



WOMEN'S
BAR
FOUNDATION
ANNUAL
REPORT

2009





ERIN HIGGINS
2009 WBF PRESIDENT

Why do we do what we do? As lawyers, that question crops up for most of us, sometimes repeatedly, and usually in the very early hours of the morning. In this annual report, we share some answers to that question, through the stories of the volunteer attorneys who make our projects possible, and the clients who are empowered simply by the presence of an attorney in their lives. A volunteer attorney was able to give her elderly client “peace of mind” by drafting a set of estate planning documents. A young mother, with the assistance of two volunteer attorneys, was able

to leave an abusive marriage and ensure a safe environment for her children. A woman in prison, with the help of another volunteer attorney, was able to resolve a clerical error that otherwise would have kept her in prison past the end of her sentence. Meanwhile, in the western part of the state, volunteer attorneys from the private and public sectors are attempting to level the playing field for low-income clients on the brink of homelessness. The passion and commitment of these volunteer attorneys is inspiring, and we hope that you will enjoy hearing about their successes. We also hope that you will become one of them. With five different *pro bono* projects, the WBF can use the time and talents of all.

In this extended period of economic uncertainty, we also are very grateful for the unwavering commitment demonstrated by our firm sponsors and individual donors. Our 2009 Comedy Night event exceeded our fundraising expectations, and several firms graciously provided us with space and refreshments for our highly-rated trainings. Many of the attendees at the Women’s Bar Association Gala in October 2009 gener-

ously made significant on-the-spot donations. In 2009, we also launched a new three-year “Women of Action” pledge campaign, designed to honor those women of action who have worked, and are still working, to make the justice system equally accessible to all. The success of these fundraising efforts enabled us to continue providing our clients with the high level of service for which our programs have become known. We have identified our firm sponsors and our individual donors in the back pages of this report, and we take this opportunity to thank them again for their support.

Thanks also are due to our incredible staff, our committed mentoring attorneys, and our passionate training attorneys. They “walk the walk” in terms of working towards the goal to which we all aspire—the establishment of a just and equitable society. We rely on them year-in and year-out to keep the WBF true to its mission.

Having achieved some of our goals in 2009, our volunteer attorneys, staff, mentors, trainers, donors, and WBF Board members are now writing our story for 2010. We sincerely hope that you will be a part of it.

My 4 1/2 year old daughter explains to her friends that my job is to make more lawyers. I asked her why she thought I needed to make more lawyers. She said “because there are women and families that need lawyers to do more things for them because they don’t have protection enough to keep them safe and other people need help in the world. The end.”

Only that’s not the end of the story, it’s just the beginning of my story as the Executive Director of the Women’s Bar Foundation (WBF). Back in 1993, a small group of women in the Women’s Bar Association founded the WBF to meet the legal needs of women and children who would not otherwise have access to lawyers. Since then, our volunteers, mentors and trainers number over one thousand and have handled cases for victims of domestic violence, homeless women, families facing eviction, incarcerated women re-entering the community, and elders facing end-of-life decision making alone.

With a small hard-working staff and a dedicated and active Board, as my daughter says, together we make an important difference in the lives of

low-income women and their families. We are only able to accomplish so much, because of the generosity of our volunteer attorneys, volunteer attorney mentors, donors and supporters. I am extremely grateful for your support as you choose the WBF for your philanthropic dollars, your firm or corporation’s resources and your volunteer time. Thank you.

This year marked a new Pledge Drive for the WBF. Our pledge drive served a dual purpose as we also told the stories about the accomplishments of past women lawyers – individual women who broke barriers for women in the legal profession including: Lelia J. Robinson, the first woman admitted to the Massachusetts Bar, Blanche Braxton Hicks, the first African-American Woman Lawyer admitted to the Massachusetts Bar , Jennie Loitman Barron, the First Woman Superior Court Judge , Emma Fall Scholfield, the First women District Court Judge, and Sadie Shulman, the first Boston Municipal Court Judge.

Please help us write the next chapter of the Women’s Bar Foundation and to break barriers for low income women and their families to access justice.

NICCI MEADOW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I welcome your suggestions, ideas and contributions. We need your support in these challenging economic times to continue to zealously recruit and engage volunteer attorneys, leverage private resources and raise the necessary funding to help meet the needs of low income women and their families.



