

# Justice in Action

NEWS FROM VIRGINIA LEGAL AID SOCIETY

## Legal Aid Helps

AN INTERVIEW WITH NOELLE PRINCE SHEAR, DONOR AND VOLUNTEER  
CO-CHAIR OF THE 2015 CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR VLAS

Noelle Prince Shear and her husband, Bill Shear, have supported VLAS as donors for several years. In 2015 our Executive Director, David Neumeyer, and Director of Development, Rhonda Knight, asked Noelle and Bill if they would chair a Capital Campaign Committee, raising funds to pay for VLAS' new office in Farmville. This building purchase marks the completion of a strategic goal to own all of our service offices. Noelle and Bill agreed to this challenging leadership position and their dedication, along with Rhonda Knight's expertise, brought a tremendous goal to fruition.

Here is what Noelle had to say regarding her support of VLAS, and why legal aid is important to her as a donor and volunteer.

"I feel very strongly about issues to do with justice. I've felt that all my life, and I don't know

exactly why. I think it's partly my character and partly my upbringing, and since I've been married my husband I have continued to support a number of national organizations that are involved in the cause of justice. I have no recollection about how I became aware of Virginia Legal Aid Society, but I was very happy to find the organization because I've always felt that we want to make some kind of difference where we are. In this community, from the moment that I drove into Prince Edward County, the effects of history were so palpable here and it took me a while to learn what had gone on. I certainly, over the years, became familiar with that. I taught in the schools as an artist in residence, so I felt that we needed to contribute to something locally that serves a big portion of our community, the foundation of our community. So those were my sentiments when we started to contribute.

"All you have to do is see homeless people (to see an example of the effects of injustice). You've taken people out of society, and they are unable to make a contribution to society. But the injustice of it is that if we don't have security for one person, ultimately we don't have security for any of us. Morally, it is to me completely unconscionable that we separate and we don't respect the lives of other people. I guess

*continued on page two*



Noelle Prince Shear, Rhonda Knight, Bill Shear

"I've always felt that we want to make some kind of difference where we are. In this community, from the moment that I drove into Prince Edward County, the effects of history were so palpable here and it took me a while to learn what had gone on. I certainly, over the years, became familiar with that. I taught in the schools as an artist in residence, so I felt that we needed to contribute to something locally that serves a big portion of our community, the foundation of our community."



Photo by Lauren MacMoyle



VIRGINIA  
LEGAL AID  
SOCIETY

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VLAS donor, Noelle  
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Thank you donors!

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Campaign for  
Farmville Office

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## ABOUT VIRGINIA LEGAL AID SOCIETY

*Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS) is a nonprofit law firm that provides legal information, advice and representation in civil cases to low-income individuals and families. Since 1977, VLAS has been the only institutional provider of such services in Central, Southside and Western Tidewater Virginia. VLAS attorneys and paralegals use legal skills to solve problems in housing, access to health care, income and public benefits, family issues, consumer lending and assets, and education. Our mission is to resolve serious legal problems of low-income people, promote economic and family stability, reduce poverty through effective legal assistance, and to champion equal justice.*



“How can anyone look at another human being who is suffering and not feel some compulsion to do something? And how can an individual who is just a member of the community support someone in a legal case? We need a professional organization of professional, qualified legal staff to help them.”

## Legal Aid Helps

*continued from page one*

I have really strong moral principles. How can anyone look at another human being who is suffering and not feel some compulsion to do something? And how can an individual who is just a member of the community support someone in a legal case? We need a professional organization of professional, qualified legal staff to help them. And so it redounds to the welfare and the benefit of the entire community and, by extension, the country. That's the way I look at it and think about it.

“There's a structural problem in our legal system, and what is allowable legally in many instances should not be allowable. But if cases are won for [legal aid] clients as well then precedents are established which can be the basis for new judgments, hopefully, to the benefit of poor clients. It is an area far from my expertise, but I do recognize from the reading I've done that there's a real structural problem through which generations continue in poverty. That completely undermines our democracy.

“In terms of community, in the process of working on this campaign I've been so heartened because there have been some very small contributions from people who have benefited from legal aid services, and then there have been people who have been key players in the community who have given. To see these individuals equally in their own capacity, and not necessarily proportional to their own circumstances, making contributions heartens me tremendously. Because those are the inconspicuous ways that we are weaving people together, the consciousness we're developing through this.

“I've learned how important creating connections is to increasing visibility. It's been a real learning experience in that way. Legal aid now finally has visibility in its location, but it's so behind-the-scenes in its work, and the clients are behind-the-scenes. Getting the word out, creating visibility in this way is part of what I feel my mission is. It's humbling to me. I need to openly, respectfully keep reaching out. I'm not all that outgoing as a person, I'm pretty introverted. I can dance, I can perform, but I am learning to reach out to others. It's been a benefit to me, it is something that I do feel passionate about and I'm grateful for VLAS, too. It has been enriching, I've learned a lot; I've connected to so many people with whom I would have ordinarily thought I had no basis for connection but I'm very appreciative of that. I feel I've really deepened friendships as well and I couldn't be happier about that. Thank you.”

