain in the advocate's offices and appear via video. This project is in conjunction with the Family Justice Center in Manhattan.

Remote filing and video appearance through the Mobile Legal Help Center. In conjunction with Justice Fisher's office we will be assisting the Mobile Legal Help Center in much the same manner as our pilot with the DV advocates offices. Litigants will appear at the Mobile Legal Help Center and will file family offense petitions with the aid of a DV advocate. The data will pass to UCMS via the E-Share program and the litigants will appear via video using LYNC software.

A joint project between Queens, New York and Richmond county Family Courts and the New York City Sheriff's Department regarding the service of court documents – most importantly, orders of protection, writs and warrants has resulted in a tremendous increase in successful service and a nearly 100% rate of the recording of service. Recording of service is required to issue extensions and modifications of orders of protection without requiring re-service and is a requirement to prosecute violations of such orders. In addition, increases in service have allowed litigants in these counties to take advantage of the NYS Sheriff's Association ALERT program wherein the petitioner is immediately notified of successful service of Orders of Protection via text to their mobile phone.

New York City Family Court continues to expand our use of DIY to assist our unrepresented petition rooms in filing petitions for our litigants. Each county, save Richmond due to space limits, continues to offer, on average, 6 or more DIY stations supported by petition room staff. DIY has enabled the court to continue to provide petition filing assistance even during this time of limited resources.

#### **Bronx County: Community Outreach and Training:**

- 2014 TIG Conference, presentations on DIY Programs, DV-APP, effective Help Centers
- Multiple DV-APP trainings for advocates and court personnel
- Queens Family Justice Center – Presented on DIY Forms and DV-APP project to multiple non-profits and agencies.
- Bridge the Gap training on Family Court matters
- Hosted Help Center Site visit – Bonnie Hough, California
- Staffed A2J table for Information Fair for Happy Healthy Families in recognition of National Child Abuse Prevention Month
- Bronx Family Justice Center – Presented on DIY Forms, Help Center and DV-App projects
- OCA Webinar (career services) DV-APP
- Hosted Help Center Site Visit, Judges and Court Administrators from the States of Montana and Kansas
- DIY training for volunteer associates for DIY Survey Project
- VAP training
- Six week DIY Survey utilizing dozens of intern and summer associates. Conducted interviews with Magistrates, court employees and litigants.
- Webinar DIY efficiency
- Provided tour and assisted in ProBonoNet's 15 year Anniversary video.
- Conducted site visit and trained the Anti-Violence Project's entire office on available A2J DIY programs, Services of Help Centers and DV-App.

- Month- A2J and Bronx Family Court co-sponsored five Domestic Violence Awareness training CLE presentations. Provided training to over 450 lawyers, court and agency staff.
  - Staffed A2J table for Teen Day
  - Hosted Help Center Site Visit – Court Administrators from New Jersey’s Newark Municipal Court
  - Hosted Help Center Site Visit, Katherine Altoneder, Director of SRLN
  - Initiated conversations with CUNY’s Public Safety to conduct training for officers and counselors in A2J programs and DV-App at Bronx Community College
- Efforts on A2J programs:
- Created and English and Spanish “fotonovella” videos for the Uncontested Divorce DIY form Program.
  - Added Spanish translation pop-ups on Custody/Visitation Modification and Enforcement DIY form programs.
  - Instituted (with Suffolk County Family Court) new court based instruction sheet for DIY Programs completed by litigants using a court computer.

**New York County:** New York County has expanded our DIY area in an effort to maximize the Access to Justice Initiative. We have incorporated the LIFT program and a staff member is assigned to the first floor DIY room and is available to answer questions. We have assigned a court assistant to DIY who encourages litigants to use the DIY program with great success. The Volunteer Attorneys are located next door to the DIY room making it easier for litigants to access both programs. Our first floor petition room staff prints out orders eliminating the need for litigants go to the seventh floor record room.