FAMILY LAW PROJECT FOR BATTERED WOMEN

The Family Law Project for Battered Women (FLP) provides high quality legal representation and assistance in family law matters to victims of domestic violence to ensure each victim's safety. By recruiting, training and mentoring *pro bono* attorneys to represent FLP clients, we maximize private sector resources. Through all of these efforts, the FLP's *pro bono* attorneys become stakeholders and advocates on issues involving domestic violence and poverty. To be eligible for services, a client must first be denied representation by a legal services organization and then her income must fall under 250% of the federal poverty guidelines (for example, \$36,425 for a family of two). This year, FLP attorneys spoke with 1,588 women about their cases. FLP staff provided immediate legal advice to 294 women and 116 women had in-person meetings with FLP staff who reviewed their documents and provided additional legal advice. The FLP's *pro bono* attorneys, with guidance from volunteer mentors, successfully handled 132 family law and restraining order cases, an 8% increase over last year. Additionally, 163 volunteer attorneys new to family law or litigation were trained in family law and domestic violence by FLP staff and more than a dozen volunteer attorney trainers.

J “Jane Doe” is a 25-year old woman who was living at a domestic violence shelter with her three children after fleeing her husband who threatened to kill her. The children were so afraid of their father that the oldest would spontaneously vomit every time her father yelled. When Jane explained to her husband that their children were afraid of him, he replied, “Children should be scared of their father.” The domestic violence shelter put Jane in touch with the FLP. The FLP found Jane an attorney and a paralegal from a law firm to represent her. The father hired an attorney who sought custody of the children in retaliation for Jane leaving him. In court, he argued that the children should be in his sole custody because Jane was living in a shelter. The judge was sympathetic to that argument and if Jane's attorney had not prepared so well in advance, Jane might have lost custody. Instead, Jane's attorney filed a strong

affidavit from Jane detailing the abuse as well as a lengthy memo of law on the Custodial Presumption Act. Based on these pleadings and Jane's attorney's oral argument that Jane was the primary and better caretaker for these children and should not lose custody because she fled abuse to a domestic violence shelter, the Court awarded Jane sole physical custody of the children and no visitation for the father. Jane is now living in her own apartment with her children and all are safe from the abuser.

A FAMILY LAW PROJECT SUCCESS STORY



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THE
ELDER
LAW
PROJECT

The Elder Law Project's two-fold mission is to educate seniors about the importance of having end-of-life documents—wills, health care proxies, durable powers of attorney, and living wills—and to prepare these documents for low-income elders on a *pro bono* basis.

The ELP makes presentations to elders at senior centers and low-income elderly housing developments to explain the purpose and importance of these end-of-life-documents. Low-income seniors who are interested in having such documents prepared meet with volunteer attorneys at these sites. Once the documents have been prepared, the volunteer attorneys return to the site to have the documents executed.

The ELP held two training sessions in 2009, at which a total of 60 new volunteer attorneys were trained. Nearly a dozen experienced estate planning attorneys helped to update the training manual provided to participants and participated as speakers at the training sessions.

During 2009, Deborah Drosnin, Esq. joined the Project as the Volunteer Attorney Coordinator. This year, the ELP made presentations to seniors at six site locations in Boston, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, and Roxbury, Massachusetts. Twenty five volunteer attorneys met with and prepared documents for 36 clients at seven locations in Boston and Cambridge.

As a Volunteer Attorney for the Elder Law Project, I had the opportunity to draft estate planning documents for a low-income elderly woman living in affordable housing in Boston. When I came into the building, I immediately felt welcomed by the staff and the elders. My client was very grateful to have someone listen to her concerns and provide her with legal solutions. Due to my training with the Elder Law Project, I was able to address her estate planning needs with confidence. Afterward, my client told me how much she valued the experience: "Everyone was so nice, and I really appreciated it. If I went to another lawyer, I would have had to pay, and I couldn't afford that." She added: "It gave me peace of mind." I'll long remember my client, and how pleasant and thankful she was. I'm sincerely grateful to the Elder Law Project for giving me the opportunity to use my skills to give back to the community in such a meaningful way.

LAUREN VITALE, ESQ., ELP
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY

My 68-year-old client was healthy, energetic, and full of humor. She and her sister walked a couple of miles every morning and she regularly went to a coffee shop with her girlfriends, where they would laugh for hours. She wished to bequeath items that had sentimental value, including a 62-year-old set of china, a dining room set, and jewelry. She also wished to provide for a close friend, who was like a daughter to her. Through the Elder Law Project, I assisted the client by drafting and executing a customized will, power of attorney, health care proxy, and living will, in addition to describing the effects of these documents in detail.