# Foreclosure Averted for VLAS Client

Ella contacted VLAS for assistance with foreclosure proceedings. She had suffered a stroke which made it difficult for her to perform everyday activities such as walking and writing. As a result of her stroke, Ella was forced to travel out of state to stay with her sister, who helped her receive medical care during her recovery. The client's two children were living in her house but did not make payments on the mortgage while the client was in the hospital and living with her sister. As a result, the bank moved to foreclose her home.

Ella learned of the foreclosure upon her return to her home months later, near the time of foreclosure. With less than a week before the scheduled foreclosure sale, the client contacted our office for help. An attorney for VLAS quickly contacted the trustee handling the foreclosure and requested a cancellation of the sale until the client could renegotiate the terms of her loan through the USDA. After brief negotiation, the trustee agreed, and our attorney then assisted the client in contacting the USDA to determine her eligibility for a refinancing. Due to Ella's physical limitations, our attorney found it necessary to provide extensive assistance for the client in applying and filling out paperwork for a new loan. The attorney also helped the client to compile lengthy documentation proving her income and submitted them to the USDA. USDA recalculated Ella's payments based on this proof of income, and approved the client for a new loan at a reduced the monthly payment. As a result, the case was successfully closed after several months, and the client was able to remain in her home.

*Client name and photograph have been changed for confidentiality.*



Photo by Lauren MacMoyle



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Appomattox County  
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Southern Area Agency on Aging  
Virginia Poverty Law Center



# 2014–2015 Annual Campaign for Equal Justice Contributors

VLAS would like to acknowledge the support of those who contributed to the 2014–2015 Annual Campaign for Equal Justice (July 1, 2014–June 30, 2015) or designated contributions to VLAS through United Way.

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Therese Wright, Madison Heights

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*For more information on how you can support VLAS, please contact Rhonda Knight at 434-455-3085 or rhondak@vlas.org.*

*Please remember us in your will.*

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Photos by Lauren MacMoyle

VLAS attorneys, paralegals and volunteer “pro bono” attorneys closed **2,978** cases, providing legal help to **6,778** men, women and children throughout our service area. VLAS attorneys and paralegals recovered for our clients **\$2,347,217** in benefits, claims and damages, and saved our clients **\$928,111** by preventing the collection of unjust claims.

## 2015 Capital Campaign for Farmville Office

This year, VLAS was pleased to conduct a capital campaign to raise funds for the purchase of our newest service office at 217 E. Third Street in Farmville. We received a challenge from Mary Morton Parsons Foundation to raise \$100,000 in matching donations, bringing the total funds raised to \$200,000. The 2015 Capital Campaign proved a huge success through the tireless efforts of the Capital Campaign Committee, led by volunteers Noelle Prince Shear and Bill Shear of Farmville, and VLAS Director of Development Rhonda Knight. Funding came from the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation; the Walter J. Payne Foundation; the Marietta McNeill Morgan and Samuel Tate Morgan, Jr. Foundation; many individual donors, and members of the committee.

The VLAS Capital Campaign Committee included community leaders from throughout the nine-county service area of the Farmville office. Through the support of these leaders and donors, VLAS has now met a strategic goal to own all of its service offices. After 34 years of renting an office on High Street, the purchase of this building is a further commitment to and investment in providing legal aid to those in need in Amelia, Cumberland, Buckingham, Prince Edward, Nottoway, Lunenburg, Charlotte, Mecklenburg, and Brunswick counties. We are grateful to all of our donors and supporters who made this year’s campaign a tremendous success!



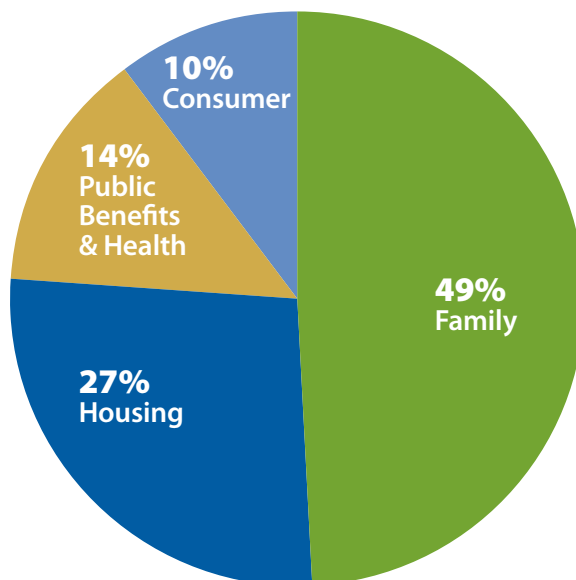
L-R: Rhonda Knight, David Neumeyer, David E. Whitus (Mayor of Farmville), Mike Doucette (former President of VLAS Board), Jessie M. Woodson-Johnson, Bill Shear, and Noelle Prince Shear cut the ribbon at new Farmville office.

