Rebecca is a bright 18-year-old high school student who hopes to become a teacher one day. Diagnosed with ADHD in elementary school, Rebecca’s difficulties with her schoolwork increased as she entered high school. Her medication made her groggy in the mornings, and she struggled with emotional and psychological disorders which made learning in a regular classroom impossible.

Rebecca’s parents begged the school system for an evaluation to enable her to receive special education services, but the school system refused. “In fact, they harassed our daughter and told her to ‘fake it until you make it,’” Jennifer recalls. “Our daughter slid into depression and self-injury. She was on the verge of dropping out.”

Meanwhile the school made a half-hearted effort at an evaluation and found Rebecca ineligible because of her high IQ and standardized test scores.

Rebecca’s parents decided they could not continue to fight the school system alone so they contacted VLAS. VLAS attorney Hank Bostwick convinced the school system to provide an independent education evaluation by a prominent psychologist. Hank also arranged for a no-cost evaluation at a nearby private school for specific learning needs. As a result of both evaluations, the public school eligibility team reconsidered and found Rebecca eligible for special education services.

Since the public school could not provide her with the education services she needed, they placed Rebecca in the private school at public expense.

Jennifer felt a huge weight being lifted. “I already work two jobs just to make ends meet and we never could have afforded this education on our own. Today, our daughter is doing well in her senior year in high school and is looking forward to graduating. She has a new start, a new confidence.”

“VLAS has given my daughter a real opportunity. They were really wonderful. If it wasn’t for them our family would have been in a lot worse shape because we couldn’t have kept up the fight on our own.”

Philip and Jennifer Shaner, parents of Rebecca

What if Your Child Were Denied Desperately-Needed Special Education Services?
Uninsured Small Businessman Obtains Health Care Coverage

Stanley Byrd was laid off of work two weeks before learning of his cancer diagnosis, and now he had no insurance. Two surgeries and twelve rounds of chemotherapy later, Mr. Byrd was facing mounting medical bills exceeding $1 million, and he could not afford to pay these soaring costs. He was referred to the Western Tidewater Free Clinic for continued treatment.

The Free Clinic often refers patients that may be eligible for Social Security Disability and Medicaid to the Virginia Legal Aid Society for eligibility assistance. Mr. Byrd shared his plight with Randi Blumenson, a Virginia Legal Aid Society attorney.

Armed with his medical records from the Free Clinic and two denials from the Social Security Administration, Ms. Blumenson’s plan was to take the case to a judge for a decision. The judge made an “on the record” decision to approve Byrd’s application.

Mr. Byrd admits he had reservations about utilizing a “free attorney” to apply for Social Security Disability benefits and Medicaid. “I was lost and had no faith. I never thought I would get help.” However, Ms. Blumenson explained she had been helping other people in this same predicament for more than 20 years. Her background and confidence compelled Mr. Byrd to “give her a shot.”

A grant from the Obici Healthcare Foundation allowed Ms. Blumenson to work with Mr. Byrd from the beginning and walk him through every step of the process. For Stanley Byrd, the Virginia Legal Aid Society was a lifesaver—literally. “If not for Legal Aid,” he said, “I know that I’d been in a homeless shelter or worse.”

When the good news finally came, both Mr. Byrd and Ms. Blumenson were overjoyed. He was able to obtain retroactive Medicaid to pay off his medical bills and receive a monthly income. Mr. Byrd was relieved to know he was no longer a burden on his family.

Though the process took a year, and the case is officially closed, Ms. Blumenson remains in touch with Mr. Byrd. Although Mr. Byrd is in remission, he still faces a long road to recovery and has Ms. Blumenson to thank for getting him to this point, adding “I can’t thank her enough.”

This article appears in the Obici Healthcare Foundation 2011 Annual Report entitled “In it for Justice.” Reprinted with permission and thanks.
Client Saved from Unlawful Income Withholding

**VLAS Attorney Action Prompts National Policy Change at SSA**

After Amber Jordan met with Carrington Sandidge for the first time, she knew there had to be a mistake. Carrington’s meager income was being garnished by Social Security by more than 64%, and he was having trouble paying his bills and making ends meet. Amber knew that the maximum amount of Carrington’s income that was eligible for garnishment according to federal and state law was 55%. Nonetheless, SSAs withholding for Carrington had crept up to much more than that.

For years Carrington paid child support for each of his four children, and the amount paid was based on his wages. Carrington unfortunately became disabled, was unable to work and his only source of income became his Social Security benefit. Carrington’s Social Security benefits were being garnished at a rate above the state and federal limit however, and Carrington could no longer afford the original amount of support.