### **New York City Surrogates’ Courts**

**Bronx County:** Access to justice efforts taken by the staff of Bronx Surrogate’s Court is as follows:

- Since a large number of the court’s users are pro se litigants, the court has assigned Senior Court Clerk Joan Reid, a previous DIY Star, to a desk located at our entrance door. This arrangement works well, however due to this court’s staffing issues; she also acts as our Calendar Clerk. When available at the desk, she also assists all court visitors by providing general information and directing them the appropriate department.
- All unrepresented litigants seeking to be appointed as Voluntary Administrator are advised to use their home computer or, while in court, the DIY Public Computer to complete the DIY Small Estate Application. The Small Estate Applications that are filed using the (Non DIY Forms) manually completed court forms are filed by applicants who are uncomfortably using the computer and applications received by mail.
- We have not had similar success with the other Surrogate’s Court DIY programs (SDO and SCPA 17A.)
- We are in the process of creating a Bronx Surrogate’s web site, and revising and configuring our telephone recorded greetings to provide a clear path to Access to Justice and Surrogate’s DIY Forms. By doing so we can avoid having court users make unnecessary visits to the Court and increase our DIY usage.
- The web site and revised recorded greeting should be complete by the end of January 2015.

**Richmond County:** The Richmond County Surrogate's Court maintains a full-time Help Center, for the use of the public wishing to submit applications and petitions to the Court without the services of an attorney. This program includes, but is not limited to, a separate DIY Kiosk for the preparation and submission of Court documents.

The Help Center compiles and maintains a library of proceeding-specific informational handouts for the public's use, and supplies OCA published forms for proceedings commonly brought in the Surrogate's Court. In addition to servicing "walk up" inquires, all telephoned inquiries are returned and responded to by the Help Center, most usually the same business day, and no later than the next business day. Statistics show that about ¼ of the initial contacts to this Court, start out as a *Pro-Se* inquiry by either mail, telephone or in person visit to our Court. In fact in 2014, our statistics show that, in addition to all "walk-up" inquires and requests for assistance, 300 appointments were made with members of the public to have anticipated filings reviewed by a member of the law department of the Court. The Help Center processes all correspondence to the Court not submitted by an attorney.

The Richmond County Surrogate's Court participated in the following programs, and conducted the following community out-reach events, all with a view toward facilitating the public's access to attaining Justice, which is the principal function of the State's Courts:

- Court staff attended an OCA web seminar, for training regarding the "new" Help Center website
- Court staff attended a "DYI" seminar, for training regarding the selection of computer-based "DYI" options available to the public regarding common filings in the Court
- Guardianship Recognition and Education program conducted in the Court
- Hungerford School 17-A Guardianship community out-reach program conducted outside the Courthouse
- National Adoption Recognition and Education program conducted in the Court.

### **New York City Civil Courts**

**Bronx County:** This is what is available in Bronx Civil/Housing Court: CLARO program, Court Navigator Program and NYLAG.

**Queens County:** Queens Civil Court has had many positive programs and events in 2014 through the Access to Justice Initiative. In Civil Court, we have our Volunteer Lawyers Program working in Part 101 handling many consumer credit issues. The volunteers have made a positive impact in the Part and in the disposition of cases. Also, we have the CLARO program, which works out of Queens Civil Court on Friday afternoons from 1pm - 5pm. The CLARO group is under the direction of attorney Mark Weliky, and includes attorneys and law students who assist self-represented litigants in answering summonses and preparing orders to show cause. The CLARO group is a very dedicated group of young professionals who provide a much needed service for the self-represented litigants in Queens County.

In Small Claims Court, there is a group of attorneys and law students who work under the direction of Professor Meryl Blauston and provide Mediation Services for our small claims litigants, both during the day session and the Thursday evening session.

Housing Court has several innovative and helpful programs. Firstly, the NYLAG group contains dedicated attorneys and paralegals who provide representation or legal advice for qualified housing court litigants. The Navigator Group works in the housing parts to assist the litigants during the courtroom process. Finally, the Landlord & Tenant Volunteer Lawyer Program is available to assist our housing litigants every Monday and Friday.

