panel notes
ALRP Newsletter | Summer 2013

upcoming events

AIDS Walk
On July 21, walk with the ALRP Legal Eagles Team!
Learn more...

Up Your Alley Street Fair
On July 28, volunteer at SF’s exciting leather/fetish street fair! Learn more...

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client spotlight

Cassandra is on Her Way Back Up

At age 57, Cassandra has survived an HIV diagnosis, a painful divorce, and assuming custody of her five-year-old granddaughter. But as strong as she is, the debts she faced after her marriage ended threatened to overwhelm her. After ALRP helped her file for divorce a few years ago, she turned to ALRP once again to ask about the possibility of declaring bankruptcy. “I was so frustrated and embarrassed about my debt,” she said. “With my husband gone, my finances had dropped so much.” Read more...

large law firms lend a hand

Pro Bono Connections Initiative
ALRP is happy to connect clients with the resources and expertise of large Bay Area law firms. We are grateful to the following firms for recently accepting cases:

- DLA Piper LLP - immigration case
- Holland & Knight LLP - landlord/tenant case
- Latham & Watkins LLP - political asylum case
- Morrison & Foerster LLP - tax case
- Paul Hastings LLP - landlord/tenant case

Reed Smith at the US Supreme Court
• Reed Smith LLP - immigration case
• Seyfarth Shaw LLP - political asylum case
• Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati - contracts case Read More…

recent events

Major Donor Party
ALRP celebrated our ALRP|30 Campaign leadership gift donors at our Major Donor Party on May 9, 2013. The party was attended by over 75 guests at the waterfront Plant Cafe.

ALRP honored Laura Maechtlen of Seyfarth Shaw LLP with the ALRP 2013 James C. Hormel Philanthropist Award and Gilead Sciences, Inc. with the ALRP 2013 Community Partner Award. Thanks to our charitable donors, ALRP has raised over $100,000 -- surpassing our $90,000 goal. See photos.

generous grant for law clerk program

Bob A. Ross Foundation Supports ALRP Law Clerk Program
ALRP was honored to receive a $15,000 grant from the Bob A. Ross Foundation in May 2013 to support our Law Clerk Fellowship Program. The generous grant will provide funds for six law clerks throughout the year. The Bob A. Ross Foundation has been the leading supporter of the ALRP Law Clerk Program since 2006, which has made a tremendous difference in our ability to serve clients. Kim Shindel of Fordham University School of Law and Nathan Bewley of University of San Francisco School of Law are the two most recent scholarship recipients. Read more…
At age 57, Cassandra has survived an HIV diagnosis, a painful divorce, and assuming custody of her five-year-old granddaughter. But as strong as she is, the debts she faced after her marriage ended threatened to overwhelm her. After ALRP helped her file for divorce a few years ago, she turned to ALRP once again to ask about the possibility of declaring bankruptcy.

“I was so frustrated and embarrassed about my debt,” she said. “My ex-husband took my car, but creditors were constantly calling me because I was still making payments on it. It was so bad that I didn’t want to be home. I was very depressed. I was worried about my health, and I was trying to take care of my five-year-old granddaughter on a fixed income. With my husband gone, my finances had dropped so much.”

ALRP referred Cassandra to Penal attorney Craig Dahlquist, who agreed to help her explore her options. When Craig discovered that Cassandra was in poor health, he suggested that they meet at her home. “He is so nice,” Cassandra said. “He patiently explained everything to me, including the pros and cons of bankruptcy and what would happen in court. I am so relieved now—my stress is gone, period.”
Craig has seen similar changes in other clients’ lives. “Bankruptcy is emotional for people,” he said. “People have terrible guilt about their situation. The calls and letters from creditors tap into that guilt, day in and day out. Attorneys have the opportunity to touch people in a really profound way—their credit issues affect every area of their lives.”

People who work in the bankruptcy field often talk about how it offers clients a fresh start. Craig agrees, and feels it goes even deeper than that. “People don’t file for bankruptcy because they’re in debt and don’t have any money,” he said. “People file because they’re on their way back up. They’re trying to move forward after bad times. But if they’ve got judgments against them, they can’t get legitimate employment, go to school, rent an apartment, or return to being productive members of society. The majority of the people I see have spent the money they owe on food, rent, and medical bills. They’re not bad, lazy, or dishonest. I’ve seen so many cry with relief at their bankruptcy signings.”

Cassandra is a great example, according to Craig, of someone who needed bankruptcy to get back on her feet. “She’s definitely on her way up,” he said. “She’s doing great work for her community, including being trained as a facilitator and advocate for both people recovering from substance abuse and people living with HIV. Now she’s been relieved of a burden that was only going to stop her from caring for herself and her granddaughter. She’s definitely somebody who shouldn’t be stopped.”

Cassandra wasn’t expecting life to throw her so many curve balls. Money is tight and it takes a lot to raise a granddaughter, but she’s free of the crushing burden of bills that threatened to overwhelm her only a few months ago. “If it wasn’t for ARIP, I would have probably relapsed by now,” said Cassandra. “It was so empowering to have ARIP there for me. They really helped me move forward in my life. I couldn’t have done it without them.”

