



**2008 Annual Report of the  
Women's Bar Foundation**

**Celebrating 15 years of advocacy to establish  
an equitable legal system, to promote social  
and economic equity for women, and to meet  
the legal needs of women and their children  
through expanding *pro bono* services**





**Christine J. Wichers**  
2008 WBF President

"You saved my life."

"I don't know what I would have done without you."

"I had nowhere else to turn."

These are real comments from real Women's Bar Foundation clients. They come from battered women, incarcerated women, homeless women, and elderly women and men who have received free legal assistance through the WBF thanks to generous support from YOU: law firms, businesses, grant-making organizations, and individuals who want to help. They come from grateful clients who receive attention and assistance from YOU: volunteer attorneys and mentors who give generously of their time, our phenomenal staff, our energetic board.

What all of you have in common is a singular dedication to providing equal access to legal representation. Perhaps someday every indigent person in America will be entitled to a lawyer, whether their legal problem is criminal or civil. Perhaps someday a person will have the legal right to an attorney even if her need is "only" to escape from domestic violence or "only" to avoid being evicted from her home. Until then, the WBF's services remain critical. Public funding for civil legal assistance is simply insufficient to help everyone in need. That's where the WBF comes in. We are the backstop for those who are turned away. Where would our clients go if the WBF ceased to exist?

Happily, we need not answer that question - at least for today. Although the downturn in the economy has put pressure on everyone's pocketbook and only increased the demand for free legal assistance, our wonderful supporters - YOU - continue to heed the call for help. With your continued support we will keep making headway, one client at a time, toward a society that promotes equal justice for all. Thank you for joining us.

Over the past 15 years, the Women's Bar Foundation has created a strong chain of support to meet the legal needs of the low-income women and children we serve. We are grateful for the generous assistance and support we've received from all of our partners, sponsors, volunteer attorneys, mentors, staff and donors, as well as the inspirational leadership of our Board of Trustees. We could not have done it without you.

Each and every one of you is a link to justice for battered women, low-income senior citizens facing end-of-life decision making alone, women in prison needing guidance and advice as they prepare to re-enter community life, impoverished families facing homelessness in Springfield, and disadvantaged or homeless women in Boston facing legal barriers to housing and jobs. Each one of you contributed to the growth of the WBF in 2008 - whether you volunteered to take a case, sponsored a training, made a donation, mentored a new attorney, provided in-kind services, or made phone calls to raise funding. One special person deserves to be acknowledged this year, and that is Lissy Medvedow, longtime Executive Director of the WBF. Lissy left to pursue other avenues to legal justice in June 2008.

Our collective accomplishments for 2008 include:

- 300+ telephone intake/consultations for victims of domestic violence and full legal representation for more than 120 clients
- 25+ educational presentations, at five different facilities, for women in prison, on topics such as custody, housing, government benefits, and warrant clearing
- 75+ low-income clients represented in eviction matters before the Hampden County Housing Court with the goal of tenancy preservation

The legal needs of low-income women and children expand and grow deeper in hard times like these. With your continued support, we can continue to offer help, and hope, to those who need us most. Thank you.



**Nicci Meadow**  
Executive Director

## The Family Law Project for Battered Women (FLP)

serves domestic violence victims in family law cases throughout the Commonwealth.

The FLP has two primary missions. The first is to **empower domestic violence victims** by giving them a voice in their abuse-prevention order and family law cases. As such, we seek to prevent further abuse, homelessness, loss of child custody, and to decrease repeated court hearings. The FLP's second mission is to **engage lawyers in *pro bono* service** and, thus, make them stakeholders on issues involving low-income domestic violence victims. **The FLP is unique** because it is designed to meet the legal needs of those who have already been denied representation by a legal services agency and who might otherwise "fall through the cracks."

In 2008, the FLP **talked to 300 women** over the phone about their cases. **138** of these women **came in for in-person meetings**, where FLP staff could review their paperwork, have an in-depth conversation about their issues, and give them immediate advice on their cases. Additionally, the FLP **trained 150 volunteer attorneys** on the basics of family law, domestic violence, and issues relating to poverty. In 2008, the FLP referred **122 family law and 209A restraining order cases** to its pool of volunteer attorneys. All of the volunteer attorneys were mentored by experienced family law practitioners who understand the devastating effect of domestic violence on low-income women.