Amber worked relentlessly with the Social Security Administration to reduce Carrington’s garnishment to the appropriate level according to state and federal law, and she was successful. She was also successful in getting SSA to change their operating manual and procedures so that others across the country would not receive garnishments higher than federal and state law allowed. Through the court system Amber also helped legally adjust Carrington’s child support obligation to an amount that accurately reflected his ability to pay and helped ensure that all of his children would be able to receive support. Carrington was extremely grateful for Amber’s help, and commented “my attorney was very professional and smart. She was GREAT!”

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- City of Lynchburg
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- United Way of Central Virginia–Women’s Leadership Council
- United Way of Danville–Pittsylvania County
- Franklin Southampton Area United Way
- United Way of Prince Edward County
- Central Virginia Area Agency on Aging
- Lake Country Area Agency on Aging
- Piedmont Senior Resources
- Pittsylvania County Community Action
- Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia
- Southern Area Agency on Aging
2010-2011 Annual Campaign for Equal Justice Contributors
(MAY 1, 2010 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2011)

Donors Noelle and Bill Shear entertain Farmville-area supporters at a “friendraiser” at their residence on September 23rd. L-R: David Neumeyer, Noelle Prince Shear, Bill Shear, Rhonda Knight

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

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FALL 2011
Reeta Wolfsohn, CMSW, founder of the Financial Social Work discipline and director of the Center for Financial Social Work in Asheville, NC, will present “Financial Social Work: What it is, how it works and why it matters in these economic times” at the Stratford Courtyard Conference Center in Danville on Wednesday, November 9, 2011 from 12:30-4:30 p.m.

The training is sponsored by the BEST Coalition, thanks to a grant from the Danville Regional Foundation. The BEST Coalition is a partnership of Caswell County Senior Center, Pittsylvania County Community Action, United Way of Danville-Pittsylvania and Virginia Legal Aid Society.

Wolfsohn’s appearance is part of a new phase of VLAS’s Financial Freedom Project, in which VLAS and BEST partners are recruiting, training and certifying volunteers from area organizations and financial institutions. The trained volunteers will then serve as financial budgeting and planning mentors for low and moderate income participants in Danville, Pittsylvania and Caswell.

For more information, contact the VLAS Financial Freedom Coordinator in Danville: (434) 793-4078, or toll-free (866) 968-3770.

VLAS attorneys, paralegals and volunteer “pro bono” attorneys closed 4,493 cases, providing legal help to 10,298 men, women and children throughout our service area. VLAS attorneys and paralegals recovered for our clients $1,636,659 in benefits, claims and damages, and saved our clients $1,092,069 by preventing the collection of unjust claims.

### Financial Social Work Training Offered

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<td>Public Benefits &amp; Health</td>
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<td>Other (Wills, Education, Employment)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL People Helped</strong></td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Benefits &amp; Health</td>
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<td>Consumer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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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.
PRIVATE ATTORNEY SUPPORT

In 2010-11, the following attorneys provided legal services to our clients without charging a fee. We thank them for their time, effort and skill!

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George Bagwell
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David B. Bice
E. Sterling Byrd-Roberts
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Randy Sinclair

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R. Clinton Clary

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Calvin Spencer, Jr.

**Suffolk Service Area:**
Franklin, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Suffolk
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Frank Rawls

For providing other pro bono legal assistance to VLAS, we thank John E. Falcone, Lynchburg

**2010-11 STAFF & PRO BONO SERVICES BY OFFICE**

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<th></th>
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**Program-Wide Pro Bono Facts & Figures: 2010-11**

- Number of Cases Completed: 187
- Number of Volunteer Attorneys: 188
- Number of Volunteer Attorneys Completing Cases: 96
- Hours of Service Provided: 608
- Value of Services Provided: $117,240
NEWS FROM THE VIRGINIA LEGAL AID SOCIETY

“I can’t begin to tell you how much I appreciate what Legal Aid has done for me. I was so scared that I was going to lose my house and I just was always reassured that I wasn’t. Thank you, thank you, thank you to Ms. Randi Blumenson.”

“Mr. White was a great attorney. Legal Aid saved me over $20,000 in Social Security overpayments that I did not owe. It kept me from losing money that I did not have.”

“Pam DeCamp was very courteous, informative and very helpful. We would have been in a terrible situation if it wasn’t for our lawyer. We didn’t have any idea what to do. This service made a huge difference for us.”

“Mr. Bostwick gave great help; excellent advice. [VLAS] helped me keep a roof over my head and did not let my landlord bully me and my family.”

“If I didn’t have your help I would have been homeless—on the street. You gave me and my daughter hope to keep on living.”

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