



**LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION  
Office of Program Performance**

**FINAL  
Program Quality Visit**

**BAY AREA LEGAL SERVICES**

**Recipient Number: 610050**

**April 19-23, 2010**

*Team Leader:*

**Michael Genz, Program Counsel, LSC**

*Team Members:*

**Willie Abrams, Program Counsel, LSC  
Mytrang Nguyen, Program Counsel, LSC  
Patrick McIntyre, LSC Consultant  
Alison Paul, LSC Consultant**

# Bay Area Legal Services PQV

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Background on the visit**

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a program quality visit to Bay Area Legal Services (BALS and "Bay Area"). The team members were OPP Program Counsel Michael Genz, (team leader), Mytrang Nguyen, Willie Abrams; and consultants Alison Paul and Patrick McIntyre.

Program quality visits are designed to ensure that LSC grantees are providing the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment, the team carefully reviewed the documents LSC received from the program including its application narrative for 2010, its case service reports (CSRs) and other service reports (OSRs), the numerous documents the program submitted in advance of the visit including advocates' writing samples and a survey of BALS staff conducted on the Internet. On site, the team visited Tampa offices (the main office, the courthouse office and the Children's Law Center) and the St. Petersburg, Dade City and Wimauma offices. In addition to speaking to most of the BALS staff members, the team met with a sampling of board members, judges, members of the bar and community organization members.

In performing its evaluation of the grantee's delivery system, OPP relies on the LSC Act and regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. The evaluation is organized according to the four LSC performance areas that cover needs assessment and priority setting; engagement with the low income community; legal work management and the legal work produced; and program management including board governance, leadership, strategic planning, resource development and coordination within the delivery system.

### **Program overview**

BALS serves a five county service area adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico in the center-west part of the state. Its 3,500 square mile service area includes Hillsborough and Pasco Counties for which it provides full services; south Pinellas County, where BALS staff provides telephone intake and extended representation in landlord-tenant cases; and north Pinellas, Manatee and Sarasota Counties whose representation it shares with three other legal aid programs. The latter three counties were added during the configuration changes of 2004. By the agreement of the four legal aid organizations, Bay Area provides centralized intake and brief services for the entire service area.

According to the 2000 census, the service area's population is 2,802,940 – 11% of whom are living in poverty. The poverty population of 300,052 includes whites (59%), blacks (24%) and those of Latino/Hispanic origin (15%). Its major cities are Tampa, St. Petersburg and Sarasota; much of the rest of the service area is suburban or rural.

BALS was founded in 1967 as “Law Inc.” Its current executive director, Richard Woltmann, has served in that capacity since 1980. Its staff of 94 includes 50 attorneys. Bay Area offices are located in Brandon (fiscal office), Dade City, New Port Richey, Plant City, St. Petersburg, Tampa (five – the main office, the Edgecomb Courthouse, Family Justice Center, the Spring DV Shelter, and the Children’s Law Center), and Wimauma.

## **Summary of Findings**

Bay Area is an outstanding program in many respects. Its resources include an impressive and dedicated board, a highly-regarded leadership and management team, and a dedicated and experienced staff. The board and the development council include several major bar figures, including a few who contributed significantly to the access to justice movement at the national level. The board takes leadership in fundraising seriously; it established a development council that is raising an endowment. Individual attorney board members are active in pro bono work. The board’s client members are informed and active participants. Several board members spoke knowledgeably of the need to address the inordinate impact this economic downturn has had on the low-income population.

Program leadership and staff are equally impressive. Leadership points with pride to the fruits of what it refers to as “community lawyering” – emphasis on partnering with the bench and bar and with other organizations that work with the low-income population. These efforts have yielded collaborative projects that generate funding to address specific problems and have succeeded in favorably resolving issues with administrative agencies without litigation. Other signs of effective leadership include the program’s overall success in resource development and its ability to attract and keep talented staff. The staff members the team spoke to express their satisfaction with program leadership and their attachment to the teams they are assigned to. BALS recently received recognition from a local newspaper for being one of the area’s best workplaces. Staff members appear to the team to be motivated and hard working. The program generates a high number of cases and does a high volume of other work. While it emphasizes having impact through its collaborative efforts, it has also successfully pursued impact cases.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the program is its willingness, even eagerness, to make significant changes when it perceives they are necessary. In the last several years, the program revamped its intake system (and then expanded it to three other counties in its new service area) and greatly expanded its pro bono program to include new opportunities for volunteers and new services for clients.

In addition to recognizing the program’s many strengths, the team also identified areas presenting challenges; particularly with technology, consumer law and human resources. We found the program’s technology and its use of it to be sub-par. The team noted, and the program acknowledged that more could be done – especially now – in consumer law. Finally, we were concerned that human resources management may need more structure and oversight than it is getting. It is our understanding that BALS management has identified these areas and is planning on addressing them.

