



GREATER BOSTON LEGAL SERVICES

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NEWS

Fall

2013

AmeriCorps Legal Advocate Reflects on a Year of Service in the Asian Outreach Unit

Kimberly Vo spent a year assisting GBLS Asian Outreach Unit (AOU) clients and staff. After saying her good-byes in July 2013, she reflected on her experience.

“The most rewarding aspect of my service year will always be knowing I helped someone in need. I will share one case that I worked on. My client fled to the U.S. from China for fear of persecution by the Chinese government. While living in Boston, he was a victim of a violent crime that left him paralyzed from the waist down. He is now a paraplegic and has to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life. AOU successfully helped him obtain a U-visa, giving him legal status in America, and submitted his application for a green card. He has been apart from his wife and kids for 23 years. AOU is also working on reuniting the family by securing immigration status for his wife.

I share this story because



AmeriCorps legal advocate Kimberly Vo, left, and one of the grateful Asian Outreach Unit clients she helped.

Photo by Linda Lank

this man could have driven himself to a place of hate, anger, and self-pity for how his life has turned out. Instead, he accepts his challenges and feels like there is hope again. Here is a man who has very little but wanted to donate \$100 of his money to AOU so that we could help more people like him. It is clients like him that inspire me to work harder for my clients so they can have hope, too.

Thank you to AmeriCorps

and AOU/GBLS for providing me with this chance to do good work, give back to my community, and make a difference in the lives of low-income Asian immigrants and refugees. I know that regardless of where my career path will lead me, the lessons learned and experiences gained here will help me excel anywhere I go. I will always be grateful for the experience to be a part of the AOU team and member of the GBLS family.”

When no one else can help, GBLS provides free assistance on civil (noncriminal) legal matters to poor people living in Greater Boston who need help obtaining food, income, shelter, and safety.

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Honors

Senior Attorneys **Dick Bauer** and **Ellen Shachter** were awarded a Hazel Hughes Award for community activism by the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), for their roles on the Somerville Community Preservation Act campaign. The Act was approved by nearly 75% of voters and imposes a property tax surcharge to be used for affordable housing, open space, and historic preservation.

Senior Attorney **Manisha Bhatt** was named by Governor Deval Patrick to the Judicial Nominating Commission.

Lead Attorney **Monica Halas** was named a Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly 2013 Top Women of Law honoree. The award recognizes “women who have made great professional strides and demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in private practice, the corporate arena and social advocacy.”

GBLS was awarded a Community Partner of the Year award by Year Up due to its “outstanding leadership in this community, helping guide young men and women from Year Up to reach their full potential and succeed. GBLS helps them navigate the challenging systems they encounter, as they try to bring stability to their own lives, as well as the lives of their families.” Year Up provides urban young adults with the skills, experience, and support to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education.

GBLS Helps Victim of Abuse and her Children Obtain Support and Stability

“Mary” is the mother of a 4- and 9-year-old and is a domestic violence survivor. Her children’s father, who has a substance abuse problem, abused her. She finally left him to ensure the children’s safety and stability.

Once away, Mary needed to focus on meeting her children’s needs — needs as basic as food, housing, clothes, and shoes — before being able to focus on finding a job. Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) was fortunately there to provide the safety net so Mary could provide those necessities.

Mary was determined to use the education and training requirement imposed on TAFDC recipients to obtain the skills needed to acquire a job that would support her family, so she enrolled in and earned a degree in Practical Nursing.

Unfortunately, part-way through her training DTA terminated her benefits when her DTA worker failed to

record Mary’s participation in her nursing program. Mary turned to GBLS for help. Her GBLS attorney, Lizbeth Ginsburg, was able to unearth the error and get her TAFDC reinstated. In addition, on more than one occasion, DTA failed to respond to Mary’s requests for a child care referral, which she needed to obtain a voucher for subsidized child care. Without it, Mary would not have been able to continue her nursing program. Lizbeth was there to help in these instances.

When Mary graduated from her Practical Nursing program, she emailed Lizbeth to tell her that “Things have been going well, I am going to take my NCLEX [National Council Licensure Examination] tomorrow to get my nursing license, then I will be able to move forward with getting a job and slowly but surely getting back on my own two feet. It would not have been possible at all without your help! ...I know that you went above and beyond for me many times



Attorney Ginsburg helped a family obtain the safety net and child care they needed to start a new life.

Photo by Linda Lank

and I can not express how much that means to me.”

Recently, Mary emailed to say that she is “working like crazy” and is “so happy about it!”. During the 2013 summer semester she also started taking some of the classes she needs to pursue her Registered Nursing degree. Her benefits, TAFDC, SNAP (Food Stamps), and child care have been essential; without them, she wouldn’t have been able to take the steps necessary to start her nursing career.

Your support ensured that Attorney Ginsberg was there to help.

Attorney Co-Authors and Edits New Book on CORI

GBLS’ Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Project attorney Pauline Quirion edited “Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Law” which was published by Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education in early 2013. She also authored several chapters.

