

BLUE RIDGE LEGAL SERVICES, INC.



ANNUAL REPORT 2002

“Equal justice under law”

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Services Corporation



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- Staunton-West Augusta Co.
- Waynesboro-East Augusta Co.



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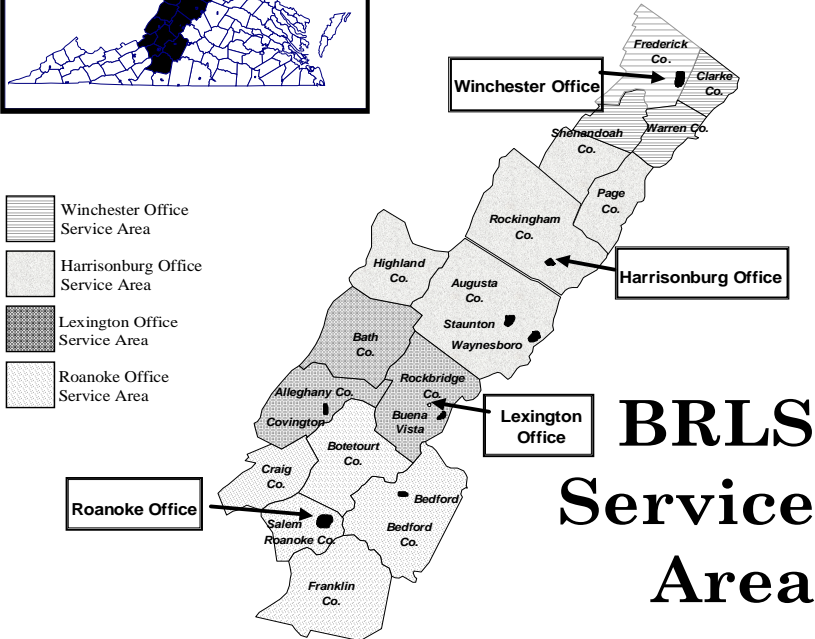
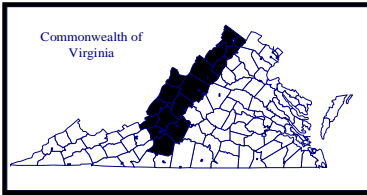
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Our Mission

Blue Ridge Legal Services (BRLS) is a private, non-profit charitable law firm established to provide free, high quality legal assistance in many types of civil matters of critical importance to low-income residents of the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke Valley.

BRLS is committed to eliminating poverty-based inequities in the civil justice system by providing free legal services to folks who could not otherwise obtain such services because of their poverty. This mission is premised on the recognition that the American ideal of “Equal Justice for All” can only be realized if the poor are provided meaningful access to our judicial system. Otherwise, the principle of equal justice remains a hollow promise.



CASE SUMMARIES

Interspersed throughout this Annual Report you will find brief summaries of some illustrative cases handled by BRLS staff and volunteer (*pro bono*) attorneys during 2002. These examples will provide the reader a clearer picture of the type of work BRLS engages in (and the results achieved) on behalf of our clients.

BRLS is part of a nationwide network of nonprofit legal services programs organized to provide free legal assistance to those who qualify. We are one of the thirteen such legal aid societies licensed by the Virginia State Bar serving various geographical areas of the Commonwealth. We are not a government agency. However, our activities are regulated by federal and state law and the various grant conditions of our funding sources.

Our Services

Blue Ridge Legal Services employs a small staff of attorneys, paralegals, and support staff in offices located in Winchester, Harrisonburg, Lexington, and Roanoke. Our legal staff is supplemented by the donated services of over 450 private attorneys throughout the Shenandoah Valley and Roanoke Valley who have agreed to handle cases we refer to them on a *pro bono* basis, without charge.

Our legal assistance ranges from advice or brief service to ongoing representation in negotiations and litigation in state and federal courts and administrative agencies, depending on the needs of the client, the type of case, and available resources.

The most common legal problems handled by Blue Ridge Legal Services include:

- Family disputes (for example, domestic violence, child custody, divorce)
-

- Problems dealing with debts and bankruptcy
- Housing and landlord-tenant disputes
- Eligibility for various government benefits (such as food stamps, TANF, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits)
- Access to health care (for example, issues involving Medicaid and Medicare)
- Consumer disputes, and
- Issues affecting seniors (such as exploitation and problems with nursing homes).

We do not handle criminal matters, traffic violations, personal injuries or malpractice cases and other cases outside of our priorities. We reserve the right to decline representation in a particular matter based on priorities established by our Board of Directors, existing caseloads, ethical considerations, and the merits of the case itself.

Eligibility Criteria

Financial eligibility for our services is based primarily on the number of persons in the applicant's household, the household's income and resources, as well as the type of case involved. BRLS does not use a sliding fee scale. If the applicant is eligible, the services are free. If the applicant is "over-income," then no services can be provided. Because of financial support we receive from Valley Program for Aging Services and the Shenandoah Area Agency on Aging, we are able to assist some senior citizens who might not otherwise qualify for our services.