As noted above, in the last several years Bay Area revamped its intake system and greatly expanded its pro bono programs. We are impressed with both efforts; it is clear that both improved client services. For reasons described below, we think it is time to go back and evaluate both to see if modifications can be made that will make each more effective. It is the team's view that the intake and case acceptance process can be more streamlined and we have concerns about the staffing and the facility for the pro bono effort.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**PERFORMANCE AREA ONE – PERFORMANCE IN IDENTIFYING THE MOST PRESSING CIVIL LEGAL NEEDS OF LOW INCOME PEOPLE IN THE SERVICE AREA AND TARGETING RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THOSE NEEDS.**

### **Periodic comprehensive assessment and ongoing consideration of legal needs**

**Finding 1. BALS conducts comprehensive periodic needs assessments every five years and bases its priorities on the assessed need. However, some areas of high need appear to be under-represented in full representation services.**

BALS conducts legal needs assessments every five years. BALS conducted and carefully analyzed the findings of a formal, comprehensive and fully legitimate assessment of client need in 2009. The assessment consisted of telephone surveys, written surveys, and review of census and other data. Surveys were conducted of clients, community organizations, social services organizations, private bar members, program staff and the private bar. Meetings were held with low income persons, community and social services organizations and court personnel. More detail about the process is provided in BALS 2010 LSC funding application. Every year the program's governing body actively considers the assessment when conducting its annual review of program priorities. The next full needs assessment is planned for 2014.

While the work of the program is generally consistent with the needs assessment results, there are some areas that appear to be under-represented as far as full representation is concerned. These include, for those under 60, bankruptcy and consumer law. Leadership is aware of this and is working on ways to address it.

### **Addressing Emerging Needs**

**Finding 2. The program has identified and is seeking to address emerging needs.**

BALS learns of emerging needs through community partnerships, their case management system (CMS) data base and weekly "team" meetings. They identified foster care Medicaid access, unemployment compensation and foreclosure prevention as pressing emerging issues. They recently developed a foster children's Medicaid pilot project. They

have responded to the need for unemployment representation by handling these cases as they come in.

Bay Area has recently greatly expanded its work in the foreclosure area. The Florida Bar Foundation (FBF) and the Office of the Florida Attorney General provided funding for this work in September of 2009. Now, both the senior advocacy unit (SAU) and ABLE, the program's housing, consumer and public benefits team, are staffed to handle these cases. Staff working on foreclosures meet monthly to share information and strategies. They are looking forward to taking advantage of the statewide mediation structure that the Florida Supreme Court has just adopted and to asking for attorneys' fees when appropriate.

### **Evaluation and Adjustment**

**Finding 3. The program undertakes extensive evaluation work and uses its results to make appropriate changes.**

Bay Area examines evaluation data very carefully. Every case has an outcome measure attached to it. It is used to track the program's progress on its measurable outcomes that it identified in the past LSC application and shows that it met or exceeded most of the identified outcomes. The executive director tracks data – both by team and by individual case handler – on cases completed and case work hours logged on a monthly basis. He notes with pride that numbers of hours worked on cases is steadily increasing. Staff members carefully review client satisfaction surveys. The deputy director reviews client complaints very seriously. Each of the program's teams conducts an annual retreat to evaluate the team's progress and set goals.

Bay Area takes external evaluations very seriously. It made significant changes, starting almost immediately, in response to recommendations made in the 2006 Florida Bar Foundation evaluation.

## **PERFORMANCE AREA TWO – EFFECTIVENESS IN ENGAGING AND SERVING THE LOW-INCOME POPULATION THROUGHOUT THE SERVICE AREA.**

### **Dignity and Sensitivity**

**Finding 4. Bay Area takes many steps to assure that clients are treated with dignity and sensitivity. It effectively serves the LEP population.**

The program is aware of the importance of recognizing and affirming client dignity. Within the last year, BALS undertook a training of support staff (with the materials being sent to all staff members) on sensitivity to client needs and dignity. Their survey of clients at the end of their cases yields positive feedback on the way they are treated. The community organization partners and client board members we spoke to indicate that the

program treats clients appropriately. As noted above, BALS works hard to resolve client grievances.

The program's offices are accessible and professional looking. The waiting rooms are clean and comfortable; they contain relevant pamphlets and other materials in appropriate languages.

The program is careful to affirm the dignity of those who speak other languages. Many staff members speak Spanish; there are also several Creole speakers. The program uses sign language interpreters and makes active use of Language Line. Training on the use of interpreters is frequently given. Several advocates told the team of successful representation through translation services. BALS has "I speak... [the name of the language in the language]" signs in all office locations they serve.

According to one staff member, knowledge of the program among the Spanish speaking community has greatly improved in recent years. Because of its relationship with the Hispanic Bar, BALS has a number of opportunities which benefit the Spanish-speaking population. They have developed a case disposition form in Spanish and English, they were written up in the Tampa Business Journal about using their law students to translate. Thanks to a FBF grant, step by step instructions for divorce forms are being translated professionally into Spanish. The pro bono intake clinic is periodically designated for Spanish speakers. Staff members periodically go to Sulphur Springs, an area with a significant Spanish population, for intake and outreach.

