

BLUE RIDGE LEGAL SERVICES, INC.



ANNUAL REPORT 2003

"Equal justice under law"

*Funded in part by the Legal
Services Corporation*



A United Way Supported Charity:

- Franklin Co.
- Front Royal-Warren Co.
- Greater Alleghany United Fund
- Greater Augusta United Way
- Harrisonburg-Rockingham Co.
- Lexington-Rockbridge Co.
- Northern Shenandoah Valley
- Page Co.
- Roanoke Valley



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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 2003. 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

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CASE SUMMARY #1

An African-American woman contacted BRLS because her car had been wrongfully repossessed and the car dealer had filed a lawsuit against her claiming she still owed him money. The car dealer had repossessed the client's car in retaliation for her testifying against her former boyfriend, one of the car dealer's salesmen, in an assault and battery charge. Another of the car dealer's employees had pressured her not to testify against the man. When she nevertheless testified, they demanded she now pay his debt to them as well, even though there was no legal basis for this demand.

A BRLS staff attorney and a *pro bono* attorney agreed to co-counsel her defense. They carefully reviewed the underlying transaction and found it fraught with violations of various state and federal consumer protection laws. They removed the case from the General District Court (where the car dealer had filed it) to the Circuit Court and filed a counterclaim for federal Truth in Lending Act (TILA) violations for the dealer's failure to properly disclose the finance charges involved in the credit sale, Virginia Consumer Protection Act (VCPA) violations for failing to comply with DMV laws regarding issuance of the title, Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) violations for failure to comply with Virginia law regarding repossessions, and common law fraud for lying about the actual price of the vehicle.

When the dealer failed to defend his lawsuit, the judge awarded our client over \$4,300 in a partial summary judgment for the TILA and UCC violations. The dealer's claim against our client was dismissed. The remaining matters then went to a jury trial. The jury awarded our client \$150,000 in compensatory damages and \$150,000 in punitive damages. So far she has collected \$10,000 from Virginia's Motor Vehicle Dealer Board Recovery fund, as the car dealer appears to be insolvent.

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 2003, the following individuals served on the Board of Directors of Blue Ridge Legal Services. (Their appointing organizations are listed in italics.)

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

Tonya S. Jodrie
Response, Inc.

Richard Nichols
Roanoke Presbyterian Community Center

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

Holly S. Peters, Esq.
Salem/Roanoke County Bar Ass'n

Christopher B. Russell, Esq.
Rockbridge-Buena Vista Bar Ass'n

Arthur P. Strickland, Esq.
Roanoke City Bar Association

Laura Wine
Mercy House, Inc.

CASE SUMMARY #2

Our Harrisonburg office elderly services paralegal noted a pattern of attempted inappropriate transfers by a local nursing home to assisted living facilities. It appeared that the nursing home was attempting to reduce the number of Medicaid residents in the facility because of the relatively low profit margin generated by Medicaid patients. In 3 separate instances that came to her attention, the nursing home requested the local Department of Social Services to perform pre-screening for assisted living (a lower level of care) facilities for long-term residents whose medical records and conditions clearly indicated that they were appropriately placed in a nursing home setting. An inexperienced DSS screener was approving them for transfer, and in a number of cases the transfer was undertaken. The family was told they had no choice in the matter.

However, in each situation, when our elderly services paralegal became involved and advocated for the resident's continued stay at the nursing home as the most appropriate placement, the nursing home dropped the transfer plans. To help prevent additional occurrences, the elderly services paralegal provided education to the local DSS pre-screening team so that they would be alert to future attempts to seek inappropriate transfers of Medicaid nursing home residents.

BRLS Staff

Our staffing suffered a major blow with the loss of our federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant from the Department of Justice in 2003. We were forced to lay off two excellent staff attorneys, Anna Hammond and Rachel Figura, because of the loss of this funding. This exacerbated the 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. In late 2003 we also lost our very experienced and capable Harrisonburg office intake paralegal, Linda Cline, at the birth of her first child. Most sadly, we lost our longstanding Staunton outreach office receptionist, Marjorie Whitfield, who passed away January 5, 2003.