According to the 2000 Census, there are nearly 79,000 residents within BRLS' service area living in poverty and, therefore, generally eligible for assistance from BRLS. Unfortunately, limited funding prevents the provision of legal assistance to every low-income resident of our service area who requests assistance in a civil (*i.e.*, non-criminal) matter. Instead, our Board of Directors has adopted a system of case priorities that we utilize to make case acceptance decisions.

BRLS Office Information

Winchester Office

Service Area:	Serves the City of Winchester and the counties of Clarke, Frederick, northern Shenandoah, and Warren.
Address:	P.O. Box 436 119 South Kent Street Winchester, VA 22604
Phone:	(540) 662-5021
Toll-free:	(800) 678-5021
Intake Hours:	9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays.

Harrisonburg Office

Service Area:	Serves the cities of Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro and the counties of Augusta, Highland, Page, Rockingham and southern Shenandoah.
Address:	P. O. Box 551 204 N. High Street Harrisonburg, VA 22803
Phone:	(540) 433-1830
Toll-free:	(800) 237-0141
Intake Hours:	9:00 a.m. and 12:45 p.m. Monday through Thursday

Lexington Office

Service Area:	Serves the cities of Buena Vista, Covington, and Lexington, and the counties of Alleghany, Bath, and Rockbridge.
Address:	203 North Main Street Lexington, VA 24450
Phone:	(540) 463-7334
Toll-free:	(866) 534-5243; or (540) 862-7642 (local call for applicants and clients in Covington and Alleghany County)
Intake Hours:	9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday -- Friday

Roanoke Office

Service Area:	Serves the cities of Bedford, Roanoke, and Salem, and the counties of Bedford, Botetourt, Craig, Franklin, and Roanoke.
Address:	132 Campbell Ave., SW Suite 300 Roanoke, VA 24011
Phone:	(540) 344-2080
Toll-free:	(866) 534-5243
Intake Hours:	9:00 a.m. -- noon and 1:30 p.m. -- 3:30 p.m. Monday -- Thursday; 9:00 a.m. -- noon Friday

Visit www.brls.org

CASE SUMMARY #1

Lisa and Ed were newlyweds. They contacted BRLS in October 2002 after Ed was served with a “no trespass” notice from the landlord of the mobile home park where they lived. He was told by the landlord he had to move out, even though he was married to Lisa, who had a valid lease.

While they were engaged, Lisa had entered into a lease with the landlord to rent the lot for her mobile home. As a result, only Lisa and her children were listed as occupants on the lease. Lisa paid her rent on time. Ed had been leasing a separate lot from the landlord. After Lisa and Ed were married, Ed sublet his lot to another person and moved in with Lisa. Unfortunately, that person defaulted in the rent. Ed could not afford to pay the rent for his separate lot. As a result, the landlord filed an eviction suit for that lot. It was after this eviction suit was concluded that the landlord served Ed with a no trespass notice covering the entire mobile home park, including his home with Lisa.

In response to the “no trespassing” notice, a BRLS attorney filed a “Tenant’s Assertion” against the mobile home park owner, challenging the no trespass notice. The matter was heard before the local General District Court. The mobile home park owner argued that it was his policy to issue no trespass papers against all persons who were evicted from the premises.

After hearing the case, the judge of the General District Court concluded that the Virginia Code section relied upon by Ed and Lisa, which allows a tenant to challenge a no trespass notice, was designed to address situations where the tenant’s guest had been served with “no trespass” papers. The Court found that Ed was not a guest, but a resident. Nevertheless the Court found it unconscionable for the landlord to prohibit a married couple from living together simply because one of them had suffered past financial problems. The Court pointed out that Ed was not a drug dealer or otherwise engaging in illegal activity. The Court then ruled that the no trespass notice was null and void, and Ed and Lisa are again able to live together like every other married couple, without fear of legal action as a result.

Board Of Directors

BRLS is governed by a Board of Directors, of whom two-thirds are attorneys, usually appointed by their local bar associations, and a third are eligible clients appointed by community organizations serving the poor. This Board establishes general program policies defining the types of cases to be handled, eligibility guidelines, *etc.*, within the limitations imposed by the grant conditions of the program's funding sources and controlling state and federal law.

In 2002, the following individuals served on the Board of Directors of Blue Ridge Legal Services:

Officers:

Dana J. Cornett, Esq., President
Harrisonburg-Rockingham Bar Association

James Bumbry, Vice President
Lincoln Terrace Residents' Council

Dr. Arthur J. Hamilton, Esq., Secretary/Treasurer
Department of Political Science, James Madison University

Directors:

Kevin C. Black, Esq.
Shenandoah County Bar Ass'n

Elizabeth M. Coogan
New Directions, Inc.