### Number of People Helped in 2014–15 by Case Type

Family	3,347
Housing	1,821
Public Benefits & Health	932
Consumer	689
<b>TOTAL</b> People Helped	<b>6,789</b>

VLAS does not charge clients any fee for legal information, advice or representation. Financial support from institutional grants and individual and corporate contributions make our services possible.

For more information on how you can support VLAS and its activities, please contact Rhonda Knight at 434-455-3085 or rhondak@vlas.org.



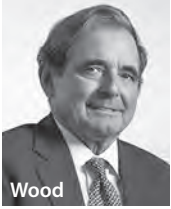
The purchase of this building is a further commitment to and investment in providing legal aid to those in need in Amelia, Cumberland, Buckingham, Prince Edward, Nottoway, Lunenburg, Charlotte, Mecklenburg, and Brunswick counties.





**VIRGINIA STATE BOARD AWARDS**

Jeremy P. White, Esq., managing attorney of the Lynchburg office was selected to receive the Legal Aid Award from the Virginia State Bar earlier this year. The award was presented to Jeremy at the VSB annual meeting in Virginia Beach, VA on June 19, 2015. Jeremy has worked for VLAS since 2002, and has been Managing Attorney in the Lynchburg office since 2005.



Robert "Robin" C. Wood III has served on the Board of Virginia Legal Aid Society since 2011, and received the Tradition of Excellence Award from the Virginia State Bar on June 20, 2015. VLAS has been pleased to have Robin serve on our Board, and joins the VSB in honoring him for his years of outstanding service.

**2014-15 STAFF & PRO BONO SERVICES BY OFFICE**

	CASES	PEOPLE HELPED
<b>LYNCHBURG AREA OFFICE</b>		
Amherst	123	286
Appomattox	55	125
Bedford County	5	11
Campbell	159	362
Halifax	146	326
Lynchburg	577	1,316
<b>DANVILLE AREA OFFICE</b>		
Danville City	408	949
Henry	133	326
Martinsville	92	210
Patrick	34	63
Pittsylvania	148	385
<b>FARMVILLE AREA OFFICE</b>		
Amelia	22	60
Brunswick	45	96
Buckingham	61	134
Charlotte	54	117
Cumberland	31	68
Lunenburg	38	88
Mecklenburg	58	109
Nottoway	55	117
Prince Edward	176	352
<b>SUFFOLK AREA OFFICE</b>		
Emporia City	57	133
Franklin City	53	112
Greensville	3	8
Isle of Wight	74	142
Southampton	35	79
Suffolk City	311	776
Sussex	14	27

**PRIVATE ATTORNEY SUPPORT**

In 2014-15, the following attorneys provided legal services to our clients without charging a fee. We thank them for their time, effort, and skill!

**Lynchburg Service Area**

- John R. Alford, Jr.
- Mark B. Arthur
- George Bagwell
- M. Kevin Bailey
- Philip B. Baker
- Sarah W. Bell
- David B. Bice
- R. Patrick Bolling
- E. Sterling Byrd-Roberts
- Jim D. Childress
- Gary M. Coates
- Gregory P. Cochran
- Theodore J. Craddock
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- Jordan B. Davies
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- Alan Gravitt
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- Yvonne Schewel
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- David W. Shreve
- Kristine H. Smith
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- Scott E. Thompson
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- Samuel F. Vance IV
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- James Frederick Watson
- Pamela W. Willoughby
- Robert C. Wood
- Frank A. Wright
- Wanda Phillips Yoder

**Danville Service Area**

- Susanne Martin
- David Pugh
- Michael Nicholas
- Rachael Sanford

**Farmville Service Area**

- Janet Early
- N. Garrison Elder
- Jason Krumbein
- Bruce E. Robinson

**Suffolk Service Area**

- Clarence Brooks
- E. Grier Ferguson
- Christopher Malone
- Jeanette Ojeda
- Andrew Paige
- Frank Rawls
- Barrett Richardson
- Martin Speroni

**Program-Wide Pro Bono Facts & Figures: 2014-15**

Number of Cases Completed	132
Number of Volunteer Attorneys	187
Number of Volunteer Attorneys Completing Cases	100
Hours of Service Provided	245
Value of Services Provided*	\$61,250

\*AVERAGE RATE = \$250/HR.



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*"The promptness of the whole service, along with the respect and how I was treated as if my case was the only case. My paralegal was great, and made all the difference in the world. Thank you!"*

*"Everyone was so nice and went out of their way to help."*

*"It benefited me and my household financially. The service provided by Pamela Fortune gave me the knowledge concerning employment laws here in the state of Virginia."*

*"It made a great difference in my life by giving me peace of mind and brought closure to the problem. I am so grateful for your service."*

*"My ex-husband was determined to keep my kids from me. Now I have custody and child support."*

*"It showed my family that there are people that care. Thanks from the bottom of our hearts."*

# CLIENT FEEDBACK

VLAS is supported by  
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