At the close of 2003, the staff consisted of:

Winchester Office

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*
Susan Haag, *Legal Secretary*
Kimberle H. Harding, *Staff Attorney*
Wanda Holsapple, *Administrator*
Janet R. Ikenberry, *Referral Coordinator*
Julie Jackson, *Intake Paralegal*
Jeffrey A. Link, *Staff Attorney*
David Martin, *Staff Attorney*
Anne S. See, *Elderly Services Paralegal*
John E. Whitfield, *Executive Director/General Counsel*

Lexington Office

Robin Mayer, *Managing Attorney*
Kirby Mullen, *Staff Attorney*
Melissa Thornley, *Intake Paralegal*

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 and Harrisonburg offices as part of a clinic we operate in conjunction with the law school. We have also been fortunate in securing law student interns during the summer months without cost to the program. In the summer of 2003 we had a record 8 law students working in the Harrisonburg office.

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

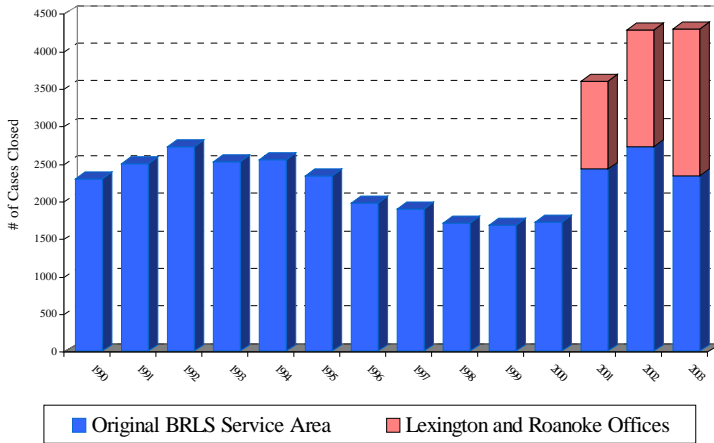
Our client was an amputee in his sixties. He contacted us when the local post office refused to deliver mail to his door. During poor weather he found that he was unable to walk safely to the apartment complex mailboxes, which are located outside. His doctor had recommended that the mail be delivered to his door to reduce the risk of his falling. The man installed a mailbox by his door and requested that the local post office deliver to it. Unfortunately, the post office denied his request on the grounds that he could drive to the apartment complex mailboxes, and they did not want to open the door to delivering mail to the door of other residents in the apartment complex.

At this point, the disabled man contacted BRLS. The BRLS staff attorney researched the postal regulations and then wrote the Consumer Advocate at the U.S. Postal Service in Washington D.C. This office intervened and instructed the local post office to deliver the mail to the disabled man's door.

Casework in 2003

The number of cases closed by the program during 2003 was virtually the same as the previous year: 4294 cases were closed in 2003 by staff and *pro bono* attorneys, compared with 4,282 cases closed in 2002. See the graph titled "Cases Closed Annually 1990-2003." Note that the program's service area expanded in 2001 by adding the Lexington and Roanoke offices.

Cases Closed Annually 1990-2003



While the total number of cases remained constant, there were underlying changes in composition. In the Winchester and Harrisonburg offices, the number of cases closed declined significantly. See the accompanying table. In contrast, the number increased significantly in the Lexington and Roanoke offices. The decrease in Winchester and Harrisonburg is partially attributable to the loss of the domestic violence attorney positions in those offices during the last quarter. The large shifts between the Harrisonburg and Lexington offices reflect the latter office's assumption of intake responsibilities for the Harrisonburg office one day a week for much of the year.

Office	2002	2003	Net Change
Winchester	802	726	-76
Harrisonburg	1929	1612	-317
Lexington	408	673	+265
Roanoke	1143	1283	+140

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 - 2003

Locality	BRLS Staff	Volunteer Attorneys	Totals
Alleghany County	65	0	65
Augusta County	324	39	363
Bath County	14	0	14
Bedford, City of	17	22	39
Bedford County	38	50	88
Botetourt County	19	34	53
Buena Vista, City of	77	0	77
Clarke County	33	6	39
Covington, City of	100	1	101
Craig County	1	5	6
Franklin County	53	82	135
Frederick County	204	25	229
Harrisonburg, City of	218	68	286
Highland County	3	1	4
Lexington, City of	42	1	43
Page County	178	33	211
Roanoke, City of	259	468	727
Roanoke County	37	100	137
Rockbridge County	136	0	136
Rockingham County	322	56	378
Salem, City of	31	60	91
Shenandoah County	136	15	151
Staunton, City of	220	31	251
Warren County	118	12	130
Waynesboro, City of	205	21	226
Winchester, City of	197	24	221
Other Virginia	28	6	34
Other USA	<u>52</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>59</u>
TOTALS	3127	1167	4294

CASE SUMMARY #4

Our client was a low-income disabled Augusta County man who had liver cancer. He had been placed on a liver transplant list. Family members were raising funds for his treatment, but the organizations working with the family and the IRS required that the funds be paid into a trust. Moreover, the client was applying for SSI and Medicaid, and he needed to be careful that the funds being collected for his treatment would not interfere with his eligibility for these much needed public benefits. A Harrisonburg attorney who specializes in trusts volunteered to set up the trust through BRLS' pro bono referral program.

