

CONNECTICUT
VETERANS
LEGAL
CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT 2014–15



*"It's like having the
USS Enterprise with a
couple of battleships
watching my back. I know
that CVLC has got me.
I'm very grateful for that."
– Ralph Clyburn*

WHY LEGAL HELP FOR VETERANS?

Because Legal Problems Destabilize Veterans in Recovery. Here's How We Help ...

- ▶ A VETERAN'S VA COUNSELOR NOTICES that his post-deployment PTSD symptoms get worse when his landlord threatens to evict him and his children from their apartment.
- ▶ THE COUNSELOR CONNECTS the veteran to on-site legal help from CVLC—down the hall.
- ▶ THE VETERAN, COUNSELOR AND CVLC ATTORNEY work together to keep the veteran and his family in their apartment.



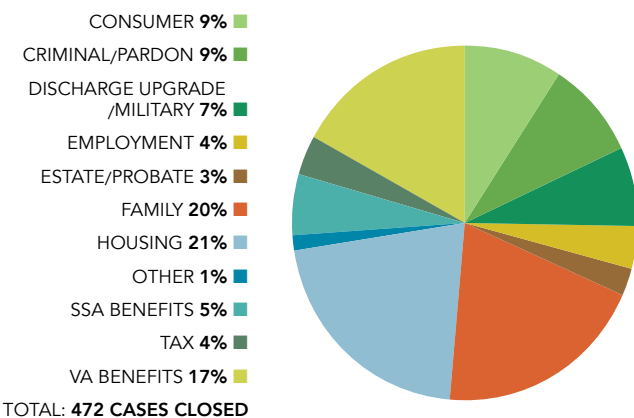
VA Nurse David McNamara R.N. and Staff Attorney Darren Pruslow



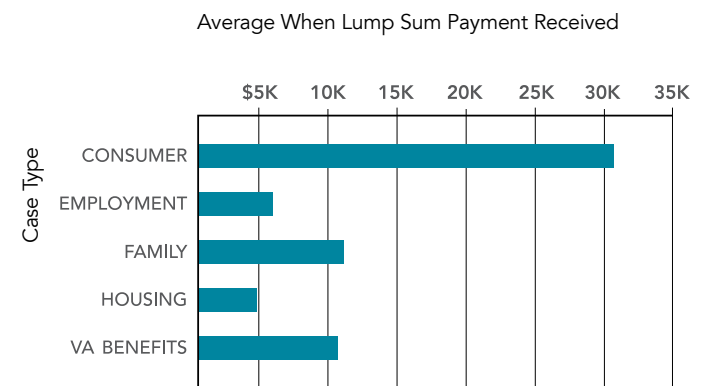
CVLC Client David Volta and Senior Staff Attorney Cindy Johnson

Without legal barriers, this veteran can focus on taking care of his family, his career and himself.

CASE BREAK DOWN 2014-15



PRO BONO SUCCESS



VA Recognizes CVLC and ECCC with National Public-Private Partnership Award

In April 2015, CVLC proudly accepted the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Community Partnership Award for its groundbreaking medical-legal partnership with the VA CT's Errera Community Care Center (ECCC) in West Haven, Connecticut.

CVLC was the first program of its kind to integrate legal help with VA care for veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness. Since 2009, CVLC has helped over 1,300 veterans resolve destabilizing legal barriers.



VA Dr. David Rosenthal, M.D. and Executive Director Margaret Middleton

"As a primary care physician for patients experiencing homelessness, I have witnessed firsthand the power of legal assistance in improving the lives of my patients. Legal assistance should not be only for those who have the means to afford it; access should be a human right."
 — DR. DAVID ROSENTHAL, M.D.

