

2022



SUMMER UPDATE

Providing access to justice through engaging the legal community in volunteer service to those in need.



EMPOWERING & CELEBRATING THE LGBT* COMMUNITY

The VLPCNY team loved celebrating at the CNY Pride Festival this June. Our LGBT+ Rights Program offers legal resources to assist those experiencing discrimination and/or harassment with regard to employment, housing, health insurance, public accommodations and more. We also offer free name and gender marker changes for trans* individuals. Learn more on our website [HERE](#).

COMMUNITY PARTNER SUPPORT

“Here at Central Library, we are in the hub of Syracuse, serving patrons with many diverse needs. We often get visitors who start out asking a simple computer question, and after a few minutes, it's clear they need help beyond what we can offer. Sometimes they need to print a Power of Attorney form, or they bring a form with them and have questions about filling it out, or they are unsure where to start when it comes to tenants' rights, or they want to start a business or nonprofit and need a lawyer referral. As librarians, it's so important for us to have information to help refer patrons to the right resources, but the fact that we have lawyers in the building each week is a huge bonus for us. Rather than handing a patron a phone number or business card, we are able to direct them right to a person who can give them the steps they need in our own building. For us and our community, the VLP partnership is a vital link to legal resources.”

René Battelle, Central Library Manager

RAISE A GLASS & SUPPORT VLPCNY



save the date!

CHEERS FOR A CAUSE

A virtual wine tasting fundraiser to benefit VLPCNY. Hosted by Ray Isle, Executive Wine Editor of Food & Wine and the Wine & Spirits Editor of Travel + Leisure.



Thursday, October 6, 2022
6:00 - 7:00 PM
More information to come!



Attorneys: can you help low-income clients prepare custody, child support and paternity petitions at the Family Court Clinic?

Beginning Wednesday June 15:
Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Onondaga County Family Court

Beginning September 23:
Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 and
Fridays from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Sign up for a shift [HERE](#).

FAMILY COURT VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

A client recently sought help with several cases pending in Family Court. He had not received notice regarding one of the cases. The volunteer attorney went with the client to the Clerk's Office to investigate what happened. It was determined that the Clerk did mail the papers to the client at his correct address, but they were returned as undeliverable. He was being accused of violating a court order he never received. The volunteer successfully drafted a petition seeking to dismiss the violation petition against the client.

THE INVALUABLE WORK OF LAW STUDENTS

VLPCNY is so grateful to receive funding from The John Ben Snow Foundation to provide a stipend to our Access to Justice Fellowship candidates. This grant allows us to recruit law students who are passionate about advancing the causes of racial equity in their work and those with diverse perspectives on life and the practice of law. We are happy to introduce Marisol Estrada Cruz, Access to Justice Fellow.



What made you want to intern with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY?

During my second year of law school, I received an email from my Immigration Law Professor about an opportunity to volunteer with VLP to help the recent Afghan Evacuees arriving to Syracuse. The call for volunteers explained that they could use any and all of the help from the community and it was a perfect time for me to step up to help. I attended a virtual training led by VLP explaining the Afghan crisis, detailing that over 500 Afghans were expected to resettle in Syracuse, and I quickly signed up for the legal clinics. Volunteering at the legal clinics was probably one of the best experiences I've had in law school and I fell in love with the work that VLP set out to do. After doing some research on the mission and vision of VLP and speaking with Sal Curran, I spoke to Sam Aguam about the opportunity to work for VLP this summer and we made it work. As the oldest daughter of a single mother of five, I've never had the financial support or safety net a lot of my peers have. I am an immigrant, a first-generation high school student, college student, and now law student. I don't have the privilege of accepting jobs at non-profits where there is not an opportunity for financial compensation. Although the work many non-profits do fills my heart, that alone cannot pay for my ability to survive. Paying for rent, groceries, student fees, and other living expenses takes a lot of planning on my part and I cannot afford to volunteer full time without financial compensation. It is for this reason that I asked Sam about opportunities for compensation and VLP was able to offer me a stipend that would pay at least minimum wage for my full-time position with VLP this summer. If VLP did not have the resources to financial compensation, I would probably have to hold my own fundraiser to see if I could pull community resources to come up with the funds to pay for my time. Otherwise, I would have had to stay working at an unfulfilling job over the summer to make ends meet.

Why did you choose to study law?

Growing up as an undocumented Mexican-American in Savannah, Georgia, I learned early on what it means to diligently work and pursue my dreams against harsh odds. My legal status is a huge part of my identity, which has presented me with overwhelming challenges, but it has also shaped my passion for the law and my deep personal understanding of its impact on people's lives.

Being undocumented is one of the most significant aspects of my identity. It has shaped the challenges in my life and inspired me to advocate for reform of our complicated immigration system. For many years, I lived in the shadows. In 2012, during my senior year in high school, President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA provided me with a work permit, a social security number, a feeling of safety, and the hope of one day gaining legal status in the only country I call home. As time passed, I found the courage to organize within my undocumented community and stepped out of the shadows and into the light.

But even with this protection, I was barred from admission to Georgia's top public colleges and universities. The Georgia colleges that allowed me to attend required me to pay out-of-state tuition. Seeking to control what I could despite a sea of policies that limited my opportunities, I earned four scholarships and worked two jobs to save for college. During my time in college, I played a vital role in the founding of the Savannah Undocumented Youth Alliance, a grassroots organization composed of undocumented youth who work to end the ban on undocumented students from certain schools and advocate on various issues that affect our community. It was through this experience that I learned what a powerful tool the law is, and how important it is to have legal representation through life's challenges.

What are your goals for after law school?

My unique worldview equips me with the passion and empathy that clients deserve from their attorneys. My goal after law school is to be a practicing immigration attorney, fighting zealously for the people whose struggles I understand firsthand and whose dreams for themselves and their families mirror my own. As an immigrant, a Latina, and the first in my family to attend and graduate from college, I am prepared to be part of our legal community's evolution, working to realize our national ideal of equal protection under the law for all. I am prepared to advocate for the immigrant community in every possible way.

Want to support our work but can't volunteer at this time? [Make a charitable gift today!](#)
Together we are providing access to justice to those in need.