Roy V. Creasy, Esq.
Roanoke City Bar Association

Mary L.C. Daniel, Esq.
Winchester-Frederick Co. Bar Ass'n

Eugene E. Derryberry, Esq.
Total Action Against Poverty

Alice L. Ekirch, Esq.
Roanoke City Bar Association

Robert C. Hagan, Jr., Esq.
Botetourt County Bar Association

Lewis Hancock, *NAMI Roanoke Valley*

William H. Lindsey, Esq.
Salem/Roanoke County Bar Ass'n

Delores Merrick
Valley Program for Aging Services, Inc.

Richard Nichols
Roanoke Presbyterian Community Center

Randall T. Perdue, Esq.
Augusta Co. Bar Association

Arthur P. Strickland, Esq.
Roanoke City Bar Association

Mary E. Vaughn
*Education for Independence Programs,
Lord Fairfax Community College*

Vicki L. Wiese, Esq.
Rockbridge-Buena Vista Bar Ass'n

CASE SUMMARY #2

Our client was a 46 year old man who had been laid off from work. He lost his "COBRA" continuation group health insurance coverage from his former employer because he had not been found disabled by Social Security within an arbitrary time frame that had been established by his employer. He should have been allowed to extend his coverage so long as the Social Security Administration found him disabled.

The client had been laid off in October 1998. He applied for Social Security Disability Benefits in November of the same year. Through the not so unusual course of appeals and remands, our client did not receive a fully favorable Social Security decision until April 2000. That decision found him to have been disabled since October 29, 1998, the last day he had worked. Even so, the employer refused to extend the client's COBRA coverage beyond the regular 18-month period because, according to the employer's policy, the client "should have" received his favorable disability decision within the first 60 days of the health coverage.

Because of the lack of health insurance, the client was at this point incurring huge medical bills with no way to pay them. He sought assistance from Blue Ridge Legal Services. The BRLS legal staff identified the case as having merit and located a volunteer private attorney who was willing to handle the case on a *pro bono* basis.

The pro bono attorney filed a lawsuit in federal court against the former employer. The employer was undaunted by this and continued to insist that they had no responsibility to continue our client's health coverage beyond his regular 18-month period. The client, becoming more and more frustrated, called the Department of Labor and asked them to investigate his case. The Department of Labor did investigate this COBRA claim, and it concurred that the employer had wrongly denied coverage. Ultimately the pro bono attorney was success in negotiating an out of court settlement of the lawsuit with the employer for \$15,000, an amount sufficient to cover all of the client's medical bills.

BRLS Staff

With the additions to our legal staff made during 2000, we are closer to being able to meet the demand for our services than we have been since the early 1980's. Nevertheless, there remains a serious and inescapable tension between attempting to meet the demand for services from eligible clients and the responsibility to provide high quality services to clients whose representation we have undertaken. Our current legal staff is a blend of some very experienced casehandlers and some new attorneys who show potential and talent. Finally, we have a well trained, highly competent and hardworking support staff that keep our offices functioning smoothly. At the close of 2002, the staff consisted of:

Winchester Office

Anna Hammond, *Domestic Violence Staff Attorney*
Nancy J. Glickman, *Managing Attorney*
Debbie Lanham, *Legal Secretary/Referral Coordinator*
Jennifer Locke, *Staff Attorney*
Becky Stallard, *Intake Paralegal*

Harrisonburg Office

Kieran Bartley, *Staff Attorney*
Linda F. Cline, *Intake Paralegal*
Rachel Figura, *Staff Attorney*
Susan Haag, *Legal Secretary*
Kimberle H. Harding, *Staff Attorney*
Wanda Holsapple, *Administrator*
Janet R. Ikenberry, *Referral Coordinator*
Jeffrey A. Link, *Domestic Violence Attorney*
David Martin, *Staff Attorney*
Anne S. See, *Elderly Services Paralegal*
John E. Whitfield, *Executive Director/General Counsel*
Marjorie K. Whitfield, *Receptionist (part-time)*

Lexington Office

Melissa Thornley, *Intake Paralegal (part-time)*
Robin Mayer, *Managing Attorney*
Kirby Mullen, *Staff Attorney*

Roanoke Office

Ann Barlow, *Referral Coordinator*
Sue O'Bryant, *Intake Paralegal*
Nancy Mills, *Legal Secretary*
Susan C. Proctor, *Managing Attorney*

In addition to our regular staff, we have a number of Washington and Lee University law students working in our Lexington office as part of a clinic we sponsor in conjunction with the law school. We also have a number of college student interns, work-study students, and volunteers working in the Harrisonburg office each semester. They assist in a wide range of support activities, from filing to fact-finding.

CASE SUMMARY #3

Our client was a 39 year old man stricken with multiple sclerosis. As the disease progressed, he became disabled in 1996, and he became eligible for Social Security disability benefits since he was no longer able to work. He was now being pursued by debt collectors because he had defaulted on his student loans totalling \$7,200. He had tried to get the student loans cancelled because of his disability, but he had no success in working through the red tape and the run-around he experienced. He sought assistance from Blue Ridge Legal Services.