### **Intake and Case Acceptance Procedures**

**Finding 5. BALS operates a centralized telephone intake center. The process begins with screeners who answer the calls promptly and obtain initial eligibility and case type information.**

Bay Area operates a centralized telephone intake (CTI) center that it calls the Legal Aid Line. It serves all five counties in the region. While the system predated the regional reorganization that was implemented in 2004, the intake system was expanded at that time to handle the intakes throughout the five county region. Thorough research was done to set up a system that works for the program and the community. The program has a high number of advice and brief service cases per 10,000 low-income persons – the highest in Florida.

Applicants access the system by an 800 number. Cases that are deemed to be eligible for full representation in Pasco and Hillsborough counties are handled by Bay Area attorneys. As indicated above, the BALS office in South Pinellas County also provides full representation for some housing issues. In the other three counties, most of the cases that are to be considered for full representation will go to one of its three partner organizations; BALS' role ends with advice and brief services. The other agencies appreciate BALS' advice and brief service work and praise the selection of cases they

receive for full representation. BALS also operates a senior hotline that has a separate number. This service is available to seniors throughout the state.

Applicants who come in person to the Tampa office are typically told to go home and call the central intake number. Exceptions are made and in-person interviews are conducted for those with extant circumstances including those who have emergencies and those who do not have telephones. However, telephone intake is also a problem for those with limited phone access at home and who don't have someone whose phone they can comfortably use. The program was in the process of identifying potential solutions to this problem at the time of the visit.

Bay Area's screeners do the initial screening. The average hold time for initial screening of applicants is less than three minutes. Screeners ask: county of residence, age, problem type, alien and income eligibility. They check for conflicts, note whether there is a deadline, and take basic information about the legal issue. The screening process is designed to weed out applicants that cannot be helped. At the end of the interview, the screener sets an appointment from drop down menus for a telephone intake for BALS CTI attorneys and other advocates.

The screeners are almost all part time. There are generally eight on the phone at any one time. They are supervised by the screener supervisor. The supervisor instituted monthly screener meetings to keep all screeners abreast of any changes to the system. Meetings last usually a half hour. The supervisor also does one-on-one meetings with screeners for training and supervision. The supervisor developed a screening unit manual, which he hopes to update and make electronic.

While the addition, a couple of years ago, of a screener supervisor position seems to have improved the quality of screening, the team was told that lapses include case type coding mistakes and the failure to inquire further about information given – such as when the applicant states that he has no income.

Perhaps because of the perceived problem with screening, the telephone interview with a CTI advocate – the next step in the intake process – often repeats the same screening questions that the screeners do before they address the substantive issues.

### ***Recommendations***

**II.5.1. BALS is encouraged to accommodate persons coming to the Tampa office who do not have access to a telephone by completing the screening process before they leave the office.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendations are numbered as follows: the Roman Numeral references the Performance Area followed by the finding number and lastly by the recommendation number that pertains to the finding.



**II.5.2. LSC recommends that BALS study the incidence of screener errors and the duplication of screening between screeners and intake advocates with a goal of cutting back on the duplication of effort while assuring high quality information.**

**II.5.3. The screener manual should be put on line so that it can be easily accessed and instantly updated.**

**Finding 6. The intake process tends to be prolonged; it involves a multi-step process including an initial screening, a telephone interview with an advocate, a face to face interview with an advocate if full representation is contemplated, and a decision at the weekly team meeting.**

While screenings happen quickly, it takes a considerable amount of time for the interview with a CTI legal advocate to occur – except when the case is emergent, in which case the CTI interview is the same day. Appointments for the CTI interview usually occur between two days and two weeks after the initial screening. The team was told that the amount of time between screening and the full intake interview is not routinely recorded and analyzed. The reasons for the varying amounts of wait time are CTI advocate availability, the subject matter of the case and the volume of cases that flow from screening to intake. CTI advocates only perform substantive interviews in cases with legal areas that they are comfortable with. An interview with a CTI advocate for a family law case typically takes a relatively long time to be scheduled because of the high volume of these cases. Consumer cases also take longer than average to be scheduled because relatively few CTI advocates handle consumer cases.

Substantive interviews are conducted by part-time CTI attorneys connected with the Tampa CTI team, the CTI attorneys in the St. Petersburg office for applicants from counties other than Hillsborough and Pasco, and attorneys from other teams that get cases to review every month.

The Tampa CTI staff attorneys are part-time staff members who work out of their homes. Allowing flexible schedules and having staff work from home is a practice that affords the team experienced attorneys – many of whom worked for BALS before in full-time capacities and who are attracted to the CTI work situation, often because they have young children at home. The use of scheduled call back appointments has proven efficient in making contact with applicants and in allowing CTI attorneys to control their schedules. One problem with this structure is that these attorneys sometimes feel disconnected from the unit and from each other. The family law CTI attorneys who are working at home do not have access to electronic legal research.

Because of the volume of cases, attorneys from other units (Family, ABLE, SAU, and the regional offices in addition to St. Petersburg that is designated as a CTI office) are enlisted to handle CTI calls. The ABLE attorneys handle approximately 12 cases per month. Several family law team attorneys take CTI calls every week or every other week. While some team attorneys do not appear to mind it, others indicate that it is very time consuming and detracts from their ability to handle extended services cases.

When the attorney who is handling a CTI case determines that it may be appropriate for full-service representation, the case is scheduled in for a face-to face interview. For Hillsborough and Pasco counties, these interviews are typically a week later and are typically with the same person who handled the CTI interview. For other BALS offices, an email is sent to the contact person in that office; that person contacts the client and sets up an appointment. Referrals to partner offices are made by facsimile at this time. It is anticipated that because all programs within the region share the same case management system, referrals will be made electronically in the future.

When interviewing the applicant, the CTI advocate determines whether the case being presented is one that should be referred to another program or whether advice and brief service will end the case. If the client lives in a community served by a partner program, that determination is made by reference to a referral “matrix” that displays all the factors to be used in making that determination. Since there are many different funding sources depending on variables like residence, age and other factors, it is a complex determination as to what service can be provided for the client and what the funding source should be. CTI staff the team spoke to indicate that the determination is often difficult to make by reference to the matrix. In several instances, more information needs to be obtained from the client and the CTI team leader has to be consulted.

The partner organizations told the team that they are pleased with the referrals that they receive. The referrals are said to be appropriate to what they are able to handle. The information about the case is helpful and thorough. Additionally, they are grateful to BALS for handling the advice and brief services cases for their area. They have not been made aware of problems with the advice given.

Whether follow up material is sent to those who receive brief service varies depending on whether they are seniors or under 60. Closing letters are always sent to seniors. There are no standardized materials for those under 60; whether materials are sent out or not depends on the CTI employee. One said that she sends materials out two or three times a day; another seldom sends follow-up material.

The LSC team has identified several areas in which the intake system might be streamlined or otherwise improved. While the CTI team leader does careful individual quality control through her daily oversight of the process and regular review of the paralegals and advocates, there has not been an overall evaluation of the intake system. Areas of focus for an evaluation include:

- Ways to improve the screening and to eliminate the duplication of screening that occurs with the screeners and the CTI reviewers
- Staffing of the intake interviews; particularly the extent of reliance on members of substantive law teams
- Reducing the delay that sometimes happens between screening and telephone interviews and also between telephone interviews and face to face interviews

- Increasing the use of technology to increase efficiencies. For example, could call flow monitoring be helpful to determine problems in the system? Could the use of communication tools such as instant messaging help CTI attorneys communicate with each other and feel more a part of the team? Can CTI appointments be made for all staff members through Legal Server, rather than just those in certain offices? Could the information contained in the imposing “matrix” be automated to allow a simplified step-by-step determination of the appropriate referral?
- Reducing the time for the final case acceptance decision for full representation; including evaluating the use of weekly case review meetings

### *Recommendations*

**II.6.1. It is recommended that BALS undertake an evaluation of the intake system to examine issues identified above and to identify any changes that could improve efficiency and effectiveness of the intake and case acceptance system.**

**II.6.2. Where feasible, technological tools should be taken advantage of to enhance the intake system. The capacity the phone system has to monitor calls through the system should be utilized to see where roadblocks occur and where they can be removed. Calendaring should be able to be done centrally in all offices.**

**II.6.3. All attorneys conducting intake interviews and providing advice and brief service should have access to electronic research resources.**

### **Engagement with and access by the low income population**

**Finding 7. Through its several offices, its centralized intake system and the projects it has generated BALS provides significant access to the client community.**

The program’s office locations are accessible and professional looking. They are also numerous. Outside of Tampa, there are two strategically placed offices in Hillsborough County at Plant City and Wimauma. The program’s support of two Pasco county offices – New Port Richey and Dade City – is an accommodation to the client community’s needs. Even though it is outside of its two counties of full service concentration, the program has an office in St. Petersburg that provides additional space for staff and signals that the program takes its responsibilities in the three counties where there are other legal services providers seriously. Staff members in that office handle public and subsidized housing for St. Petersburg and Manatee Counties and intake work for Pinellas, Manatee and Sarasota Counties. The program is accessible throughout the service area by phone due to its centralized intake system.

The team was told about issues surrounding the accessibility of the Wimauma office. It is not reachable by public transportation; the long highway from the town center to the office is said to be a deterrent to some senior drivers. It should be noted that the office has made significant efforts to assist senior citizens and people with disabilities and other

health issues. They have set up regular outreach visits to the senior centers and do outreach during regional events.

The program's accessibility is also demonstrated by special projects that make it more accessible to many communities. Several projects the program has pursued have established additional Tampa locations, such as one in a courthouse, the one in a family justice center and the one in the Spring Domestic Violence Shelter, that have facilitated access. Its projects for children, for senior citizens and for victims of domestic violence provide direct accessibility to those populations.

**Finding 8. The extent to which the community utilizes the program is shown in its case numbers and the significant other work that it does. It has made significant inroads into serving special populations.**

The program's centralized intake system and its pro se efforts, particularly in Tampa, provide initial access to the program for thousands of persons. As noted above, the intake system generates high numbers of advice and brief service cases and connects clients with cases within its extended service priorities to representation. The program's Legal Information Center and Family Forms Clinic provides access to pro se assistance to more persons. A few people the team spoke to suggested that access to the program could be improved by an outreach effort to publicize the intake system's 800 number.

The program appears to have significant inroads into serving special populations including seniors, youth, ethnic minorities, victims of domestic violence and, as discussed in Finding 4, those with limited English speaking ability. The coordinator of the homelessness project's outreach work contributed to her receipt of the "Outstanding Service to Homeless People Award 2008" from the Florida Coalition for the Homeless. Funding that the program receives for senior and youth work gives them extra access to those populations. The proportion of their clients who are black is higher than the proportion of the black poverty population in the area; the proportion of Hispanic clients is close to the proportion of the Hispanic poverty population. Their diverse staff gives them access to issues that have disproportionate impact on the Hispanic and Creole communities.

As is discussed in many places in this report, Bay Area is very connected to the human services provider community. Their emphasis on "community lawyering" leads to many outstanding instances of extended collaboration with domestic violence providers, housing authorities and other human services providers of many types.

### ***Recommendation***

**II.8.1. BALS is encouraged to engage in outreach activities that would more widely publicize its intake 800 number.**

**PERFORMANCE AREA THREE – EFFECTIVENESS OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND OTHER PROGRAM ACTIVITIES INTENDED TO BENEFIT THE LOW-INCOME POPULATION IN THE SERVICE AREA.**

**Legal Work Representation**

*Experience of Advocates*

**Finding 9. The program’s attorneys have significant experience and expertise. A high level of satisfaction appears to play a role in the long tenure of staff members.**

Attorney tenure is most impressive. All of the teams are staffed by attorneys and others with high levels of experience. This is not a new phenomenon brought about by the depressed economy and the recent salary increases. The program has a history of low turnover. In conversations with experienced staff members, they state, almost to a person, that they are happy to be at BALS. Several of them note that they have had opportunities to go elsewhere that they have not taken. The team was particularly impressed that those with the highest levels of tenure appeared to share younger members’ enthusiasm, commitment and energy.

Many staff members cite their commitment to the program’s goals, the program’s approach to projects, partnerships and “the holistic approach” as reasons that keep them at BALS. Many of them stress their connection to their “team.” Teams were often described as like families. Teams are said to play a central role in the professional and personal lives of staff members. Members of several teams noted, matter-of-factly, that theirs is the best team in the program. While team loyalty is very high, those we spoke to also said very positive things about the program leadership and the program as a whole. After a week, the LSC “team” was not surprised that BALS had recently received recognition as one of the top places to work in Tampa.

Many of the attorneys who are new to the program come here with significant experience. They include an SEC attorney, attorneys formerly in private practice, a JAG attorney and a former prosecutor. It was clear to the staff that several of these attorneys who are relatively new to legal aid practice are making significant contributions to their teams.

*Legal Work Oversight*

**Finding 10. Case handling standards and guidelines for legal work oversight are in place and adhered to.**

The program has case handling standards that dictate procedures such as: opening and closing memos, including what is to be in each and how the files are to be arranged; and how tickler systems are to be used. Opening and closing memos are done routinely. While it wasn’t clear to the team that the tickler system is uniformly followed, the team was not told of an instance of double recording not being done in one way or another by

case handlers. Putting all important information in the case management system is required; the team was told that this is done routinely.

While Bay Area refers to the ABA standards, BALS' written case handling standards do not include explicit guidance on topics included in the ABA Standard 7 such as litigation strategy, motions practice and discovery.

Supervisory procedures are in place. Opening and closing memos are to be reviewed upon closing. Staff members review their docket monthly and report on action and plans for the cases and give these to the supervisors. Team leaders are charged with reviewing these dockets.

The LSC team found that, with a few exceptions, oversight occurs in accordance with the procedures. Legal work oversight is the responsibility of each BALS team leader. One team leader does not necessarily check the monthly dockets of the most experienced attorneys; another does not always review the closing memos of experienced attorneys. With these few exceptions that appear to be judgment calls that team leaders make, the supervisory guidelines are followed.

Yearly evaluations involve reviewing outcomes and reviewing case files. They have recently been expanded to include an advocate's professional plan and training plan. Several staff members expressed appreciation for these additions. One stated a goal of being promoted and was impressed that the supervisor identified practical steps and resources that were calculated to lead to that goal. Another indicated that she wasn't enthusiastic about having to draft a plan at the time of her evaluation, but that she has found it useful to refer to since. Yearly evaluations are done in the manner required and when required.

Staff member openness to oversight is impressive. Attorneys expressed openness to, and even the desire to, have their work reviewed and critiqued. Because of the program's low turnover there are several experienced attorneys not in supervisory positions. The team was impressed that these attorneys both assisted team leaders in assisting other attorneys and sought guidance to expand their own abilities.

### ***Recommendation***

**III.10.1. The program is encouraged to consider whether more explicit case handling standards would be helpful.**

### ***Training and Support for Attorney Staff***

**Finding 11. New Attorneys are appropriately trained and supported.**

New attorneys in the program appear to be both nurtured and challenged. The responsibility to give them support and appropriate oversight is taken very seriously by team leaders and other senior attorneys. While the program has a new protocol for the

development of new attorneys in response to the FBF requirement for it, it appears that the relatively new attorneys the team spoke to had been well supported with appropriate case selection, careful case load monitoring, case review meetings, and frequent case meetings before the adoption of the new protocol. One new attorney had a docket review with her managing attorney twice a week. We were impressed with the balance we sensed exists between allowing these new attorneys to take risks and challenge themselves while at the same time providing support and guidance so that there is not a risk of harm to a client's interest.

New attorneys have significant access to formal training. The program supports staff in attending Florida programs that meet their CLE requirements. Several new attorneys described hands-on training that they had received. It was noted that the team meetings often function as opportunities for training. The new attorneys the team spoke to were particularly grateful for the opportunities they had to attend multi-day training conferences, including out of state sessions. One first year attorney indicated that she was encouraged to attend any training she wanted to go to. Examples of training attorneys attended included NITA training and any number of substantive conferences such as those specializing in family law and foreclosure.

The attorneys we spoke to who were new to BALS, but had practiced law for several years indicated that the support they received was commensurate to their needs. Several indicated that their prior experience was recognized and that they appreciated that.

**Finding 12. Advocate staff members have significant access to training and other support resources.**

As they become more experienced, advocate staff continue to have access to formal training. Florida has thirty hours of mandatory CLE in three year cycles. FBF grantees produce training that staff members have access to. All the staff attorneys we asked indicated that they were members of one or more of the state's umbrella groups. Several senior attorneys reported going to national trainings and conferences. Two of the supervisors we spoke to had recently attended the Management Information Exchange's supervisor trainings.

Attorneys have access to other support resources. They rely on Florida Legal Services' website resources at [www.FLAdvocate.org](http://www.FLAdvocate.org) and [www.floridalegal.org](http://www.floridalegal.org). The Florida Advocate site contains extensive practice areas in topics such as consumer, family law, public benefits, health and senior law, disaster legal services and leadership and supervision. The program has specialized practice manuals, including those from the National Consumer Law Center. Several attorneys are on specialized state and national listservs including the National Association of Consumer Advocates listserv and Florida state's mortgage foreclosure listserv. Funds for discovery and other litigation expenses are readily available.

### *Quantity and Quality of Legal Work*

#### **Finding 13. A significant volume of high quality case work is produced. BALS is generating several cases with broad impact.**

In 2008, the program generated a high number of cases relative to its poverty population – 319 per 10,000 poverty population, as compared to the national median of 256 per 10,000 poverty population. The number of its extended cases, relative to the poverty population, is comparable to the national median when only using the poverty population of the two counties where the program provides full representation. Its case numbers are particularly high in comparison to other Florida programs. While BALS receives 14.5% of LSC funds dedicated to Florida, it accounts for 29% of the cases closed by LSC grantees.

Based on our review of writing samples and discussions with staff advocates, the team concludes that the program does some very good legal work. As noted above, we were impressed with the experience and expertise of the team leaders and other experienced counsel and with the way they mentor and interact with other team members. The product of this oversight shows in the quality of the work that they do. Writing samples are of good to excellent quality overall. The team's discussions with case handlers on cases they discussed with the team impressed us that appropriate strategies were being pursued and that diligence and zeal were being exercised. The judges and lawyers we spoke to praised the program's legal work.

Staff members told us that the program values case work with impact; they note that the deputy director and the executive director emphasize impact work in their conversations. Attorneys describe impact cases as coming naturally from their regular intake and being identified as having the potential for impact through the review of the case and its development.

Several recent and current cases have established excellent precedents or have the potential to do so. Basco v. Machin, an 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit case, applied Goldberg v. Kelly principles to establish that the party seeking to terminate a federal Section 8 voucher has the burden of proof on grounds to terminate; failing that showing, the tenant has due process rights to remain in Section 8 housing. In a decision currently on appeal, the trial court recognized the importance of bonding and attachment for very young children in determining that, after termination of the parental rights of the natural parents, the baby should stay with the foster parents with whom he has bonded rather than with a grandmother he had not been with. In another case, also on appeal, the trial court ruled that both members of a separated couple are entitled to the homestead exemption to state tax. In the course of defending several cases the Tampa Housing Authority brought, the program persuaded the Authority to agree to a sweeping new policy that relatives who are taking care of children living on the premises should not be evicted just because they do not have court-ordered custody. This agreement is particularly valuable because there is a federal court opinion to the contrary.



Much of the program's work that has significant impact beyond the benefit to a single client comes from collaborative efforts with other organizations, including projects providing joint and coordinated services for clients and agency decisions coming out of good relationships with housing authorities and other agencies that lead them to modify their policies to the benefit of the client community. These are discussed in Finding 17 below.

### **Private Attorney Involvement**

#### **Finding 14. BALS' PAI effort has expanded considerably in the last several years. PAI attorneys engage in a wide variety of work for the client community.**

Bay Area directly runs the pro bono efforts in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties through its Bay Area Volunteer Legal Program (BAVLP and VLP) that consists of four full-time and two part-time staff members. The program also issues small subgrants to its partners for pro bono work in the other counties. All of the subgrantees participate in the Community Counsel program, described below.

BAVLP's Case Referral Panel is the traditional model of pro bono delivery. Cases referred from CTI and from the intake clinic are placed with pro bono attorneys who are volunteering to handle extended service cases. Family law matters and bankruptcies account for a significant number of cases handled by the panel. BALS recruits family lawyers, the Hispanic bar and bankruptcy attorneys for the panel.

In recent years, Bay Area has greatly expanded its Hillsborough pro bono offerings and projects in order to provide pro bono assistance to more clients and to provide pro bono opportunities to attorneys who were not signing up for traditional pro bono work. Its battery of pro bono programs now includes the Case Referral Panel, Family Forms Clinic, Community Counsel, Domestic Violence Assistance Panel and Intake Clinic. It plans to increase the frequency of its intake clinics to better serve the immediacy of client needs.

BAVLP is located in the George Edgecomb Courthouse (courthouse) and runs its clinics out of the courthouse. This location has been ideal for the community, judges and clerks who are otherwise accessing the courthouse. The major drawback of the location is that the space the program has is limited.

The Family Forms Clinic provides hands-on assistance of volunteers in filling out court pleadings and offering advice on pursuing a family law case. The clinic operates two nights a month; on one of them, Spanish speaking attorneys are available to assist persons whose first language is Spanish. The clinic effectively supplements the information provided by BALS' Legal Information Center.

The Domestic Violence (DV) Clinic provides specialized assistance for those who need protection from domestic violence. Volunteer attorneys work out of the Court's Domestic Violence Program office to assist domestic violence injunction applicants in filling out

their paperwork. Volunteers for this project receive training in the Domestic Violence statute and in the problems facing persons surviving domestic violence.

The Intake Clinic, held weekly at the courthouse, serves Hillsborough residents. Up to 40 appointments are scheduled for ten volunteers. On average, about half of those who have appointments come. Most of the cases presented are family law, including child support and custody. Other cases that are seen with some frequency are criminal records expungements; consumer cases – including collections and bankruptcies; and probate. Volunteers provide advice to the participants. BALS staff members are present to advise the volunteers and provide other support to them. Many of the participants receive advice and counsel; others are referred to the Case Referral Panel discussed above, for placement with a volunteer attorney. The LSC team member who attended a BAVLP evening clinic observed an organized and efficient clinic operation which was well designed for the clients and volunteers.

The Community Counsel is a pro bono program providing assistance to non-profits in the region. The managing attorney for the BAVLP also serves as the director for Community Counsel with BALS having primary responsibility for coordinating this project that was funded by the FBF as a collaboration between the legal aid programs in the community -- Community Law Program, Gulfcoast Legal Services and Legal Aid of Manasota. While it has taken a while to get all of the organizations aligned and functioning as a true collaboration, the program is beginning to come together. It has provided services to community-based housing initiatives such as Self-Reliance, Inc., Good Samaritan Mission – a migrant housing initiative, Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa, and Homes for Hillsborough among others. While most of the work that it has done so far involves the incorporation of non-profits, the project is designed to handle a full range of transactional services for these organizations and this has generated significant interest from volunteer attorneys wanting to do more transactional pro bono work. The program is making use of corporate in-house attorneys and their local Association of Corporate Counsel chapter for this project.

BALS also makes use of pro bono attorneys as mentors. Several of the staff members the team spoke to reported positively on their use of mentors to help them with their work. Mentors are also used to work with other volunteers who are taking cases in areas they are not fully expert in. This arrangement provides a satisfying experience for the mentor and allows support and training for the volunteer who can handle a case he or she wouldn't otherwise be sufficiently proficient to handle.

BAVLP has accomplished a great deal in setting up these new and innovative projects in the last several years. BAVLP has also sought to address their staffing needs by creatively leveraging stipended and unpaid law student graduates. These myriad pro bono projects are being run with what appears to the LSC team to be a relatively small full-time staff for the effort undertaken, particularly as the program continues to consider additional and expanded offerings. As noted above, space in the courthouse is limited. No evaluation of the projects has yet been undertaken.

