Barely a month into 2010, we experienced in Virginia one of the most debilitating snowstorms the commonwealth has ever seen. Government offices and courts closed, schools shut down, and roadways were vacant. The same storm affected all four of our Legal Aid Justice Center offices around the state, but more importantly, it impacted all of the communities we serve.

Here in Charlottesville, the city was paralyzed at first, with downed power lines and icy roads. Little by little, though, signs not just of life but of community emerged. Whether it was neighbors helping to shovel walkways of those who could not manage, or families working together to solve child care issues when schools closed, we used our individual strengths to help solve a larger problem as a community.

In our practice, we form similar partnerships with clients to tackle their immediate legal needs. We forge bonds with local groups and organizations to ensure that our advocacy is always informed by the communities we serve. We rely on the collective strength of our statewide coalitions to create a comprehensive effort that is greater than the sum of its parts.

In these pages, we share with you how our advocates work with—and within—communities to achieve common goals.

When we listen to Petersburg parents express concern for their children’s educational success, we are better able to tailor our advocacy to help them achieve meaningful change within a struggling school system. When we successfully represent a group of supermarket workers in Northern Virginia in a claim for unpaid wages, we send a larger message to businesses that unfair employment practices have no place in that community. And when our organizing efforts are directed toward building a multi-ethnic statewide coalition to tackle issues affecting immigrants, we extend our reach well beyond our individual offices to help strengthen the voices of all immigrants across the commonwealth.

Our advocates work tirelessly to address clients’ acute legal needs. We also strive to effect systemic change that will improve conditions for all low-income families and individuals who live and work in Virginia. But like the clients who come to our offices, and like the snow-covered communities across the commonwealth last winter, we are not able to do it alone.

Only with the steadfast support of our generous donors and supporters can we achieve the progress we make each year on behalf of low-income families.

We need the power of our community to make it happen.

Alex R. Gulotta
Executive Director
Amy Woolard works with foster youth, like Jenna, through our JustChildren program. Too often, children in foster care experience barriers to education that can derail their progress toward graduation. JustChildren ensures that the commonwealth’s most vulnerable young people receive the educational services and support they need to lead successful lives in their communities. In 2010, Amy worked with state agencies to implement a new federal law promoting educational stability for youth in foster care. Through coalition building, policy advocacy and litigation, Amy and others make lasting improvements for all children in Virginia.

Claire Curry directs our Elder Law Initiative, combining direct legal services with a powerful community presence to enable low-income elderly persons to live their lives in safety and dignity. She works with family members, like Ken and his dad, and other passionate volunteers through the Community Partnership for Improved Long-Term Care to promote better treatment for our elderly neighbors living in area nursing homes. Claire also advocates at the state level to seek regulatory and statutory changes that benefit all elderly persons.

When Gloria was scammed by a car title lending company, Brenda Castañeda reviewed the contracts and filed suit to recover Gloria’s money and car title. As part of the Civil Advocacy Program, Brenda and others help clients navigate complicated bureaucracies and find fair treatment. Every day, low-income individuals encounter problems related to housing, consumer protection, employment, public benefits and access to mental health services. Our help can range from simple advice to representation at administrative hearings or in court.

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For more than 20 years, Marcel Slag has supervised private attorneys who volunteer to help low-income clients maintain safe and affordable housing. These lawyers participate in a weekly clinic where they meet and counsel clients. Whether clients simply need advice or require representation in court, the private attorneys manage the cases from start to finish—greatly expanding our capacity to serve Richmond residents. Under Marcel’s leadership, clinic attorneys have represented more than 8,000 clients.

Unforeseen medical emergencies can leave low-income families in dire straits and in need of legal assistance. Sylvia Jones collaborates with medical providers through the Medical-Legal Partnership to identify cases before they become a crisis. By helping both clients and medical providers recognize and address the legal issues associated with poor living conditions, inadequate heat or water, loss of shelter and hunger, Sylvia contributes to better medical outcomes for families in Richmond.

Being one paycheck away from disaster is a daily reality for many of our clients. With unemployment on the rise, many of our clients like Terry depend on receiving their unemployment benefits in a timely manner in order to pay for housing, food and medicine. Pat Levy-Lavelle helps clients avoid a financial crisis by providing counsel and direct representation to help unemployed Richmond residents get the benefits they deserve.
PETERSBURG

{advocacy in southside virginia}

indy

Indy Toliver believes all families and individuals should have access to affordable, quality housing. Low-income and vulnerable families and individuals face loss of housing through substandard conditions, eviction, foreclosure and barriers to accessing public housing or vouchers. Many also fall victim to unfair and illegal utility and rent collections practices. Indy works to prevent homelessness every day by helping clients navigate the government bureaucracies that many people find confusing.

stella

The JustChildren Program’s community organizing work in Petersburg strives to empower residents to demand high-quality educational services. Stella Edwards and others work to make certain that the community can formulate its own vision of how change should occur and then communicate their vision to those who need to hear it. Stella and members of Pathways Community Group conducted outreach meetings in public housing communities citywide.

nicole

Nicole Dooley provides individual representation to help homeless, foster and court-involved youth obtain the educational services they need to remain in their communities and be successful. So many of these children experience trauma and transitions that can often mask underlying educational needs. As part of the JustChildren Program, Nicole helps families, like Brenda and her granddaughter, work with schools to develop Individualized Education Plans for children who qualify for special education services.

The city of Petersburg embodies so much of what our work is about: community, history, struggle and the pursuit of equal justice. Our office on Bollingbrook St. may be small, but the spirit and tenacity of our Petersburg advocates—like the communities they serve—are boundless. Our staff provides direct legal services to the cities of Petersburg, Hopewell and Colonial Heights, and the counties of Dinwiddie, Charles City, Prince George and Surry, while supporting and leading larger advocacy efforts to rebuild and reinvigorate these communities.