SARAH ROXBURGH, ESQ.,
SHELTER LEGAL SERVICES AND
ELP VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY



STORIES
FROM
VOLUNTEER
ATTORNEYS



THE FRAMINGHAM PROJECT FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN

The Framingham Project serves women incarcerated in Massachusetts' prisons and jails, or those who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Currently, volunteer attorneys work to clear warrants, helping women get released from prison in a timely manner or advance to a lower security classification that permits greater access to educational and programmatic opportunities while they serve their sentences. In the summer of 2009, the Framingham Project organized a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) sealing training. To date, volunteer attorneys have accepted nine women for representation in CORI sealing cases. Sealing a CORI removes a significant barrier to housing and employment, especially in today's difficult economy.

In addition to these direct services, the Framingham Project holds educational presentations for women in M.C.I. Framingham, the Suffolk County House of Correction, the Women's Re-entry Program of the Boston Rescue Mission, and Aid to Incarcerated Mothers (AIM). Volunteer attorneys meet with women and answer questions regarding family law, child custody, care and protection, housing, CORI, and criminal warrant clearing. With the help of several talented law students through Suffolk University's Rappaport Center, the Framingham Project is working to create a comprehensive manual that will detail major issues in each of these legal arenas. This manual will provide every volunteer attorney with the information needed to assist women prisoners.

In August 2009, I met A.L. at the Suffolk County House of Corrections. A.L. was a few weeks from finishing a 60-day sentence for a probation violation and was 6-months pregnant. It was not her first time at the house of corrections and she appeared resigned this would not be her last. A.L. had five open warrants in five different district courts, including a warrant for failure to appear at arraignment in Roxbury District Court and one at the BMC for failure to pay restitution she couldn't afford. Before A.L. was released from the house of corrections we were able to clear the warrant in Malden District Court, get the underlying case dismissed, and clear the warrant in Quincy District Court, where we obtained an extension of her probation. I assured the court that I would make sure A.L. had all warrants cleared if she was released that day. Though they wanted to hold her until the Commonwealth could transport her to the

remaining courts to clear the warrants, the judge offered to release A.L. to my custody if I gave the Court my word that I would personally drive A.L. to the courts that day. I had a decision to make. I knew A.L. needed someone in the justice system to believe in her and it was my turn. I made up my mind. With each warrant cleared, throughout this long process, I could see the young woman turn slowly into a more confident person—I knew I could help more. After her release, we cleared the West Roxbury warrant and were able to persuade the judge to dismiss the underlying case on A.L.'s promise that she will complete an expecting mother's program. A.L. never missed a court date. After clearing the warrant at BMC, Judge Redd reduced her restitution by half. The Roxbury case was eventually dismissed for failure to prosecute. The Quincy case was also dismissed

due in great part to A.L.'s efforts to clear the warrants and resolve her open cases in the other district courts. A.L. is now a mother to a 4-month old baby girl. After spending 6 months at St. Mary's Women and Children's Center, A.L. has moved with her baby girl to an apartment of her own. She is still paying restitution and is enrolled in a GED program. A.L. has taken the initiative to take back control of her life and is looking ahead with hopeful eyes. I believe that the WBF gave A.L. the chance she deserved; the break she was waiting for.

ARIATNA VILLEGAS-VAZQUEZ, ESQ.
WBF FRAMINGHAM PROJECT
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY

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WOMEN'S LUNCH PLACE PROJECT

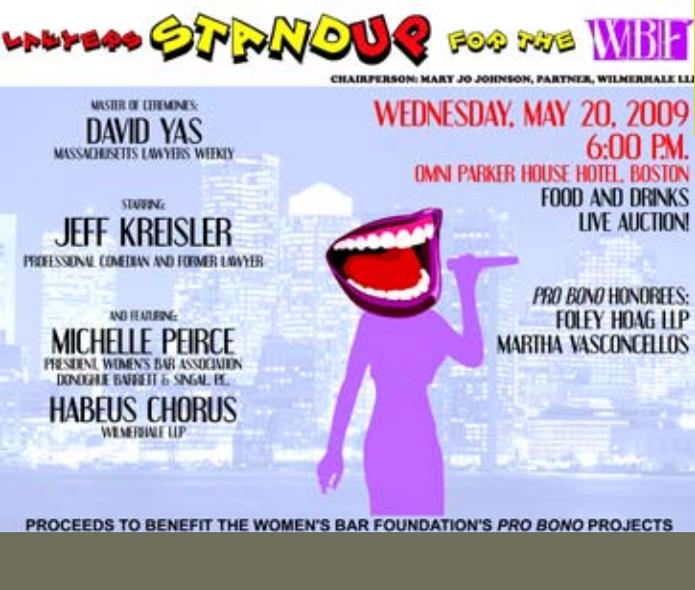
The WBF began partnering with the Women's Lunch Place in 1993 to help meet the legal needs of its guests, primarily low-income homeless women, victims of violence, or women suffering from mental health problems and addiction. The Women's Lunch Place provides a daytime refuge for these vulnerable women. Many face complicated legal problems which become obstacles to meeting their basic daily needs. Many also have limited ability to understand the legal issues they are facing. Without legal advocacy, many of the women are left to navigate the complex judicial system alone, often with unsuccessful results. In 2009, the WBF helped to re-structure the Women's Lunch Place Project's internal advocacy program, which had suffered budget cuts in the recession. The WBF's volunteer attorneys shared information and legal resources and conducted legal training for the WLP staff and made presentations on a variety of legal topics to guests. The WBF also convened a panel of attorneys with expertise in housing, government benefits, criminal law, personal injury law, employment law, family law, mental health law, and bankruptcy law to provide telephone guidance to staff to help spot legal issues and make referrals to legal resources on behalf of its guests. WBF Volunteer Attorney Nikki Stewart, who joined the Project in 2009, is currently coordinating the Project for the WBF. The WBF also collaborated with the Volunteer Lawyers Project to enhance the WLP's internal legal advocacy services. Additionally, members of the WBF's Board of Trustees volunteered at the WLP to help provide meals and distribute clothing to guests to become more familiar with the direct operations of the WLP.

HAMPDEN COUNTY HOUSING COURT PROJECT

The Hampden County Housing Court Project provided free legal services for 36 litigants this year who were facing either eviction or loss of their home and who did not have financial means to retain the services of an attorney. 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. The attorneys involved in the project have represented hundreds of clients since its inception in eviction matters before the Western Division of the Housing Court. As part of a "Celebrate *Pro Bono*" reception in October 2009 honoring the *pro bono* legal work of attorneys across western Massachusetts, the Women's Bar Foundation honored the project's partners including MassMutual Financial Group, the law firm of Heisler, Feldman, McCormick & Garrow, P.C., the Massachusetts Justice Project, and the Hampden County Bar Association. The collaboration is an example of the difference that the combined resources of the private and public sectors can make in the lives of people in need. Each year, these partners devote countless hours to the representation of low-income tenants and landlords appearing in the Hampden County Housing Court.

I met my client in Court on eviction day. She was there with her husband and their four very young children. When I met her she was already in mediation and prepared to sign a voluntary eviction agreement to move out within 30 days and was going to repay all her withheld rent. However, she and her family had spent the entire winter without heat and she had with her a Board of Health report reflecting numerous other significant state sanitary code violations. After I appeared as her *pro bono* lawyer through the Women's Bar Foundation project, we reached an agreement that allowed the tenants to continue to live in the apartment. In light of all the code violations, the landlord waived the back rent he claimed was owed and he was required to make all the necessary repairs so that the apartment was safe and in compliance with the state sanitary code, My client was not required to resume paying rent for an additional three months until all those repairs were completed.

SUZANNE GARROW, ESQ.
WBF HAMPDEN COUNTY HOUSING COURT
PROJECT VOLUNTEER'S TESTIMONY



LAWYERS STAND UP FOR THE WBF

The WBF's annual fundraiser, Lawyers Stand Up for the WBF, prides itself on being the funniest legal event all year. Returning for a command, repeat performance, David Yas, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly, hosted the event (and kept his shirt on the entire evening). WBA's President Michelle Peirce of Donoghue Barret and Singal, P.C. displayed "Presidential" humor in her witty jokes of the pressures and

pleasures of the legal profession. New to the 2009 lineup, Habeas Chorus, a group of lawyers from WilmerHale performing humorous musical parodies, exhibited its longstanding tradition of bringing people together, showcasing the spirit of the firm, and poking fun at anyone or anything that affects the legal community. The group's appearance at Comedy Night marked its first performance outside WilmerHale. Jeff Kreisler, former lawyer and professional comedian, inspired our local legal talent to consider giving up their day jobs and join the pro tour! The Live Auction included rentals on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Western MA, a Boston Harbor Boat Ride and a Hyannis Golf Outing. The WBF's first silent auction generated its own unique form of entertainment in addition to providing an opportunity for everyone to provide further support of the WBF. Combined, the event raised approximately one-third of the WBF's operating budget for the year.

The WBF honored Foley Hoag LLP and Martha Vasconcellos with *pro bono* awards for 2008 at the annual fundraiser. Foley Hoag LLP was honored for its pioneering program in the field of domestic violence prevention. Foley Hoag's Domestic Violence Prevention Program provides legal representation to low-income victims of domestic violence referred to the firm by the Women's Bar Foundation and several other victim services providers. In 2008, Foley Hoag represented nearly 90 victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, drawing on the resources of more than 80 lawyers, technology specialists, summer associates, law clerks and paralegals at the firm. At least 20 associates actively handle 209A, sexual assault, immigration, housing, education and other types of cases for victims.