Queens Civil Court is extremely proud of our Help Center where we provide all court users with literature, interactive computers and attorneys who will meet with litigants, one on one, and provide legal information. Our Help Center is also available to walk litigants through each step of an Uncontested Divorce Action from 2pm - 7pm each Thursday afternoon. Lastly, the Help Center is home for the Assigned Counsel Project which assists seniors, who meet the financial requirements, with their Housing Court issues. Access to justice is available through our many DIY computers placed in convenient locations through the court including, but not limited to the Help Center. The DIY program has proven to be a valuable tool in helping our self-represented litigants navigate their way through the court process. It would be remiss of me to not salute the Queens Civil Court employees who are extremely dedicated and assist the court users, each and every day, and most definitely provide Access to Justice.

## PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND VOLUNTEERS

The NYS Courts Access to Justice Program could not possibly reach as many New Yorkers in need of assistance without the help of our many partners, friends and volunteers outside the court system. Below is a list of the individuals, agencies, nonprofit organizations, charitable organizations, government offices, *pro bono* organizations, bar associations, law firms, corporations, law schools, social work schools, and colleges throughout New York State that generously offer their services to increase access to justice for unrepresented litigants. This list would be endless if it included the numerous court employees who continuously commit their time and energy to bolster our efforts. The Access to Justice Program is grateful for the assistance.

### PARTNERS AND FRIENDS

Alan Canner, Esq., The Legal Aid Society, Harlem Community Law Office  
Alan Ferster, Esq., Director of Community Affairs, Adult Protective Services, NYC Human Resources Administration  
Albany County Bar Association  
Albany Law School's Pro Bono Program  
Allison Schoenthal, Esq., Hogan Lovells  
Alston & Byrd, LLP  
Arent Fox LLP  
Arlene M. Markarian, Executive Assistant District Attorney  
Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver  
Banco Popular North America  
Bank of America  
Bank of New York Mellon  
Bar Association of Erie County  
Barclays  
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law  
Berkeley College  
Better Business Bureau  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC  
Blank Rome  
BNP Paribas  
Bonnie Rose Hough, Managing Attorney, California Administrative Office of the Courts  
Boricua College  
Bronx CLARO Program

Bronx Community College  
Bronx County Bar Association  
Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project  
Brooklyn Housing and Family Services  
Brooklyn Law School  
Brooklyn Legal Services  
Brooklyn Public Library  
Bruce Jordan, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, NYC Human Resource Administration  
Bushwick Housing and Legal Assistance Program  
Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, LLP  
Capital District Black and Hispanic Bar Association  
CAMBA  
CASA of Rockland County (Court Appointed Special Advocates)  
Catholic Migration Services  
Center for Court Innovation  
Chadbourne & Parke LLP  
Child Care Resources of Rockland  
Children's Law Center (CLC)  
Citigroup Global Markets, Inc.  
City Bar Justice Center  
City College  
CLARO NYC  
Clifford Chance  
Colgate-Palmolive Company  
College of Mount Saint Vincent

College of New Rochelle  
Community Mediation Services  
Columbia Law School  
Columbia Law School Lawyering in the  
Digital Age Clinic  
Cooley, LLP  
Council Member Antonio Reynoso  
Council Member Mark Treyger  
CUNY School of Law  
CUNY School of Law Community Legal  
Resource Network  
CUNY York College  
Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP  
Davis Wright Tremaine LLP  
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP  
Dechert LLP  
Dinah Luck, Senior Staff Attorney, MFY  
Legal Services, Inc.  
Disability Advocates, Inc  
DLA Piper LLP  
Donna Dougherty, Attorney-in-Charge,  
JASA/Legal Services for the Elderly in  
Queens  
Douglass J. Seidman, Manhattan  
Courthouse Project, The Legal Aid  
Society  
Duane Morris LLP  
EAC, Inc  
Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk  
County  
Educational Opportunity Center of  
Buffalo  
Elder Abuse Unit/Domestic Violence  
Bureau  
Empire Justice Center  
Empire Justice Center, Telesca Center  
for Justice  
Erie County Bar Association Volunteer  
Lawyers Project (VLP)  
Erie County Minority Bar Association  
Erie County Women's Bar Association  
Evan Denerstein, Esq. MFY Legal  
Services, Inc.  
Family Justice Center of Erie County

Feerick Center for Social Justice,  
Fordham Law School  
Greater New York Chamber of  
Commerce  
Gibb Surette, Esq., Legal Services of  
NYC  
Greenberg Traurig LLC  
Guidance Center of Brooklyn Heights  
Hamilton Madison House/Asian  
American Recovery Services  
Hinshaw & Culbertson, LLP  
Hiscock & Barclay  
Hispanic Society  
Hogan Lovells  
Hon. Howard L. Malatzky (Ret.)  
Hostos Community College  
Housing Court Answers, Inc.  
HSBC  
Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP  
Human Resources Administration's  
Office of Community Affairs  
Hunter College  
Immigration Equality  
Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic  
Elderly, Inc.  
Jamaica Homebase  
JASA  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
Johnson County District Court  
JP Morgan Chase  
Katie M. Lachter, Esq., Hinshaw &  
Culbertson, LLP  
Kaye Scholer LLP  
Kings County District Attorney's Office  
Kirkland & Ellis, LLP  
Korean American Family Service Center  
Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP  
Kroub, Silbersher & Kolmykov PLLC  
LawHelp.org/NY  
Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo  
Legal Assistance of Western New York,  
Inc.  
Legal Assistance of Western New York,  
Inc., Bath Office, Southern Tier Legal  
Services

Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc., Elmira Office, Chemung County Neighborhood Legal Services  
 Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc., Geneva Office  
 Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc., Ithaca Office, Tompkins/Tioga Neighborhood Legal Services  
 Legal Assistance Western New York, Inc., Jamestown Office, Southern Tier Legal Services  
 Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc, Olean Office, Southern Tier Legal Services  
 Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. Rochester Office, Monroe County Legal Assistance Center  
 Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvantaged of WNY, Inc.  
 Legal Services of the Hudson Valley  
 Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project  
 Legal Services NYC  
 Legal Services of NYC – Brooklyn  
 Lehman College  
 Lenox Hill Neighborhood House  
 Levelle & Finn, LLP  
 LIFT  
 Long Island Coalition for the Homeless  
 Lucas A. Ferrara, Esq., Newman Ferrara LLP  
 Lucy C. Newman, Esq. Staff Attorney, The Legal Aid Society  
 Manhattan CLARO Program  
 Manhattan College  
 Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University  
 McCarter & English LLP  
 Meagan Johnson, Esq., Safe Horizon, Domestic Violence Law Project  
 Medgar Evers College  
 Mercy College  
 Meredith Heller, Esq.  
 Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C.  
 MFY Legal Services, Inc.  
 Monroe College  
 Monroe County Bar Association  
 Montana Supreme Court  
 Morgan, Lewis, and Bockius, LLP  
 Morrison Foerster LLP  
 Munonyedi Ugboode, The Legal Aid Society, Harlem Community Law Office  
 My Sister's Place  
 Nancy Salamone, The Business of Me  
 Nassau County Bar Association  
 Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
 Nassau/Suffolk Law Services Committee, Inc.  
 National Center for Access to Justice  
 Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.  
 New York Appleseed  
 New York City Bar Association  
 New York City Bar Association Legal Referral Service  
 New York City County Clerks Office  
 New York City Housing Authority  
 New York City Paralegal Association  
 New York County Civil Court Gender and Fairness Committee  
 New York County District Attorney's Office  
 New York County Lawyers' Association  
 NYCLA  
 New York Law School  
 New York Legal Assistance Group  
 NYLAG  
 New York State Bar Association  
 New York State Board of Elections  
 New York State Court Officers Association  
 New York University Law School  
 New York Women's Agenda  
 New York Women's Bar Association  
 Niagara County Legal Aid Society, a Division of Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.  
 Nixon Peabody

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)  
NYC Commission on Human Rights  
NYC Department for the Aging  
NYC Department of Consumer Affairs  
NYC Department of Homeless Services  
NYC Family Justice Center  
NYC Human Resources Administration, Adult Protective Services  
NYC Human Resources Administration, Office of Legal Affairs  
NYC Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence  
Office of the Bronx Borough President  
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP  
Pace Women's Justice Center  
Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP  
Paul Hastings LLP  
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP  
Pfizer Inc.  
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York  
Pro Bono Net  
Pro Bono Partnership  
Proskauer Rose LLP  
Queens County Bar Association  
Queens County Bar Association, Lawyer Referral Service  
Queens Legal Services  
Queens Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.,  
Reed Smith LLP  
Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of Rockland County (RSVP)  
Richmond County Bar Association  
Robert Jacovetti, Esq., Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project  
Robin Hood  
Rockland County Bar Association  
Rockland County Probation Department  
Rockland County Women's Bar Association  
Ropes & Gray LLP  
Safe Horizon  
SCORE  
Self-Represented Litigation Network

Senator Andrew Lanza  
Serena Scott Ram, Esq., New York City Administration for Children's Services  
Shanna Tallarico, Esq., New York Legal Assistance Group  
Shearman & Sterling LLP  
Sidney Cherubin, Esq., Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project  
Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett  
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates  
Southside United Housing DFC  
St. John's University School of Law  
Staten Island CLARO Program  
Staten Island Trial Lawyers Association  
Staten Island Women's Bar Association  
Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP  
Suffolk County Attorney, Suffolk County Department of Law  
Suffolk County Bar Association  
Suffolk County Bar Association Pro Bono Foundation  
Suffolk County Children's Center at Cohalan Court  
Suffolk County Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Suffolk County Criminal Bar Association  
Suffolk County Department of Veterans Affairs  
Sullivan & Cromwell  
SUNY Buffalo Law School  
Tenant Protection Unit, Division of Housing & Community Renewal  
Thompson Hine LLP  
Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center  
The Cervantes Society of America  
The City College of New York  
The City College of New York, Skadden Arps Honors Program in Legal Studies  
The Legal Aid Society of the Bronx, Juvenile Rights Practice  
The Legal Aid Society of Harlem Community Justice Center

The Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc., Pro Bono Program	Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County, Inc.
The Legal Aid Society of New York City	Volunteers of Legal Services
The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Inc.	Volunteer Counseling Services of Rockland County
The Legal Aid Society of Rochester	Volunteer Lawyer's Project of Onondaga County
The Legal Aid Society of Rockland County	Watson Farley & Williams (New York) LLP
The Legal Aid Society of Suffolk County	Wedly Pluviose, Director, Rental Assistance Unit, FIA Housing & Homeless Services/Initiatives, NYC Human Resources Administration
The Legal Project, Capital District Women's Bar Association	Weil, Gotshal & Manges
The New York Community Trust	Westchester County Bar Association
The Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Services in New York	Westchester Women's Bar Association
UBS Wealth Management Americas	Western New York Law Center
Urban Justice Center	WHEDCO
University Settlement	White & Case LLP
U.S. Department of Labor	William Randolph Hearst Public Advocacy Center, Touro Law Center
U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Suffolk County	Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
U.S. Small Business Administration	Worker Justice Center of New York
Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Inc	Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University
Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts	Yoo Yeon, Esq., Legal Services of NYC
Volunteer Lawyers Project of Erie County	YMCA of Rockland County (Rockland Children's Center)
Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, Inc.	

## **VOLUNTEERS**

The pages of this Report detail the numerous ways in which the Access to Justice Program provides pathways to legal services, assistance, and information for unrepresented litigants, in an effort to level the playing field in the judicial system. Recorded throughout these pages are the extraordinary numbers of unrepresented litigants assisted in the court-based volunteer programs, as well as a review of the Access to Justice Program's highlights and milestones in 2014. What is not acknowledged in this report is the fact that none of these achievements would be possible without the generosity, skill and dedication of the individuals who volunteer their time to serve the many thousands of *pro se* litigants who would be lost without them. While the Partners and Friends enumerated in the previous section allow the Access to Justice Program to operate, there would be no court-based programs to operate without these volunteers. In recognition of their service, listed below are the names of the 2014 Access to Justice Program's stellar volunteers, divided by level of contribution. All of the individuals listed below were previously recognized during

National *Pro Bono* Celebration Week (see Part V). The Access to Justice Program is grateful for their ongoing support and service.

**The Access to Justice Program's Star volunteer of the year, recognized for five years of exceptionally dedicated service:**

Stanley Pruszynski

**The following outstanding volunteers provided the most volunteer hours in the programs they participated in:**

William Brick  
Michael Massmann  
Rafael Tassy  
Maria La Macchia  
Tamekia Hosang  
Joellen Valentine  
Gaston Kroub  
Pfizer, Inc.  
Betty Ware Hayes

Camille Prince-Mercado  
Jennifer Velez  
Kinshasa K. Hillery  
Eugene Y. Chen  
Adam S. Waldbaum  
Amy G. Davis  
Christopher K. Lee  
Sagar Sharma  
Susan Herskovits

**The following distinguished individuals volunteered substantially in excess of their required *pro bono* commitment:**

Alfia Agish  
Adam Algaze  
Diana Azcona  
Nermina Z. Arnaud  
Melissa Beck  
Brandy A. Beltas  
Yonatan Berkovits  
Ernesto Belzaguy  
Rosa Benneth  
Andrea Blair  
Marlowe Boettcher  
Cil Shaw- Brewer  
Elizabeth Burgos  
Mary Callaghan  
Nadia Campbell  
Bianca L. Cappellini  
James Caputi  
Sonia Casado-Cruz

Sean Cassidy  
Jacqueline N. Cazilas  
Tina Chan  
Lawrence Chandler  
Starr Chandler  
Della Dekay  
Pietro Deserio  
Joseph Devine  
Suzana Djencic  
Phillip Dunn  
Lenny Duran  
Emma Ekema  
John Elliot  
Dionne Ellis  
Jonathan Engel  
Andrea Engels  
Dorie Fader  
Michael Fernandez

Shani Friedman  
Renee Gallagher  
Matthew Gartenberg  
Thomas Jeffrey Giles  
Jamie Goldstein  
Kelly Graf  
Ariana Green  
Roshane Gregory  
John Gross  
Byrne Harrison  
Nathan Harvey  
Javon Henry  
Kristen Hester  
Kinshasa Hillery  
David A. Hoicka  
John T. Hood  
Amadi Jackman  
Claire James  
Andrew Katzenberg  
Sharon Katz  
Gena Kerr  
Katherine Kessler  
Richard M. Landman  
Juanita Lasprilla  
Ashley Laurie  
Nicholas A. Laveris  
Roberta Lavey  
Lindsay Lewis  
Eric Li  
Andrew Lillis  
Ami Lipman  
Howard L. Malatzky  
Carolyn Mann  
Rachael Martins  
Alix Mathe-Dumaine  
Crystal Mateo

Shaun McElhenny  
Brigette McLeod  
Grissel Mercado  
Ryan Moreno  
Ronny Nader  
Cara L. Newman  
Kristie E. Ortiz  
David Pantaleoni  
Robert Peters  
John Pierpont  
Justine Rayborn  
Victoria Rodriguez  
Elizabeth Rosa  
Jennifer Rubin  
Soanny Sanchez  
Shannon A. Seidenstein  
Islam Shahan  
Reshma Shah  
Zafar Shirinkulov  
Alisa Shmukler  
Gary Simmons  
Natasha Slater  
John Spears  
Marta Staniszezwska  
DeVoia Stewart  
Daniel Sullivan  
Mahbubar Talukdar  
Keren Tenenbaum  
Bedel Tiscareno  
Michael Valentine  
Joanna Vargas  
Jolisel Vargas-Lopez  
Tessa K. Weeks  
Brian White  
Carol Ann Williams  
Shazana Zumpfe-Cochran

**The following individuals donated 50 hours or more in Access to Justice Program's volunteer programs:**

Rachael Abrahami  
Jose Abrigo  
Jessica Acosta  
Amanie Akarah

Percival R. Bailey  
Aubrey Bowermaster  
Jennifer Cha  
Christine Chang

Xia Chen  
Shawn Cohen  
Hazel B. Dagoy  
Alexander Dergarabedian  
Anita Douglas  
Carolyn Fakury  
Ferdinand Fernandez II  
Jessica G. Gilbeault  
Hayley Halvorson  
Marissa Harrison  
Amy Hsiao  
Dennis Hulse  
Amin Hirra  
Gabriel Huntington  
Magda Laszlo

Cali Madia  
Chongyi Mao  
Lisa Marroni  
J. Olabisi Matthews  
Diane Miles  
Roxana Moussavian  
Novica Petovski  
Jason Reinfeld  
Rayne M. Sassower  
Steven Schwartz  
Shirali Shah  
Jean M. Stevens  
Tessa Weeks  
Kenneth Zweig





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