Highlights:

- Provided direct representation to more than 600 clients, benefiting more than 1,500 people and resulting in financial benefits totalling $609,000.
- Welcomed Nicole Dooley to the Petersburg office as an Equal Justice America fellow, providing educational advocacy and representation to court-involved children and their families in Petersburg and surrounding counties.
- Advocated on behalf of low-income residents to the Petersburg Housing Authority, for compliance with the residents’ rights under the Housing Act of 1937.
- Worked with community groups to stave off budget cuts that would have cost Petersburg schools more than $1.3 million dollars in state support.
- Increased communication between the community and Petersburg City Public Schools by changing the structure of monthly work meetings to include community engagement sessions.
Virginia relies on immigrants to fill many of the toughest, lowest-paying jobs in the commonwealth. Yet low-income immigrants are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous employers willing to take advantage of workers who may not know how to fight back. Arnoldo Borja reaches out to immigrant communities every day to inform them about their right to be paid for work performed and to receive fair treatment in the workplace.

Karen Minatelli supports low-wage immigrant workers in their efforts to find fair treatment in the workplace. Karen and others help workers in court and administrative proceedings, recover unpaid wages, and fight workplace discrimination. Since 1998, our clients have won judgments and settlements totaling more than $5 million. In most cases, as in the case of these restaurant workers, this is money the workers earned but were not paid by their employers.

The theft of low-income workers’ hard-earned pay can be a destabilizing force, sometimes leading directly to poverty and homelessness. To address this growing need, bilingual attorney Rhonda Perkins, formerly of the Richmond office, was added to the Falls Church staff to provide representation and offer advice in areas such as housing and consumer protection. As a result, Rhonda can now help Herminio and others stay in their homes.

Our Falls Church office serves the growing immigrant communities in the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William and Stafford; the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park; and the town of Herndon. What began in 2001 as an effort by our Immigrant Advocacy Program to assist immigrant workers with employment issues has expanded to include services in the areas of housing and consumer protection, as well as several important community organizing projects and coalitions.

Highlights:
- Provided direct representation to more than 200 clients, benefiting nearly 500 people and resulting in financial benefits totaling $286,900.
- Through a partnership agreement with Legal Services of Northern Virginia, we expanded our advocacy by offering housing and consumer services to immigrant communities.
- Edgar Aranda-Yanoc, community organizer for the Immigrant Advocacy Program, won the 2010 Linowes Leadership Award, which recognizes “outstanding commitment and dedication to helping others.”
- Convened the Virginia Asian Pacific American Roundtable, which connects individuals, advocates, and service providers who work with Northern Virginia’s underserved Asian and Asian-Pacific American community so they can share information, collaborate on projects and seek funding together.
Increasing unemployment and the accompanying losses of income mean difficult times for our client communities. State budget cutbacks mean fewer services generally, and persons with low incomes and those who are incarcerated are hit even harder. Abigail Turner looks beyond individual cases to identify where we might produce broader gains. She serves as a resource for experienced staff and mentors many talented new attorneys, like Phil Storey, to further increase our litigation capacity.

More than 10 percent of today’s Virginians were born outside of the United States. Our collective future hangs in the balance as we decide as a state whether to welcome our newest Virginians, or reject them and try to drive them out. Edgar Aranda-Yanoc works to bridge this gap by organizing community forums on crucial immigration issues and advocating in opposition to anti-immigrant laws and policies. Edgar was recently named the chairman of the Virginia Coalition for Latino Organizations.

As Virginia’s unemployment rates have continued to rise, more workers are completely shut out of a system that is difficult to navigate. Those who manage to successfully file a claim can wait months for their first checks. Some workers, like Flossie, call repeatedly but are unable to get a response. Carolyn Kalantari’s persistent advocacy led to a dialogue with the Virginia Employment Commission, and she is working to persuade state leaders that it is time to modernize Virginia’s unemployment system.

Highlights:
• Provided direct representation to nearly 3,000 clients, benefitting more than 7,000 people and resulting in financial benefits totalling $3.376 million.
• Along with Troutman Sanders, filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of 11 inmates who were sentenced prior to Virginia’s abolishing parole in 1995. These sentences occurred at a time when long sentences were imposed, in part, because of the availability of parole. These inmates are eligible for parole but have repeatedly been denied.
• Helped pass Senate Bill 259, creating a presumption that youth who are being tried as adults are held in juvenile detention centers pretrial and will only be placed in an adult jail if they are found by a judge to be a security or safety threat.
• Achieved a landmark settlement of $2.2 million in unpaid wages and damages for 2,200 foreign guestworkers who entered the country legally on a worker visa program and were cheated out of wages for the work they performed planting trees across the southeast.
• Launched a new website, www.mlpvirginia.org, designed to provide information about the nine medical-legal partnership sites in Virginia.

To tackle the root causes of poverty, we ensure that our individual work informs broader systemic campaigns. These campaigns are designed to benefit the greatest number of people while having the most lasting effects. In 2010, our participation in coalitions, partnerships and impact initiatives helped us achieve meaningful policy changes and substantial judgments for the clients and communities we serve. Listening to clients and community members helps us identify common issues and mutual goals, making our work a truly collaborative effort.
### FINANCIALS

#### REVENUES  
July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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#### EXPENSES BY LOCATION  
July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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#### EXPENSES  
July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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#### EXPENSES BY PROGRAM  
July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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Alex R. Gulotta
Executive Director
Legal Aid Justice Center

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