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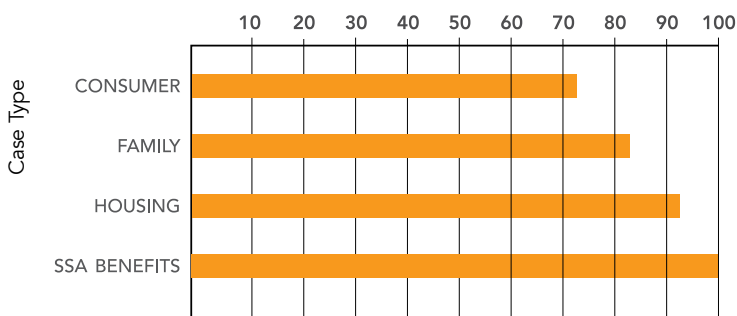
DR. LAURIE HARKNESS
 Director, Errera Center,
 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

PROFESSOR MICHAEL WISHNIE
 Yale School of Law

In Memory of Co-Founder,
 Howard R. Udell/ 1941 – 2013

DATA-DRIVEN AND OUTCOME ORIENTED

Percentage of Cases Resulting in Improved Housing, Financial or Healthcare Status — CVLC Representation



CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Been Homeless
 57%

Served in Combat
 37%

Served in Iraq/
 Afghanistan
 20%

Median Income
 \$14,796

Legal Help is Good Medicine

Earlier this year, former Navy electrician Mr. Robert Stokes received an alarming notice from his landlord: He had fallen behind on rent and faced the possibility of eviction.

Without counsel, Mr. Stokes, 54, signed an agreement with his landlord, scheduling a repayment plan for the missed rent. Strained from the financial stress of these extra payments, Mr. Stokes again fell behind and this time his landlord sued to evict him. This threat of eviction elevated his symptoms of acute anxiety to the point that he had to be hospitalized.

Thanks to coordinated assistance from VA social worker John Sullivan and CVLC attorney Darren Pruslow, Mr. Stokes was able to stay in his home.

The successful outcome relied on the skill sets of attorneys and mental-health clinicians collaborating in medical legal partnership. Because the legal and healthcare teams worked, together Mr. Stokes' hospitalization didn't disrupt his legal care.

"I'm so glad I have access to multiple resources," says Mr. Stokes. "I needed legal help and I needed mental-health support, and I got both."

Besides supporting the veteran directly, Mr. Sullivan contacted the landlord to notify him of Mr. Stokes' mental health and after a

period of negotiation, the landlord agreed not to serve the eviction, which would have forced Mr. Stokes to vacate his apartment immediately. Mr. Pruslow represented Mr. Stokes, appearing in court on his behalf to renegotiate a more reasonable payment plan that Mr. Stokes will be able to uphold. Most importantly, Mr. Stokes has been discharged from the hospital and has returned to his home.

"The ability to partner with clinicians allows for feasible solutions that might not otherwise be possible," Mr. Pruslow says.