The BRLS attorney doggedly helped the client in obtaining, completing, and submitting the necessary forms. A doctor's statement had to be resubmitted because it did not specify on what date in 1996 the client had become disabled! Nevertheless, their persistence paid off and the U.S. Department of Education eventually confirmed that the client's student loans had been cancelled due to his total and permanent disability.

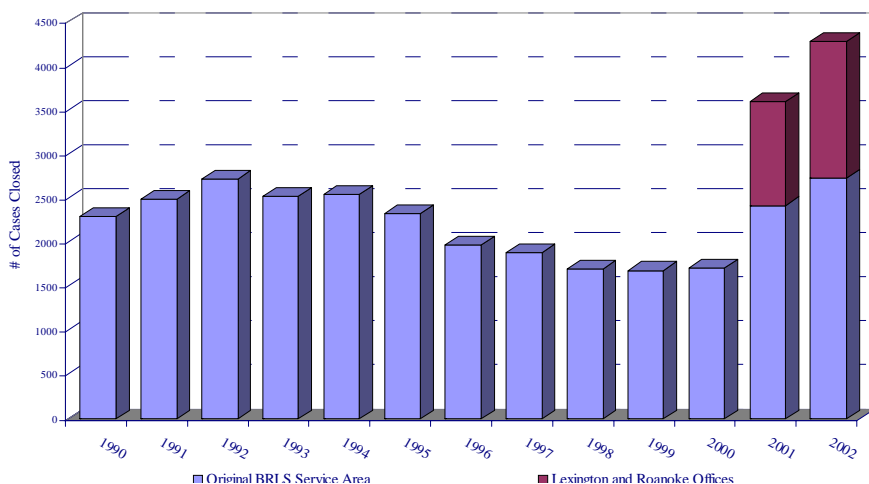
A few months later, another BRLS attorney assisted the same client with a new problem. He had purchased a mobility scooter through Medicaid in order to get around. However, the scooter proved to be defective. Since it was covered by a 5 year warranty, he contacted the dealer to see if he could get it repaired or replaced. Repairs proved unsuccessful, and the dealer promised to get a replacement for him. However, months passed without the delivery of the new scooter. The client sought the assistance of BRLS again.

The BRLS attorney called the dealer and wrote a demand letter. The dealer agreed to have a replacement sent right away. It was delivered promptly to the client soon after the letter was sent.

Casework in 2002

The number of cases closed by BRLS during 2002 increased significantly from the previous year. Four thousand two hundred eighty-two (4,282) cases were closed in 2002 by staff and *pro bono* attorneys. This represents a 9.7% increase in the total number of cases closed over 2001. See the graph titled “Cases Closed Annually 1990-2002.” Note that the program’s service area expanded in 2001 by adding the Lexington and Roanoke offices.

Cases Closed Annually 1990-2002



Most of the increase was achieved in the Roanoke office, where the case closures went from 738 in 2001 to 1143 in 2002, a 55% increase! *Pro bono* hotline cases increased (from 513 to 814) as did staff cases (from 225 to 329). In addition to closing these cases, the Roanoke office screened an additional 1200 or so low-income clients and transferred them to the Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley for legal assistance after determining them to be eligible for services. The Winchester office also contributed to the increased case closures, closing an additional 37 cases in 2002, a 5% increase. The Harrisonburg and Lexington offices saw slight declines in case closures (35 fewer cases in Harrisonburg (-1.8%), and 29 fewer in Lexington (-8.0%).

BRLS provided assistance to clients throughout its service area, including the more far-flung rural counties as well as the cities. In order to assure easy access for clients in the outlying counties, BRLS provides toll-free telephone service in each of its offices.

Cases Closed By Locality - 2002

Locality	BRLS Staff	Volunteer Attorneys	Totals
Alleghany County	70	0	70
East Augusta County	140	22	162
West Augusta County	147	16	163
Bath County	10	0	10
Bedford, City of	6	18	24
Bedford County	23	51	74
Botetourt County	11	33	44
Buena Vista, City of	53	0	53
Clarke County	34	3	37
Covington, City of	65	1	66
Craig County	1	6	7
Franklin County	64	85	149
Frederick County	237	19	256
Harrisonburg, City of	284	51	335
Highland County	3	2	5
Lexington, City of	67	0	67
Page County	169	20	189
Roanoke, City of	192	462	654
Roanoke County	28	93	121
Rockbridge County	109	0	109
Rockingham County	338	60	398
Salem, City of	12	55	67
Shenandoah County	125	24	149
Staunton, City of	266	31	297
Warren County	145	14	159
Waynesboro, City of	212	36	248
Winchester, City of	265	18	283
Other Virginia	28	6	34
Other USA	<u>45</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>52</u>
TOTALS	3149	1133	4282

CASE SUMMARY #4

Our client was a single father who had lost his job and was denied unemployment compensation benefits. The basis for the firing and the denial of unemployment compensation was his tardiness. While the client was admittedly tardy to work a couple of times, he could explain (and did explain to his employer) that each occasion of tardiness was caused by some unexpected and unforeseeable obligation as a single father. Despite his legitimate explanations, however, he was still terminated.