"Jane," a long-term victim of domestic violence, has three children with her abusive husband. During a violent incident, Jane attempted to call the police and the abuser ripped the phone away from her and hit her with it. This incident prompted Jane to obtain a 209A Abuse Prevention Order out of District Court and file for divorce in the Probate and Family Court *pro se*. She received an order for child support from the court, but her husband refused to pay it and, in retaliation, he filed a motion to have unsupervised visitation with the children despite his history of violence and drinking. The parties also owned a home together, but without the child support payments, the home was about to go into foreclosure. With the help of the WBF staff and a volunteer attorney, Jane received a lump sum payment from her husband to prevent her home from going into foreclosure. The WBF volunteer attorney also helped Jane to obtain a divorce, sole legal and physical custody of her children, regular child support through the Department of Revenue and an equitable distribution of assets. Today, Jane is enjoying an independent life free from abuse and is living safely with her children.

## The Framingham Project for Incarcerated Women

recruits lawyers to serve the unmet legal needs of women in our jails and prisons.

In 2008, the Framingham Project:

- **Handled 20 warrant-clearing cases**, allowing women to move forward in life without the fear of outstanding legal issues
- Conducted **monthly educational outreach sessions for incarcerated women** at Kingston House and the South Bay House of Corrections, helping to prepare the women for imminent re-entry into the community
- Worked with Harvard Law School's Prison Legal Assistance Project, **providing training for law students representing female inmates**



"Tammy," an incarcerated mother who wanted some contact with her children, contacted our office in early 2008. The father of her children had refused to give the mother's letters to the children or allow the children to ever visit their mother. The children simply believed their mother no longer loved them.

The Framingham Project's volunteer attorney presented research to the court on the importance for children of maintaining connections with their incarcerated parents. The court ordered a Family Service investigation which supported increased contact with the mother. Now, the mother has a court order that allows her increased contact with her children, paving the way for the mother to re-enter her children's lives once she is released in 2009.

## The Elder Law Project

The Elder Law Project offers low-income elderly women and men *pro bono* legal preparation of simple wills, health care proxies, durable powers of attorney, and homestead declarations. Volunteer attorneys meet with seniors in their own communities, at senior centers and low-income housing developments, and return at a later date to assist in the execution of the documents.

Since the launch of the Elder Law Project in 2000, more than 250 low-income senior citizens have received free legal preparation of vital end-of-life documents.

In addition to conducting site visits at the Cambridge Senior Center and the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard Association, in 2008 the Elder Law Project worked with a new panel of presenters and writers to update its training manual, and prepared for a new slate of volunteer attorney trainings scheduled for 2009.

"As a volunteer for the Elder Law Project, I visited my community's local senior center, where an elderly woman shared her life story with me, as well as her end-of-life concerns. Having lived through the Great Depression, she held her possessions dear, and thus had a lifetime's worth of sentimental items she wished to leave to friends and family members. I provided her with a simple will and health care proxy. Many elders don't have anyone to help them with end of life decision-making, but fortunately she had a niece to name as her health care agent. Thanks to my prior training with the ELP, I was able to execute her estate planning documents with confidence. This simple yet meaningful contribution to an elderly woman's sense of well-being left me with the personal satisfaction of knowing that I had helped someone who really needed me."

## The Hampden County Housing Court Project

The Hampden County Housing Court Project provides *pro bono* representation to indigent tenants and landlords on eviction day. The Project was created in response to the Hampden County Housing Court's plea to local attorneys to help reduce the number of unrepresented people in Housing Court on eviction day. The Western Massachusetts Committee of the Women's Bar Association, working with the judges and staff of the Housing Court, and the law firm of Heisler, Feldman, McCormick & Garrow, P.C., created a training and mentoring program. The attorneys involved in the project have represented well over 80 clients in eviction matters before the Western Division of the Housing Court with the goal of tenancy preservation.