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Large Law Firms Lend a Hand

ALRP wishes to acknowledge the large law firms who have recently donated their time and expertise to help our clients. ALRP’s Pro Bono Connections Initiative connects clients with the resources and expertise of large Bay Area law firms. We are grateful to all the attorneys who volunteer their time through the PBCI. Here is a sampling of recent cases we have placed with law firms:

**DLA Piper LLP**

In March 2013, DLA Piper agreed to help an undocumented immigrant who was held at gunpoint many years ago and assisted the DA with the prosecution. However, the client was extremely ill after the crime and did not pursue obtaining a U-Visa for victims of a crime. Renee Chantry and Elliot Katz have agreed to help the client determine if he is still eligible to file for a U-Visa.

**Holland & Knight LLP**

In October 2012, Holland & Knight agreed to represent a client with his landlord/tenant matter. The client is in a precarious financial situation, surviving on unemployment benefits and a rental subsidy from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. A glitch caused his benefits to be postponed, and he was unable to pay rent on time. Although he was able to obtain the funds soon after, his landlord refused to accept his check and gave notice of eviction. Matthew Valdis and Aaron Cahn of Holland & Knight accompanied the client to a settlement conference. The conference went very well and the client was able to stay in his housing.

**Latham & Watkins LLP**

In January 2013, Jason Daniels and Katherine Larkin-Wong of Latham & Watkins agreed to assist an immigration client with filing for asylum. This client fears persecution and discrimination on account of his sexual orientation if he returns to Mexico. In May 2013, Adam Thomas pledged to help another client from Mexico who was verbally and physically abused as a child by his father, brother, and classmates for being gay. After escaping to the US, the client hopes to obtain political asylum so that he never has to face such persecution again.

**Morrison & Foerster LLP**

Leslie Lao of Morrison & Foerster has already accepted four tax referrals since becoming involved with ALRP in late 2012. In April 2013, a client received a letter from the CA Franchise Tax Board stating that he owes taxes for income he never made. Although he previously worked as a hairstylist, he stopped working and went on SSD during the time period in question. Fortunately, Leslie was able to withdraw the notice against the client, ensuring that he is no longer liable for any state tax.
Paul Hastings LLP
In March 2013, Paul Hastings agreed to fight to keep a client in his home when his landlord tried to evict him. Although the client is legally blind and disabled, his landlord tried to evict him on account of alleged “complaints” from neighbors. However, his landlord refused to substantiate these claims. Elisabeth Dunn and Angela Mearle of Paul Hastings spent a great deal of time on the case, including visiting the client in his apartment. In the end, they successfully settled the case with generous terms for the client.

Reed Smith LLP
In February 2013, Reed Smith agreed to assist client from Venezuela who obtained a U-visa (for victims of a crime) after her husband abused her. She has high blood pressure and diabetes, and is in urgent need of a kidney transplant. Unfortunately, only lawful permanent residents are generally allowed to be put on the organ transplant list. Reed Smith attorneys Steven Borwian, Michelle Sowen, and Adam Forest have pledged to help this client explore all possibilities for obtaining the kidney transplant she needs.

Seyfarth Shaw LLP
In January and February 2013, Seyfarth Shaw agreed to help two immigration clients file for political asylum. One client fears returning to Mexico, where he was once stalked and threatened for being gay. Robi McDadden, Nick Clements, and Peter Viss of Seyfarth Shaw worked on the cases.

Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati
In December 2012, Wilson Sonsini agreed to advise a client who owns a production company for events. Jay Purcell consulted with the client and helped him decide whether incorporating his business or keeping it as a sole proprietorship would be more beneficial.

ALRP staff and clients thank you for all your support!
ALRP was honored to receive a grant of $15,000 from the Bob A. Ross Foundation in May 2013. The generous grant will provide funds for six law clerks at ALRP throughout the year. The Bob A. Ross Foundation has been the leading supporter of the ALRP Law Clerk Program since 2006, which has made a tremendous difference in our ability to serve clients.

ALRP depends upon the hard work of a small staff, volunteer Panel attorneys, and a handful of law clerks. Law clerks provide critical program support while also learning first-hand about the legal needs and rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. Each law clerk works 10 to 15 hours a week for 12 weeks. Some clerks choose to specialize in housing and insurance law. These clerks support ALRP staff attorneys who provide clients with direct, in-house representation in those two legal areas. The remaining clerks assist with all other legal areas that ALRP handles, including family law, bankruptcy, immigration, confidentiality, and government benefits.

After conducting thorough intake interviews with clients, the law clerks either provide direct assistance or refer complex cases to volunteer Panel attorneys. Law clerks often provide short-term services such as answering questions or writing letters to landlords and creditors. ALRP staff attorneys provide careful supervision to ensure that clients’ needs are being met. Law clerks also frequently conduct research and produce legal articles.

The two most recent recipients of the Bob A. Ross scholarships are Kim Shindel, a graduate of Fordham University School of Law, and Nathan Bewley, a graduate of University of San Francisco School of Law.

For information about applying for a law clerk position at ALRP, visit Jobs & Clerkships.