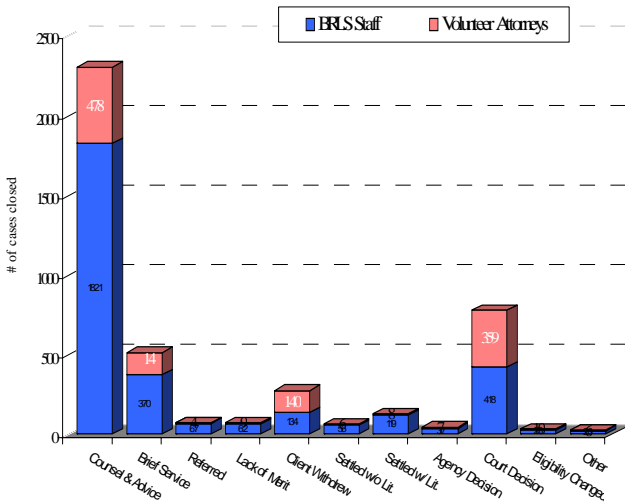
In 67% of the cases closed, BRLS provided only advice, brief service, or a referral. See the graph "Types of Services Rendered Programwide 2003." Another 9% of the cases were discontinued because of lack of merit, the withdrawal or disappearance of the client, or a change in eligibility.

Extended representation (including BRLS staff and *pro bono* cases) was provided in 24% of the cases closed, about the same as the previous year. BRLS staff and volunteer attorneys negotiated 62 settlements without litigation, and they settled another 127 cases in litigation. Forty-four (44) cases were resolved by administrative agency decisions, while 777 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 staff or volunteer attorneys.)

Over 11% of the cases closed were for elderly clients. About 20% of our clients were minorities, and over 78% of the clients served in 2003 were women.

Of the 4294 cases closed in 2003, 3127 were handled by BRLS legal staff, while 1167 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.

Types of Services Rendered Programwide 2003



CASE SUMMARY #5

The client was an elderly woman who had been persuaded to sign two home improvement contracts for roof repair and installation of gutters. She made a downpayment of \$1600, but months passed without any work being done, despite numerous calls and letters to the contractor. She finally contacted BRLS for assistance.

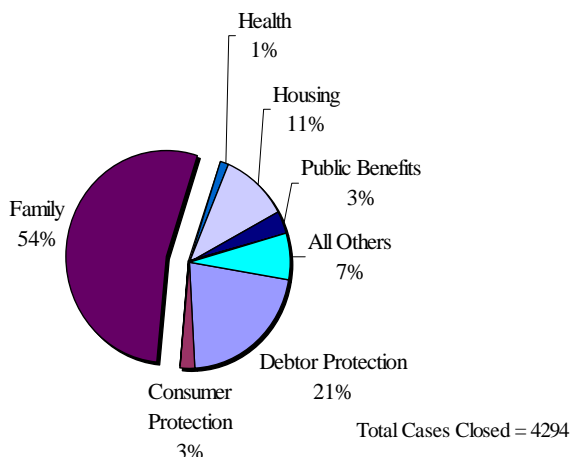
A BRLS staff attorney sent the home improvement contractor a letter cancelling the contract under the Virginia Home Solicitation Sales Act and demanding the return of the client's downpayment within ten days. The company complied promptly, returning the client's money to her in full.

Family disputes (54%) constituted the largest category of cases closed in 2003. Debtors' issues comprised 21%, while Housing issues constituted 11%, followed by Public Benefits and Consumer Protection (3% each) and Health (1%).

Cases Closed by Legal Category

Programwide

2003



CASE SUMMARY #6

This Augusta County man had entered into a year's lease with the landlord and had paid a full year's rent in advance. Soon after he moved in with his wife and five children, the septic system backed up. Sewage flooded the toilet, the bathtub, and the yard. He notified his landlord and called a local septic company to empty the system. Within three weeks, it had backed up again. Despite repeated requests, the landlord failed to drain, expand or repair it. The Augusta County Health Department advised the man to remove his family from the premises because it posed a serious health risk. The man was forced to rent space at a campground for his
(Continued on next page.)

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family. He came to BRLS seeking to recover the rent he had prepaid as well as rent abatement for the months he lived there with the sewage backing up. He also sought damages for the cost of moving his family.

A local private attorney agreed to handle represent him without charge through BRLS' Pro Bono Referral Program. The attorney sued the landlord and successfully recovered and collected a judgment for \$3,255 for the man. The attorney donated over \$1,000 in legal services in his pursuit of justice in this case.

Outcomes Achieved in 2003

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 872 such cases closed by BRLS staff or volunteer attorneys during 2003, the clients' goals were achieved in over 89%; partially achieved in 7%; and not achieved in less than 4%. 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 2003:

Debtor Relief and Consumer Issues

Obtained 62 bankruptcy discharges, discharging \$2,036,000 in debts while recovering \$8,931 in garnished wages.

Stopped or reduced debt collection actions against 23 clients, avoiding \$455,000 in debts and recovering \$3,420 in payments.

Averted repossession for 1 client, avoiding a loss of \$5,000.

Avoided deficiency judgments for 6 clients, avoiding some \$31,000 in claims and recovering \$10,000.

Quashed 56 garnishments, liens, or levies, returning nearly \$37,000 in wages or property to the clients.

Resolved credit-reporting errors for 3 clients.

Enforced warranties for 6 clients worth over \$4,000.

Avoided a utility termination for 1 client.

Overcame fraudulent sales practices for 2 clients.

Assisted 43 clients with consumer matters outside of litigation.

Provided advice and counsel or referral to 562 clients on debtor and consumer issues.

Family-Related Issues

Obtained child custody orders for 63 clients, including over \$12,200 in monthly child support benefits and over \$10,000 in lump sum support.

Preserved child visitation rights for 16 clients.

Obtained divorces or annulments for 218 clients, including financial benefits of \$86,000 in lump sums and \$3,500 in monthly benefits.

Prepared Separation Agreements for 42 clients, including \$41,000 in financial benefits.

Avoided termination of parental rights for 1 client.

Established paternity for 3 children.

Obtained court protection for 36 victims of domestic violence, together with \$1,200 in lump sum financial benefits and \$3,000 in monthly support.

Obtained, preserved, or increased child support for 4 clients, including nearly \$29,000 in lump sum awards and \$731 in monthly support.

Obtained, preserved, or increased spousal support for another 6 clients, including \$26,000 in lump sum awards and \$1,500 in monthly support.

Obtained a downward modification of child support for 9 clients, including over \$23,000 in lump sum reductions and \$800 in monthly reductions.

Assisted 30 clients with family matters outside of litigation.

Provided advice and counsel or referral to 949 other clients on family-related issues.

Access to Health Care Issues

Obtained, preserved, or increased Medicaid benefits for 13 clients, worth over \$1,200 in lump sum benefits and at least \$7,500 in monthly benefits.

Obtained, preserved, or increased Medicare benefits for 2 clients.

Prevented denial of rights to 4 nursing home residents, preserving over \$97,000 in financial benefits.

Obtained access to health care for 4 clients, worth \$3,500.

Enforced health insurance policy for one client.

Advised 23 clients on health care issues.

Assisted 11 clients with health care matters outside of litigation, obtaining \$6,700 in financial benefits.

Housing Issues

Prevented evictions for 23 families, saving over \$13,000 in charges.

Delayed eviction for 15 families, while successfully defending claims for \$41,000 in charges.

Avoided 4 foreclosures.

Obtained access to housing for 5 families.

Avoided illegal charges imposed by landlords on another 16 families, saving over \$19,000.

Overcame denial of 3 tenants' rights under their leases.

Enforced 3 families' rights to habitable housing.

Restored 8 families' access to their personal property, worth \$5,800.

Obtained repairs to dwellings for 1 client.

Assisted 25 households in housing-related issues outside of litigation.

Provided counsel and advice or referral to 294 other clients with housing related problems.

Other Public Benefit Issues

Assisted 1 client in obtaining TANF benefits, worth \$254 monthly.

Obtained, preserved, or increased food stamps for 3 families.

Obtained, preserved, or increased SSI and Social Security disability benefits for 21 clients, securing \$55,000 in lump sum benefits and \$4,000 in monthly benefits.

Obtained, preserved, or increased unemployment compensation benefits for 18 clients, with financial benefits of over \$29,000.

Obtained, preserved, or increased VA benefits for 3 clients, including financial benefits of over \$6,500.

Avoided wrongful placement or term of training for 3 clients.

Assisted 13 households in benefit-related issues outside of litigation.

Provided counsel and advice to 52 other clients with public benefit issues.

Miscellaneous Matters

Advised 16 clients regarding employment issues.

Obtained appropriate special education for 1 child.

Restored drivers license for 1 client.

Advised 6 clients on civil rights issues.

Prepared wills for 8 clients.

Prepared 39 living wills, powers of attorney, or health care proxy documents.

Provided representation for 20 clients in unsuccessful affirmative litigation.

Provided representation for 16 clients in unsuccessful defensive litigation.

Pro Bono Programs

Eleven hundred sixty-seven (1167) cases were closed by volunteer (“pro bono”) attorneys in our Pro Bono Hotline and Pro Bono Referral Program during 2003.

Four hundred thirty-one (431) 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 736 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 27% of all BRLS cases, and over 38% 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

Loss of Federal Domestic Violence Grant Cripples Program. In September BRLS learned that a major domestic violence grant from the Department of Justice would not be renewed. The loss of the grant funds had an immediate impact on the free legal services the legal aid society provides to victims of domestic violence. "This is truly devastating news, both for our staff and for the clients we serve," stated John Whitfield, BRLS executive director, in a statement to the press. "We will have no choice but to lay off two fine, dedicated attorneys and reduce critical legal services to folks that desperately need them and who have no where else to turn."

Blue Ridge Legal Services had initially received an 18-month, \$160,000 grant in 1999 from the Violence Against Women Office of the Department of Justice. It was renewed for an additional 18 months in 2001, and it was up for renewal again in 2003. The grant enabled BRLS to add two attorneys to its staff, one in the Harrisonburg office, the other in the Winchester office, who worked exclusively to provide free legal representation to victims of domestic violence. The grant allowed us to expand our normal financial guidelines to assist victims with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. They collaborated closely with the various domestic violence shelter organizations across the Valley, expediting

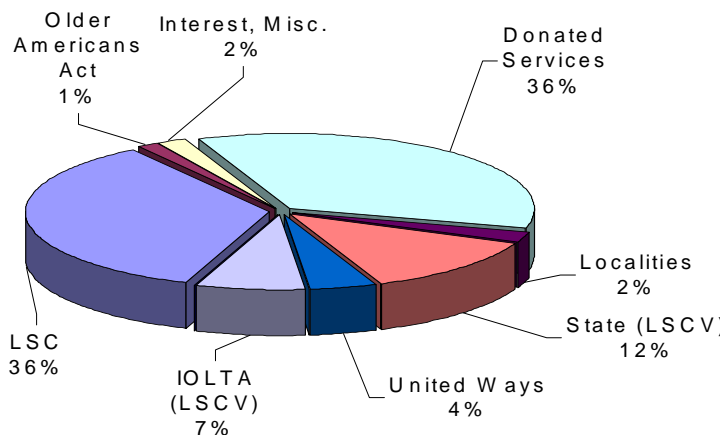
services on an emergency basis. Overall, the grant allowed BRLS to assist 728 victims of domestic violence over the 3 years. Most of these cases involved multiple court appearances in bitterly contested battles between the abuser and the victim over the parties' children, property, and support.

Comprehensive Client Satisfaction Survey Implemented.

BRLS implemented a program-wide client satisfaction survey system in August 2003. During the remainder of 2003, we averaged an 83% satisfaction rate (that is, services provided were either "excellent" or "very good"). Another 7% of clients rated the services they received as "adequate". The remaining 10% rated the services received as "poor"; the majority of these were from disappointed under-served clients with cases where we were only able to provide some advice as opposed to on-going representation, due to a lack of available attorneys to meet the demand for services.

New Funding Supports Elderly Services. New funding from the United Way of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County and the Gannett Foundation allowed BRLS to create a new, temporary half-time attorney position in the Harrisonburg office focusing on providing legal services to the elderly. Anita Robinson, an experienced former legal services attorney who had recently relocated with her family to the area was hired to fill the position.

BRLS SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR 2003



Statement of Support, Revenue and Expenses

Year Ended December 31, 2003

SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Grants and contracts	1,152,666
Interest	1,907
Donated services	641,853
Contributions	14,648
Other Income	20,400
Net assets released from restrictions	
Expiration of time or purpose restrictions	<u> -</u>
Total support and revenue	\$1,831,474

EXPENSES

Lawyer wages	\$471,837
Paralegal wages	33,951
Non-legal wages	263,969
Donated services	626,418
Employee benefits	219,300
Travel	23,973
Rent	45,063
Utilities and telephone	34,016
Office supplies, postage and printing	26,559
Advertising	6,088
Insurance	8,657
Professional dues	8,618
Repairs and maintenance	16,356
Litigation expenses	1,010
Equipment rental	1,793
Training and conferences	1,614
Independent contracts	7,413
Library materials	16,265
Miscellaneous	2,056
Statewide Website Project	791
Depreciation	<u>18,672</u>
Total expenses	\$1,834,419

Change in net assets	(2,945)
Net assets at beginning of year	\$820,319
Net assets at end of year	\$817,374

Statement of Financial Position

December 31, 2003

ASSETS**Current assets**

Cash	\$ 69,031
Cash in escrow, client deposit	4,031
Contributions receivable	686,019
Support receivable	3,337
Prepaid expenses	<u>18,627</u>
Total current assets	<u>781,045</u>

Property and equipment

Land	6,724
Building and improvements	99,524
Furniture, fixtures and equipment	306,704
Law library	<u>18,695</u>
	431,647
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>351,672</u>
Total property and equipment	<u>79,975</u>

Total assets \$ 861,020**LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS****Current liabilities**

Accounts payable	\$ 4,389
Accrued annual leave	35,226
Client deposits	<u>4,031</u>
Total current liabilities	<u>43,646</u>

Net assets

Unrestricted	113,078
Temporarily Restricted	<u>704,296</u>
Total net assets	<u>817,374</u>

Total liabilities and net assets \$ 861,020

Comments from BRLS Clients Assisted Through Our Pro Bono Referral Program

“[Mr. Matthew Sunderlin] really went ‘the second mile’ to help me. He was not just a first class attorney, he was also a quality gentleman....He treated me with the utmost caring, compassion, and totally non-judgmental. Thank you, Blue Ridge, for helping me have such a wonderful legal eagle whose heart is reflective in all he does. You have restored my faith in the legal profession for sure. Thanks to Mr. Matthew Sunderlin and the Clark & Bradshaw law firm.” – Harrisonburg resident.

“Mr. [Russell] Fowler was a wonderful lawyer. He was very understanding and alot of support in my case. Thank you very much!” – Winchester resident.

“Jennifer Cupp was very pleasant and listened to all matters....I am very pleased and grateful.” – Harrisonburg resident.

“Mr. [Michael] Hobart was very helpful, also his staff is great. Thanks so much.” – Clarke County resident.

“[Mr. James Glick] was very pleasant and did a tremendous job.” – Augusta County resident.

“Mr. [Thomas] Howell is a very good and nice attorney.” – Harrisonburg resident.

“I thank all of you who were involved in my case. From the beginning to the end, you all have been very kind and very helpful. Without your help and Ms. [Deborah] Gartzke’s kind services, I would have never been able to have afforded this divorce case on my own. God bless each of you and thank you again very much.” – Staunton resident.

“[Mr. Bishop Dansby] did a great job.” – Harrisonburg resident.

“My Dad and I would like to personally thank you for your assistance in obtaining the legal services of Randall Perdue, Esq. He is the kind of lawyer you would prefer to have to represent you in any kind of a legal situation.... We can’t begin to tell you how much we appreciate what he did. Again, thank you and BRLS for your services to people with limited incomes who have been unjustly taken advantage of. Without your legal services Pro Bono Referral program they would have no one to turn to.” – Staunton resident.

“[Mr. William Stables] and his secretary were polite, knowledgeable, patient, and very, very helpful.” – Page County resident.

“[Mr. John Crist] was a super nice attorney. Thank you Blue Ridge Legal Services and Mr. Crist. You did a great job.” – Rockingham County resident.

“Mr. [Richard] Erickson did a great job. I thank all of you for helping me to get all the help I received. There was no way possible I would have been able to get the divorce if it wasn’t for BRLS and Mr. Erickson.” – Staunton resident.