Partners in the Hampden County Housing Court Project include MassMutual Financial Group; Heisler, Feldman, McCormick & Garrow, P.C.; the Massachusetts Justice Project; and the Hampden County Bar Association.

## The Women's Lunch Place Project

The Women's Lunch Place Project (WLPP) matches volunteer attorneys with guests of the Women's Lunch Place, a daytime community for homeless women and their children. WLPP volunteer attorneys provide representation in multiple areas of law, including immigration, public benefits, health care, bankruptcy, housing, domestic violence, and criminal defense.

Throughout the years, the WLPP's volunteer attorneys have provided legal advice and representation to many women who would not otherwise have had access to legal services, and have represented those women with dignity, respect and understanding.



## In Memoriam - Paul Poth

The entire WBF family was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Mintz, Levin attorney Paul Poth after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Paul was a great supporter of the WBF, generously giving his time, talent and energy as a stand-up comic during Comedy Night 2008. The WBF mourns Paul's loss but is grateful to have had the opportunity to laugh with him for a good cause.

## WBF Comedy Night 2008

The WBF held its fourth annual Lawyers "Stand Up" for the WBF Comedy Night on May 1, 2008 at Boston's Omni Parker House Hotel. Touted as the funniest legal event of the year, the WBF was pleased to entertain 350 attorneys from around the Commonwealth, while raising funds and bringing attention to the WBF's *pro bono* projects.

Host and comedian David Yas, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly, led the event for the fourth year, and finished the evening with his crowd-pleasing year-in-review rap. Yas was joined by featured comedians Hon. Suzanne DeVecchio, former Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Superior Court, and Mintz Levin attorney Paul Poth. The New England School of Law was honored as the 2008 WBF Pro Bono Award winner for the school's work and volunteerism with the Family Law Project for Battered Women.

## Thank you to our 2008 Comedy Night Sponsors

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We owe immense  
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WBF 209A Panel, including:

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Domestic Violence Project

Foley Hoag LLP  
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Special thanks to the  
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Family Law Project  
trainings in 2008:

Foley Hoag LLP

Ropes & Gray LLP

Seyfarth Shaw LLP



## Become a Volunteer Attorney

Volunteering for one of the *pro bono* projects of the Women's Bar is rewarding, challenging, educational, and inspiring. Not only will you receive comprehensive training in an area of law you may not otherwise have an opportunity to learn, but you'll be providing critical legal services to people who do not have access to legal representation. The people we serve in our programs desperately need your help. And you won't be alone. We assign mentors to our volunteer attorneys, and your mentor will be there to provide guidance, answer questions, review documents, and more.

## Become a Mentor

One of the most important components of the Women's Bar *pro bono* projects is our commitment to provide mentors to volunteer attorneys. Each volunteer attorney is paired with a senior attorney who specializes in a discrete field of law. Over the years, we have found that mentors truly distinguish the Women's Bar *pro bono* projects. We need mentors for all of our *pro bono* projects. If you are willing to share some time and wisdom with a new attorney, please contact the WBF via e-mail at [rbiscardi@womensbar.org](mailto:rbiscardi@womensbar.org) or by telephone at 617.973.6666.

## Become a Contributor

The Women's Bar Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) organization, dedicated to providing *pro bono* legal services to indigent and low-income individuals, primarily women and children. We are funded exclusively through the generosity of grants, foundations, educational institutions, firms, corporations, and private donors. The WBF leverages each donation for the greatest return on investment, and every donation makes a measurable and lasting difference to the WBF. All contributions to the Women's Bar Foundation are fully tax deductible. To make a contribution, visit us online at <http://www.womensbar.org/WBF>, or send a check to: Women's Bar Foundation, 27 School Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02108.