After Client lost his job, he applied for and was initially denied unemployment compensation benefits, since it was determined by the Virginia Employment Commission that his tardiness amounted to a deliberate disregard of the employer's interests. At this point he sought assistance from BRLS.

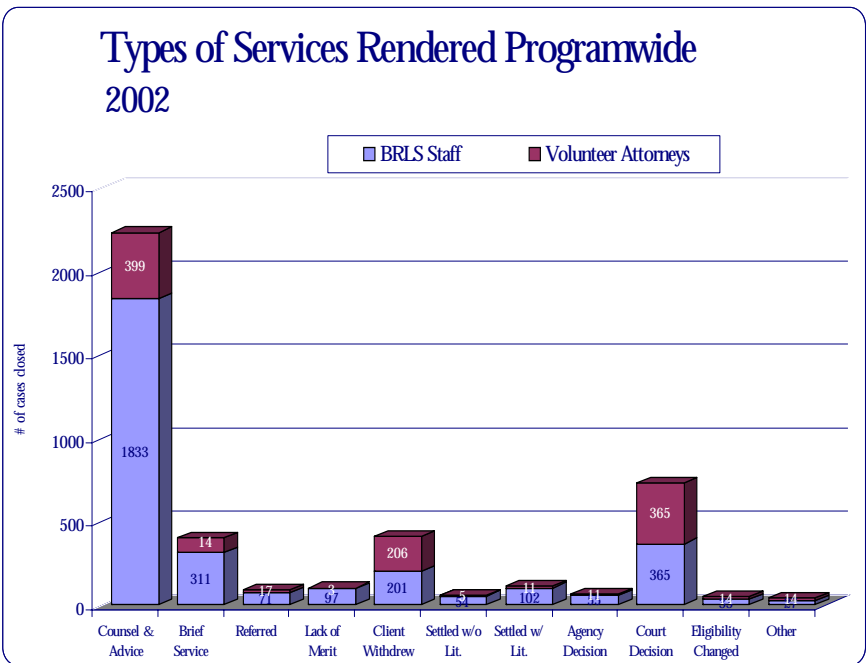
A BRLS staff attorney represented him in appealing this decision and establishing that his actions were not deliberate. At an administrative hearing, the BRLS attorney showed, among other things, how the client's actions were predicated by dealing with an absentee mother who failed to pick up the child as agreed upon and by making arrangements for the care of a sick child at the last minute. After his hearing, the client was awarded \$3,680 in unemployment benefits. He was able to use the money to prevent a foreclosure sale of his home.

In 64% of the cases closed, BRLS provided only advice, brief service, or a referral. See the graph "Types of Services Rendered Programwide 2002." Another 13% of the cases were discontinued because of lack of merit, the withdrawal or disappearance of the client, or a change in eligibility.

Extended representation (including BRLS staff and *pro bono* cases) was provided in 23% of the cases closed, the same as the previous year. BRLS staff and volunteer attorneys negotiated 59 settlements without litigation, and they settled another 113 cases in litigation. Sixty-six (66) cases were resolved by administrative agency deci-

sions, while 730 cases were resolved by court decisions obtained by BRLS staff or volunteer attorneys. (It should be noted that many of these represent no fault divorce decrees obtained by volunteer attorneys.)

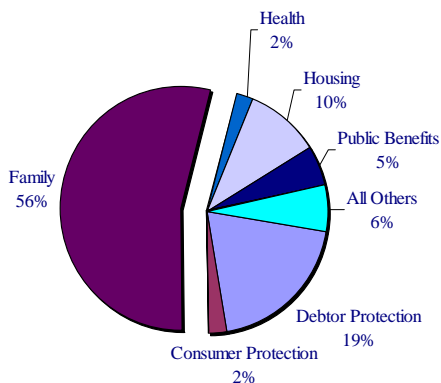
Of the 4282 cases closed in 2002, 3149 were handled by BRLS legal staff, while 1133 cases were closed by volunteer attorneys either accepting *pro bono* referrals under BRLS' Pro Bono Referral Program or participating in the Roanoke office's Pro Bono Hotline.



Family disputes (56%) constituted the largest category of cases closed in 2002. Debtors' issues comprised 19%, while Housing issues constituted 10%, followed by Public Benefits (5%), Consumer Protection and Health (2% each).

Over 11% of the cases closed were for elderly clients. About 18% of our clients were minorities, and over 78% of the clients served in 2002 were women.

Cases Closed by Legal Category Programwide 2002



CASE SUMMARY #5

This disabled client contacted our office in December 2001 because the Social Security Administration had reduced his monthly SSI check and assessed him an overpayment. Because he did not pay rent for the house in which he lived, SSI determined he was receiving "in-kind" support. They set the fair market rental value of his house at \$197 per month, and reduced his check accordingly.

He came to BRLS for assistance. The BRLS attorney appealed and requested a waiver. The attorney and a student intern went to the client's "house," which was in a very rural part of Rockbridge County. The conditions were appalling. He had no inside toilet, and since the water pipes had burst that winter, the only water he had was "what [he] could carry." There were many holes in the floor from rotting wood, and there was serious rodent and insect infestation. There was virtually no insulation, and a questionable pool of standing water was outside by the back door. Quite possibly the whole structure should have been condemned.

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The BRLS attorney took pictures and submitted them to SSA, along with a letter describing the substandard conditions. As it turned out, the client did not have to have an hearing, as his case was decided favorably at the Reconsideration stage based on the pictures and the letter. Shortly thereafter, SSA sent the client a refund check for the \$2,007.10 it had withheld. The client decided to use that money to finance his relocation into decent housing. He put a down payment on a trailer in a local mobile home park, where he currently lives.

Outcomes Achieved in 2002

Blue Ridge Legal Services systematically measures its success rate in cases involving on-going representation (*i.e.*, negotiated settlements, administrative agency decisions, and court decisions). Of the 866 such cases closed by BRLS staff or volunteer attorneys during 2002, the clients' goals were achieved in over 83%; partially achieved in 12%; and not achieved in only 5%. From these statistics, it is safe to conclude that the program is doing a good job of ascertaining the merits of the cases that are accepted for on-going representation.

BRLS also attempts to compile the measureable outcomes, if any, achieved in the cases closed. Of all the information compiled to measure the achievements for BRLS during the last year, these highlights reveal most powerfully the results of the legal work performed by BRLS staff and *pro bono* attorneys. BRLS staff and volunteer attorneys achieved the following outcomes for low-income clients during 2002:

Debtor Relief and Consumer Issues

Obtained 86 bankruptcy discharges, discharging \$1,912,000 in debts.
Stopped or reduced debt collection actions against 32 clients.
Averted repossession for 2 clients, avoiding a loss of \$35,000.
Avoided deficiency judgments for 5 clients, saving some \$12,000.
Quashed 44 garnishments, returning nearly \$32,000 in wages to clients.
Overcame illegal sales contracts for 5 clients, recovering nearly \$4,000.
Resolved credit-reporting errors for 9 clients.
Enforced warranties for 6 clients worth over \$10,000.
Avoided a utility termination for 2 clients.
Overcame fraudulent sales practices for 2 clients, saving over \$5,000.
Assisted 32 clients with consumer matters outside of litigation.
Provided advice or referral to 617 clients on debtor and consumer issues.

Family-Related Issues

Obtained adoptions for 8 families.
Obtained child custody orders for 56 clients, including nearly \$5,200 in monthly child support benefits and over \$3,000 in lump sum support.
Preserved child visitation rights for 22 clients.
Obtained divorces or annulments for 451 clients, including financial benefits of \$70,000 in lump sums and \$4,700 in monthly benefits.
Prepared Separation Agreements for 44 clients, including \$50,000 in financial benefits.
Avoided termination of parental rights for 5 clients.
Established paternity for 2 children.
Obtained court protection for 47 victims of domestic violence, together with \$2,700 in lump sum financial benefits and \$1,300 in monthly support.
Obtained, preserved, or increased spousal support for 6 clients, including \$4,100 in lump sum awards and \$633 in monthly support.
Obtained, preserved, or increased child support for another 5 clients, including \$963 in monthly support.
Obtained a downward modification of child support for 5 clients, including over \$16,000 in lump sum reductions and \$450 in monthly reductions.
Assisted 29 clients with family matters outside of litigation.
Provided advice and counsel or referral to 1301 other clients on family-related issues.

Access to Health Care Issues

Obtained, preserved, or increased Medicaid benefits for 25 clients, worth over \$21,000 in lump sum benefits and at least \$6,500 in monthly benefits.
Obtained, preserved, or increased Medicare benefits for 6 clients.
Prevented denial of rights to 4 nursing home residents, preserving over \$44,000 in financial benefits.

Obtained access to health care for 4 clients, worth \$5,235.

Enforced health insurance policy for one client.

Advised 33 clients on health care issues.

Assisted 11 clients with health care matters outside of litigation.

Housing Issues

Prevented evictions for 22 families, saving over \$10,000 in charges.

Delayed eviction for 25 families, while successfully defending claims for \$13,000 in charges.

Avoided 3 foreclosures.

Obtained access to housing for 4 families.

Avoided illegal charges imposed by landlords on another 22 families, saving nearly \$34,000.

Overcame denial of 3 tenants' rights under their leases.

Enforced 2 families' rights to habitable housing.

Restored 2 families' access to their personal property, worth \$3,700.

Obtained repairs to dwellings for 2 clients.

Obtained assistance in development of affordable housing for one family.

Provided non-litigation advocacy on behalf of 19 households in housing-related issues.

Provided counsel and advice or referral to 303 other clients with housing related problems.

Other Public Benefit Issues

Assisted 3 clients in obtaining TANF benefits.

Obtained, preserved, or increased food stamps for 4 families, worth over \$1,800.

Obtained, preserved, or increased SSI and Social Security disability benefits for 52 clients, securing over \$190,000 in lump sum benefits and \$12,350 in monthly benefits.

Obtained, preserved, or increased unemployment compensation benefits for 28 clients, with financial benefits of nearly \$5,600.

Obtained, preserved, or increased VA benefits for 4 clients, including benefits for one client worth nearly \$4,400.

Provided non-litigation advocacy on behalf of 12 households in benefit-related issues, resulting in nearly \$14,000 in financial benefits to clients.

Provided counsel and advice or referral to 98 other clients with public benefit issues.

Miscellaneous Matters

Advised 34 clients regarding employment issues.

Avoided expulsion from public school for one client.

Restored drivers licenses for 3 clients.

Advised 9 clients on civil rights issues.

Prepared wills for 41 clients.

Prepared 75 living wills, powers of attorney, or health care proxy documents.

Provided representation for 15 clients in unsuccessful affirmative litigation.

Provided representation for 21 clients in unsuccessful defensive litigation.

Pro Bono Programs

Eleven hundred thirty-three (1133) cases were closed by volunteer (“*pro bono*”) attorneys in our Pro Bono Hotline and Pro Bono Referral Program during 2002. This compares with 818 *pro bono* cases closed the previous year.

Three hundred sixty-one (361) of these were closed as part of the Virginia Bar Association (VBA)'s Pro bono Hotline operated in our Roanoke office, in which volunteers recruited by the Young Lawyers Division of the VBA staff an advice “hotline” one afternoon each week. The Roanoke Pro Bono Hotline is one of several such hotlines sponsored by the VBA across Virginia. The VBA has received national recognition from the American Bar Association for its creation of these pro bono hotlines, receiving its prestigious Harrison Tweed Award in 1995.

Another 772 cases were closed through our Pro Bono Referral Program. Over 400 private attorneys throughout our service area have generously agreed to assist, without charge, clients who are referred to them by BRLS.

Over the years, the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Bar Association has received state and national recognition for its outstanding commitment to *pro bono* work. In 1993, the national Legal Services Corporation awarded the Bar its Rural Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award. In 1995, it also received the prestigious Harrison Tweed Award from the American Bar Association in recognition for its work. In 1998 it was recognized by the Virginia State Bar when it was awarded the Lewis Powell Pro Bono Award.

Other bar associations across our service area similarly perform “yeoman's work” in providing *pro bono* assistance to low income clients referred to them by BRLS, without having yet received national and state awards. Many local bar associations in the Shenandoah Valley boast virtually 100% participation rates in our Pro Bono Referral Program, a tribute to the professionalism and generosity of the lawyers in our communities.

Representing over 26% of all BRLS cases, and 40% of those cases in which ongoing representation was provided, our *pro bono* programs are clearly important and successful components in BRLS' overall delivery of legal assistance. Nearly \$537,000 worth of legal services was donated to our clients by volunteer private attorneys handling *pro bono* cases. Because BRLS is an approved project under the Commonwealth's Neighborhood Assistance Program, many attorneys for a state income tax credit equal to 45% of the value of their donated services.

Credit also goes to BRLS's three referral coordinators, Janet Ikenberry in Harrisonburg, Debbie Lanham in Winchester, and Ann Barlow in Roanoke for their committed efforts to keep our *pro bono* programs a vital part of BRLS' service delivery system.

Other Program Developments

Integrating our New Offices Serving Expanded Service Area. BRLS's service area had been dramatically expanded in 2001 to include the Alleghany Highlands and the Roanoke Valley. This expansion was part of a statewide plan for the reconfiguration of legal aid programs. As part of this plan, BRLS assumed responsibility for two legal aid offices previously operated by Piedmont Legal Services, in Lexington and Roanoke. During 2002, BRLS committed significant resources to these new offices, upgrading the phone systems and computer networks.

In the Roanoke Valley, BRLS now closely collaborates with the Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, which continues to be the larger program in that area. The BRLS office in Roanoke performs intake screening for both legal aid programs, operates the Pro Bono Hotline, and maintains the Pro Bono Referral Program in the area, as well as provides direct legal assistance to low-income residents of the Roanoke Valley.