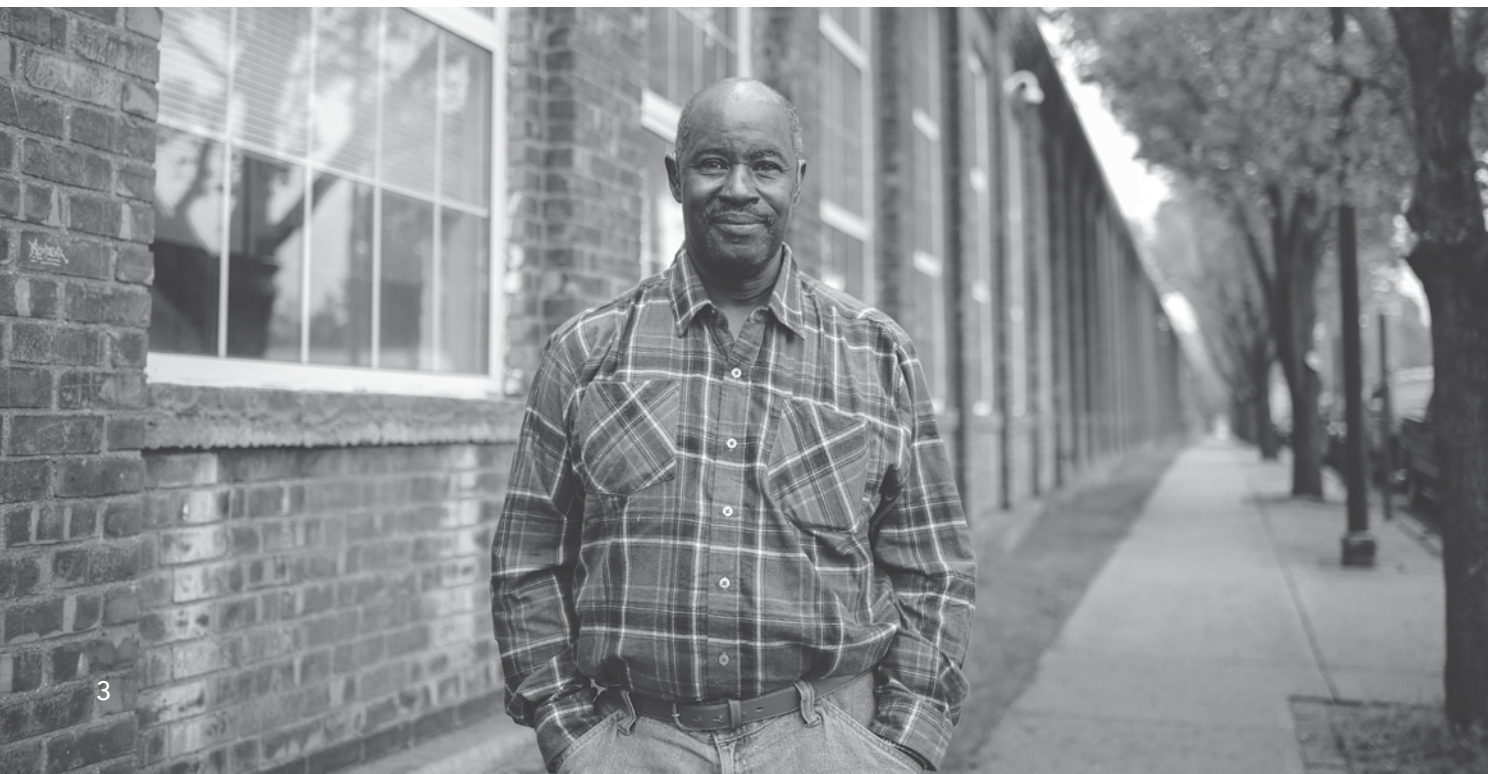
"Mr. Stokes has returned to full-time employment and his clinical status is improving daily," Mr. Sullivan says. "This is all due to the collaborative supports provided. This was a very time-sensitive situation that literally could have ended in homelessness at any moment. The partnership with CVLC is open, accessible, and flexible. I could not be happier with our outcome!"

Medical legal partnership at the ECCC continues to improve the well-being of veterans by resolving legal issues that may be barriers to wellness.

"I'm so glad I have access to multiple resources. I needed legal help and I needed mental-health support and I got both."

— ROBERT STOKES

BELOW: Tony Askins also benefited from CVLC's legal services when his landlord threatened him with an eviction. Mr. Askins is now stably housed.



Maximizing Services through Pro Bono Partnership



RIGHT: Volunteer Bill Egan
BELOW, L TO R:
Board Member John Kelley,
Board Chair John Bashaw,
Volunteer Jason Maddox



PHOTO: MICHAEL PERLUTTER

“The legal system can be intimidating to those without lawyers and I am proud to serve as part of the team of lawyers, that provides legal help to veterans through the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center.”

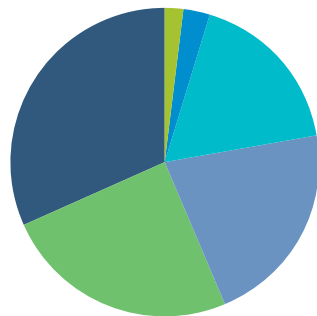
— BILL EGAN, MANAGING PARTNER, ROBINSON & COLE, LLP

“Why do I volunteer? You know that feeling you get when you’ve solved a problem for someone? Now couple that with the knowledge that you were probably the only resource available to solve that problem. That’s why. CVLC is an incredible organization doing valuable work.”