# Income

01/01/08 - 12/31/08

**Fundraising Initiatives**

**\$100,319**

**Grants**

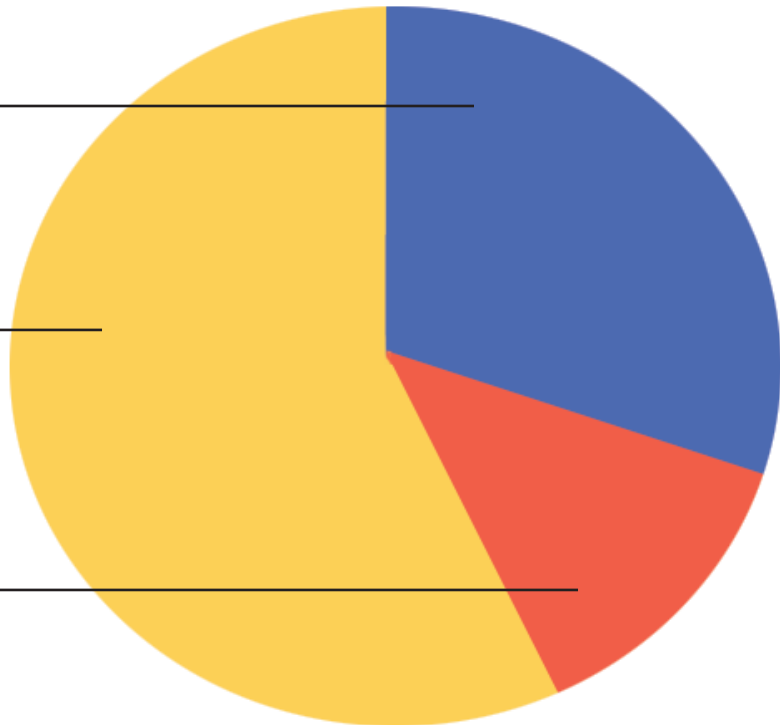
**\$177,739**

**Pledges and Individual Donations**

**\$56,468**

**Total Income**

**\$334,526**



# Expenses

01/01/08 - 12/31/08

**Fundraising**

**\$17,701**

**Administrative**

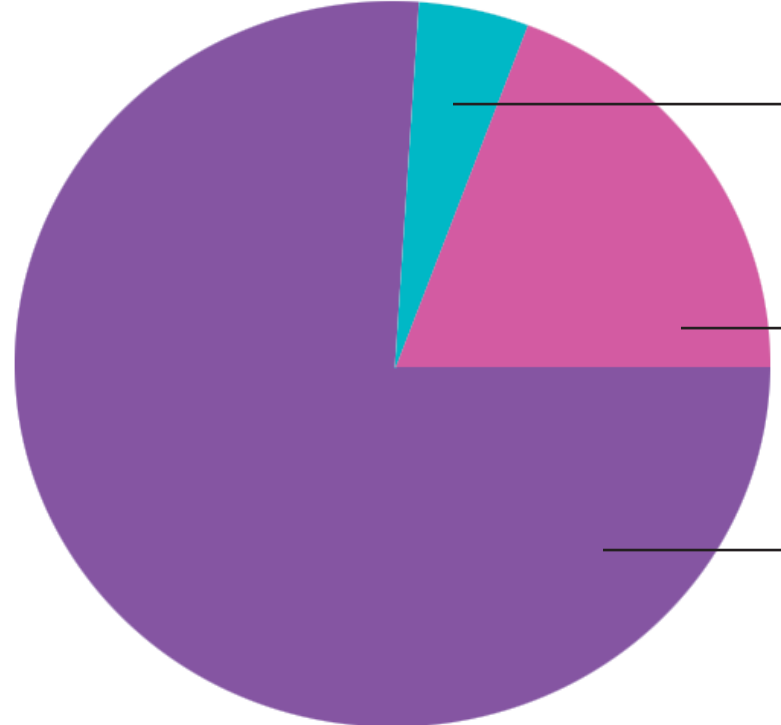
**\$49,414**

**Programming**

**\$212,010**

**Total Expenses**

**\$279,125**



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**Michelle Peirce** - Donoghue Barrett & Singal, P.C.  
**Djuna Perkins** - Brody, Hardoon, Perkins & Kesten, LLP  
**Jane Rabe** - Office of the Bar Counsel, Board of Bar Overseers  
**Lynda Harbold Schwartz** - Ernst & Young  
**Sally A. Walker** - Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts