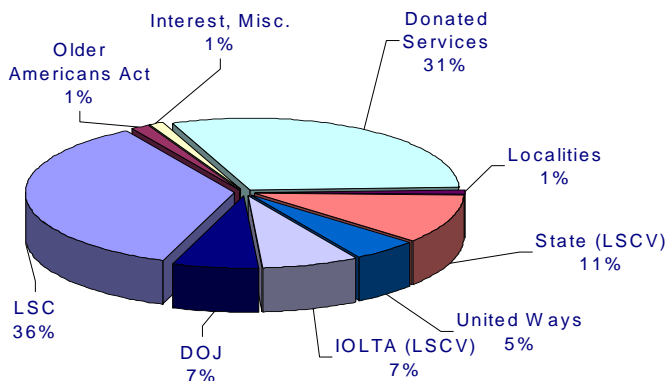
2000 Census Data Reveals Large Increase in Service Area's Poverty Population. The 2000 Census poverty data released in 2002 revealed that the BRLS service area had experienced a disproportion-

ately large increase in our poverty population relative to the rest of the state and the nation as a whole over the last decade. Overall, the service area's poverty population increased nearly 13%, from 69,892 in 1990 to 78,758 in 2000. This compares to about a 7% increase in Virginia and across the United States as a whole. The increase was greatest in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County area. Bedford County also witnessed a large increase in poverty, as did Warren County and Winchester.

LSC Technology Grant Funds Web-based Case Management Software. With funds from a statewide LSC Technology grant, BRLS was able to integrate and standardize all four offices' databases into a single one using Clients 2000, the case management software used by most legal aid programs in the country. Using an application service provider, BRLS staff can now access this case management program from their desktops, from home, or from anywhere they have Internet access.

Relocation of Roanoke Office. We relocated our Roanoke office in December 2002. The move was forced by conditions in the old office space that could not be remedied, deriving primarily from a chronically leaking roof. The new office space was found a few blocks away in downtown Roanoke. The relocation was undertaken in close coordination with the Legal Aid Society of the Roanoke Valley, which is now located on the second floor of the same building.

BRLS SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR 2002



Statement of Support, Revenue and Expenses
Year Ended December 31, 2002

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Grants and contracts	1,196,411
Interest	2,921
Donated services	525,557
Contributions	9,305
Other Income	18,679
Net assets released from restrictions	
Expiration of time or purpose restrictions	_____
Total support and revenue	\$1,752,873

EXPENSES

Lawyer wages	\$485,146
Paralegal wages	32,560
Non-legal wages	246,475
Donated services	525,557
Employee benefits	204,025
Travel	26,438
Rent	32,533
Utilities and telephone	32,798
Office supplies, postage and printing	24,016
Advertising	5,281
Insurance	8,952
Professional dues	8,440
Repairs and maintenance	35,699
Litigation expenses	3,176
Equipment rental	2,461
Training and conferences	3,161
Independent contracts	28,289
Library materials	16,914
Miscellaneous	3,606
Statewide Website Project	11,932
Depreciation	<u>19,442</u>
Total expenses	\$1,756,901

Change in net assets	(4,028)
Net assets at beginning of year	\$824,347
Net assets at end of year	\$820,319

Comments from Clients Assisted Through the Pro Bono Referral Program

"Ms. Solomon was very efficient and pleasant to work with." – Warren Co. resident.

"Couldn't have had anyone any better. Larrick & Drown was really nice and helpful. Treated you extremely good." –Warren Co. resident.

"[Mr. John Flora] was very nice about everything." – Harrisonburg resident.

"[Mr. John Hill] keep me well updated." – Staunton resident.

"Even though it took a long time to get what they wanted, [Mr. Ross Newell] still stuck to it. Any and everything that went on I was informed and I gratefully appreciate it." – Staunton resident.

"I am very grateful to Ms. Alt and her team for their help!" – Rockingham Co. resident.

"Mr. Glass was very nice and kind to me." – Staunton resident.

"[Mr. Thomas Howell] was very helpful and prompt." – Rockingham Co. resident.

"Mr. Silek and his staff were wonderful. Thanks again for all your help." – Warren Co. resident.

"Mr. Stables is a very nice and friendly gentleman.. He made me feel like my case was the most important thing he had to do...." –Page Co. resident.

"Mr. McPherson did a wonderful job!!! I believe that God answered my prayers by putting me in touch with the "perfect" people to help me!!!" – Staunton resident.

"[Mr. Dana Comier] is a real good attorney and he knows his work." – Rockingham Co. resident.

"[Mr. Tom Lane] was great. He made me feel comfortable ...He is the best!" – Augusta Co. resident.

"Mr. Butler and his staff were very efficient and helpful and friendly." –Page Co. resident.

"Mr. Wirth was very thorough and prompt in getting my case resolved quickly. Thank you for handling my application over the phone and qualifying me quickly since we didn't have much time before my court date." –Augusta Co. resident.

"[Mr. Matthew Sunderlin] made me feel like I was a very special client. Thank you so much!" –Rockingham Co. resident.

"Mr. Ward was an excellent attorney, very helpful... He called me and let me know what was going on step by step." – Waynesboro resident.

"Thank you for having Douglas Woodworth handle our needs. How wonderful it is to work with someone like him." –Augusta Co. resident.

"Ms. Reed is not only a great attorney but a very kind woman." –Page Co. resident.