— JASON MADDOX, QUINNIPIAC LAW GRADUATE 2015

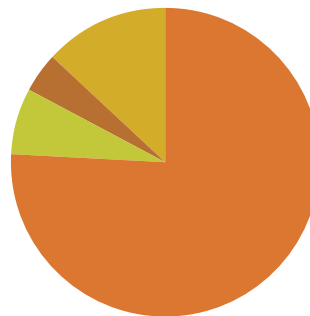
Thanks to the volunteerism of Connecticut’s bar, in the last year **172 ATTORNEYS** worked on **322 CASES** for veterans donating an estimated **\$805,000 IN TIME.**

REVENUE SOURCES + EXPENSES ■ Fiscal Year 2014–2015



TOTAL REVENUE - 750,520

- CORPORATIONS AND LAW FIRMS - 15,556
- INDIVIDUALS - 21,007
- SALUTING SERVICE ANNUAL EVENT - 130,717
- THE RIDE FOR OUR VETERANS - 161,403
- BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB FOUNDATION - 185,740
- OTHER GRANTS - 236,095



EXPENSES

- 76% - LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS
- 7% - ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION
- 4% - GENERAL ADMINISTRATION
- 13% - DEVELOPMENT

“I was trying to explain that the disease was there but it wasn’t that noticeable before. Colleen presented a case that the VA really had to look at seriously. She did the research, covered all the bases. Colleen’s brief was over an inch thick! She did a wonderful job.”

– Edward LaPointe



Justice After 30 Years of VA Denials

In 1971, Edward LaPointe returned home to Connecticut after being honorably discharged from the Marine Corps. He came home expecting to re-establish his life as a civilian, but his family members began to notice changes in his mood, behavior and appearance. Mr. LaPointe was suddenly unable to keep a job, something he had no trouble doing prior to his service.

His psychiatric condition continued to deteriorate, and he was hospitalized in 1976. In 1984, Mr. LaPointe applied for service-connected disability benefits, hoping to treat his deteriorating psychiatric condition. Mr. LaPointe was denied service-related benefits in 1986 and again in 1987, 1990 and 1996.

CVLC connected Mr. LaPointe with Murtha Cullina LLP associate Colleen O'Neill and partner Francis Brady. Working under the supervision of Mr. Brady, Ms. O'Neill reviewed Mr. LaPointe's previous attempts to receive benefits, researched schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder and decided to approach the benefits request from a new angle.

Ms. O'Neill became involved with pro bono work through CVLC because she has "a lot of respect for veterans" and wanted "to be involved in changing a veteran's life."

Ms. O'Neill has many personal connections to the military: Her father had a long career in the Army; her brother is currently in the army and was deployed to Afghanistan last summer; and her boyfriend was previously in the army and was deployed to Iraq. She became involved with pro bono work through CVLC because she has "a lot of respect for veterans" and wanted "to be involved in changing a veteran's life," she says

Through her own research, Ms. O'Neill learned about prodromal symptoms of schizophrenia—symptoms from the

initial phase of psychosis, which are vague and easy to miss. Ms. O'Neill collaborated with Dr. Joseph Chien, a forensic psychiatry fellow at Yale University School of Medicine, who evaluated Mr. LaPointe and wrote a comprehensive report. Ms. O'Neill was able to use the report to show that Mr. LaPointe was experiencing prodromal symptoms of schizophrenia while still in the military, and within one year of his discharge from the service—much earlier than the VA originally believed Mr. LaPointe's service-related mental health issues began.

Mr. LaPointe submitted a new application for service-connected benefits with this new evidence. In August 2014—approximately 30 years after his first application—the Department of Veteran Affairs issued a decision granting Mr. LaPointe service-connected disability benefits for his psychiatric disorder.

Mr. LaPointe calls the brief prepared by his attorneys a "work of art." After 30 years of discouraging news, Mr. LaPointe says he felt like he would never get benefits. He explains the experience: "I was trying to explain that the disease was there but it wasn't that noticeable before. Colleen presented a case that the VA really had to look at seriously. She did the research, covered all the bases. Colleen's brief was over an inch thick! She did a wonderful job."

CVLC continues to be amazed by the relationships that grow out of pro bono work. Mr. LaPointe and his attorneys radiate mutual respect and admiration for each other. Ms. O'Neill praises Mr. LaPointe: "He was a pleasure to work with. Not everyone is as in tune with what's going on in their life. He is a wonderful person and so grateful and gracious for our assistance with this case."

SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNERS



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CVLC is proud to work with volunteer attorneys from more than 50 law firms, law schools and corporations to help veterans in need.

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Annual Report Produced by Lorena Mitchell and Nancy Sepe

All photographs by Desirea Photography (unless otherwise noted)

TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: CVLC Clients Ray Covington, Abdul-Ali Muhammad, Delene Falcon, Cecil Murray, Michael Broucki, April Pearson Lahai