CONTINUED

Martha Vasconcellos, Brazilian native, 1968 Miss Universe, and Supervisor of the Domestic Violence Program at the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers ("MAPS") was recognized for her tireless support and advocacy for victims of domestic violence within the Portuguese-speaking community in Boston. She assists victims in obtaining *pro bono* attorneys to represent them in the Family and Probate courts on family law and Abuse Prevention orders and to immigration attorneys for Violence Against Women Act Self Petitions, U visas and T visas. She supports these victims as they go through the legal process including explaining the U.S. legal system, which differs vastly from that in Brazil and Cape Verde. In 2008, MAPS referred 19 cases to the WBF and Martha, herself, provided support on 10 of those cases.

THE WBF WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS OF THE 2009 LAWYERS 'STAND UP' FOR THE WBF COMEDY NIGHT EVENT

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2009 ABUSE PREVENTION ORDER REFERRALS

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Domestic Violence Project
- Sullivan & Worcester LLP
Domestic Violence Representation Program
- Bingham McCutchen LLP
Domestic Violence Prevention Program
- Liberty Mutual Insurance Company Legal Department

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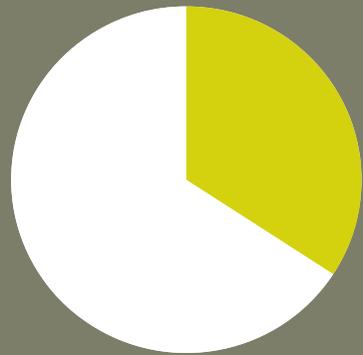
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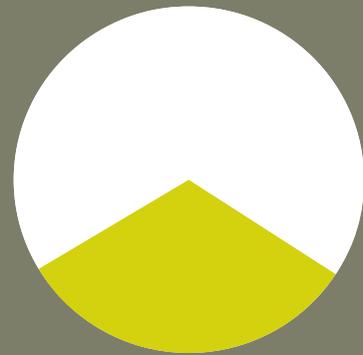
JANUARY 1
DECEMBER 31 2009

TOTAL
INCOME \$307,896



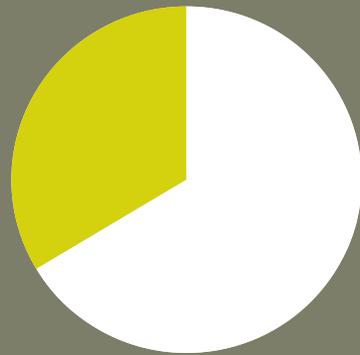
FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES¹

\$105,426



PLEDGES & INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS¹

\$99,386



GRANTS

\$103,084

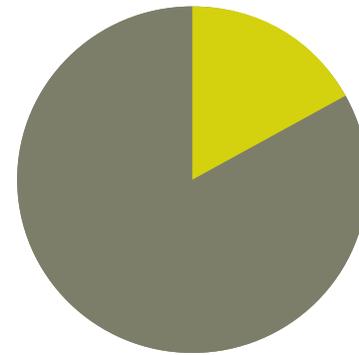
* THESE NUMBERS HAVE NOT BEEN REVIEWED OR AUDITED

¹ NUMBERS INCLUDE DIRECT COSTS

TOTAL
EXPENSES \$293,750

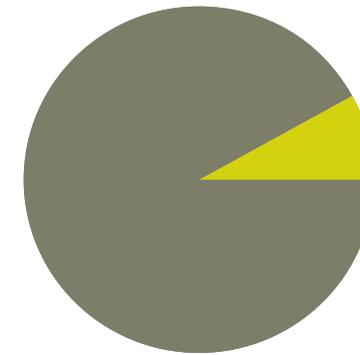
JANUARY 1
DECEMBER 31 2009

EXPENSES*



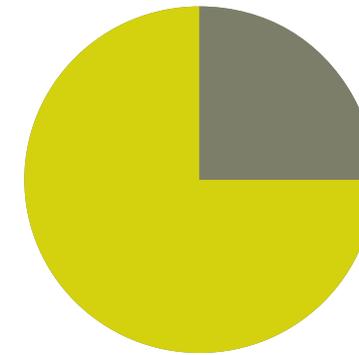
ADMINISTRATIVE

\$49,938



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\$23,507



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\$220,305

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