The book deals with the collateral consequences connected with CORI as it affects employment, housing, legal immigration status, child custody and domestic violence cases, driver’s licenses, and juvenile and/or adult criminal court proceedings. It features practical steps for sealing,

correcting, and expunging CORI information and filing appeals of denials of requests to seal records. The book brings readers current on reforms that overhauled the CORI system in 2012 and the impact on the rights and protections of Massachusetts residents with CORIs.

Dear Attorney Filler:

This letter has been a long time in coming. I want to thank you for all the support and guidance you have given me. When someone referred you to me and we got together, I was feeling lost and hopeless. I can't remember the date we connected but I will never forget the caring and help you extended to me.

The economy had affected my business so much that I was having trouble paying my bills including bills for essential things like food and utilities. I felt completely overwhelmed because I could not take care of myself financially and I was feeling immobilized. This was especially scary since I always considered myself resourceful and resilient but was now feeling depressed and stuck. I didn't know where to turn for help and what help was out there for me.

You reassured me that help was out there and took the time to help me start filling out a food stamps application. You referred me to a local agency and social worker who came to see me quickly and continued to help me in concrete ways. When the food stamp bureaucracy started to give me a hard time you stepped in and offered help to deal with them. I am a smart woman but when I was feeling so much despair, I needed people like you to step in and offer me concrete help at no fee. If there had been a fee, I could never have used your help.

You always ended each request or question with the line that if you could ever be of more help just contact you. I felt as if you held my hand and kept me from drowning. I don't know what would have happened to me without you. I might be homeless or worse. While I'm on a limited income, at least I feel I now have my quality of life back. I feel back on my feet. I no longer feel helpless and hopeless. I need to be frugal but I'm managing.

I am so grateful your organization exists and you have helped me feel as though I have my life back. I have regained my sense of perspective and my sense of humor. You treated me with great care and respect. I always felt you had my back. Your organization is lucky to have you. Thank you more than I can express in words.

With appreciation,

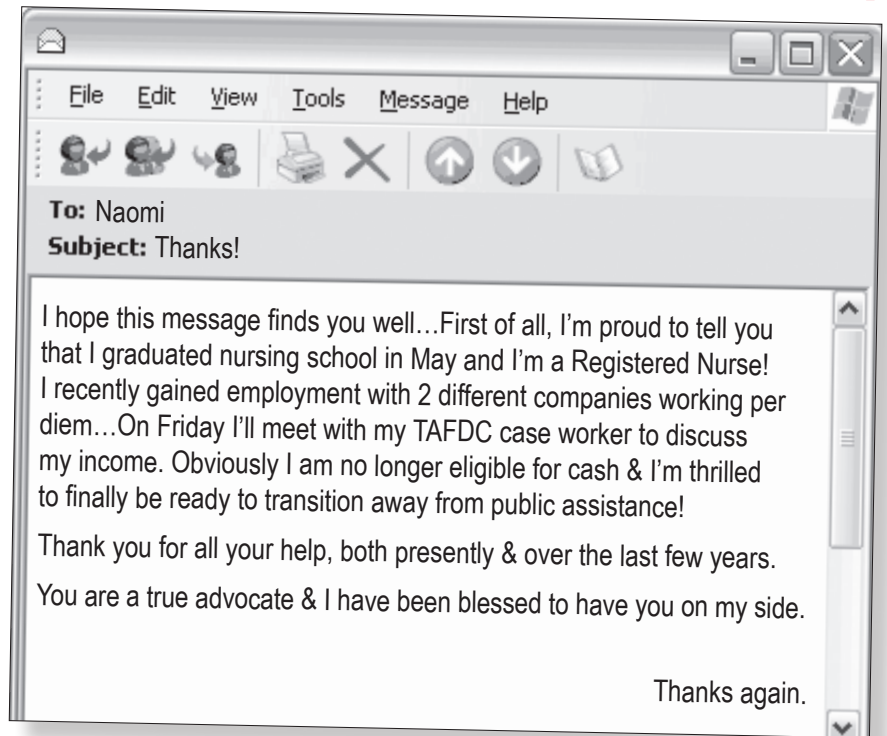
Cheryl

Grateful Former Client Reaches Out to Her GBLS Attorney

Attorney Naomi Meyer was thrilled to hear from “Julia”, a former GBLS client and single mom with a young daughter, who against all odds completed nursing school and then found work in her field. Attorney Meyer had successfully gotten Julia’s TAFDC and Food Stamps benefits reinstated after they were repeatedly terminated by the Department of Transitional Assistance after workers misplaced Julia’s monthly reporting forms. While working part-time and going to college full-time, striving for a better life for herself and her child, Julia had diligently submitted the forms.

After receiving Julia’s message, Attorney Meyer stated, “I never cease to be humbled by our clients’ resilience and perseverance.”

Attorney Meyer was able to help Julia because of your support and the support of GBLS’ other donors and grant providers. Thank you!



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