### *Recommendation*

**III.14.1. It is recommended that BAVLP strategically assess their pro bono offerings to determine how to increase staff capacity or focus the range and scope of their projects to align with the current size of their staff and office space.**

**Finding 15. PAI recruitment, retention and oversight efforts are effectively accomplished.**

BAVLP's smorgasbord of volunteer options described above operates as both an effective recruitment and retention strategy in that it provides options for attorneys with many different interests, abilities and time availabilities. BAVLP also engages in many other recruitment and retention efforts and has critical support and leadership from Florida's Thirteenth Judicial Circuit. All of the standard individual and bar association solicitations are pursued. There is extensive volunteer information on BALS' website. The pro bono team leader has both made use of FBF's statewide "One Campaign" strategies and materials and obtained a consultant volunteer to design materials for BAVLP.

Every member of the VLP team is required to engage in recruitment activities including attending bar luncheons and other bar activities. For example, VLP staff members staffed a tent at the recent 5 K race put on by the Hillsborough Bar Association. They train volunteers for the Domestic Violence Assistance Project. In recent months VLP has made a particular effort to recruit new lawyers who have not yet found full-time employment. VLP's close relations with the State's Attorney and with the Chief Public Defender has also led to many new recruits.

BAVLP's retention efforts include ceremonies and publicity recognizing volunteers. Upon completion of a case, VLP sends a personal note of thanks and attaches the completed client satisfaction form from the client, where available and appropriate. Other effective retention strategies are the program's malpractice insurance for these cases and the offer of mentoring by another volunteer or co-counseling or consultations with a BALS attorney.

PAI cases are appropriately monitored and prepared for placement. Cases are only sent to attorneys who indicate they have experience with the appropriate subject matter. At the end of the case, the volunteer sends a report detailing the results of the case and the hours donated.

### **Other Services and Activities**

**Finding 16. BALS engages in a significant amount of outreach and community legal education projects. The program is overhauling its website.**

### *Outreach and Community Legal Education*

BALS records reflect that the staff made more than 200 presentations to 3,500 persons in 2009. The senior advocacy unit leads the program in doing outreach efforts and has presented on a multitude of topics. These activities take place at senior centers and health fairs; the unit seeks out sites where Spanish and Vietnamese speaking people congregate. The ABLE unit and the senior unit are involved in outreach efforts on foreclosure. The homelessness project directly goes to where homeless people assemble to provide outreach services. Staff members regularly go to the neighborhood of Sulphur Springs to do outreach. BALS' presence in The Spring Domestic Violence Shelter, the Family Justice Center and the courthouse can be considered outreach efforts. The clinics run out of the courthouse in Tampa provide assistance with forms; the program's Legal Information Center points those needing pleadings to appropriate forms and gives guidance on court procedures for family, landlord/tenant and small claims matters.

### *Pro Se Assistance and the website*

BALS' PAI forms clinics are helpful sources of assistance for those who are proceeding pro se. The advice and brief service that attorneys provide in the course of intake may often constitute pro se assistance. However, the program's website does not currently provide useful community legal education material or pro se information; it doesn't even link those who need such material to the Florida site. There is an effort just beginning to significantly revamp the program's website.

### *Recommendations*

**III.16.2. In its revamping of its website, the program is encouraged to consider expanding the website's outreach, community legal education and pro se capacities.**

**Finding 17. BALS staff members have undertaken collaborations to address issues and to provide holistic services. The collaborative projects have produced many valuable results.**

The program is active in bar, state legal services and local community organizations on children's issues, consumer, family law and domestic violence, housing, public benefits and Medicare, self sufficiency, senior and senior issues. It is also active in state legal services committees. The program encourages these activities. Almost every advocate the team spoke to described work on one or more of these efforts. The listing of committees, task forces and community groups on the BALS intranet identifies more than 40 advocates, with most belonging to more than one organization.

Several collaborative projects with other organizations have led to significant results. The current executive director of the Family Justice Center characterizes BALS as playing a "huge role" in establishing the Center. She also notes that when the first director of the Center left, the family law team leader stepped in to be interim executive director. The Center brings together 23 organizations to provide a wide range of services

to victims of domestic violence. Three staff members work at the Center. Bay Area's presence at The Spring Domestic Violence Shelter – two staff members work there – is characterized by shelter staff as invaluable. The program supported the Sulphur Springs neighborhood in preserving the community school and partnered in the development of a resource center located on school board property that houses a wide variety of service providers, including BALS.

BALS has been successful in working with housing authorities and other organizations to reach residents' goals without litigation. Its good relationship with the St. Petersburg Housing Authority led to both organizations working together to find good and sustainable alternate housing for 200 elderly and disabled tenants of the Graham/Rogall housing complex while preserving the housing slots that were available as public or subsidized housing. The effort, funded by a FBF grant, involved weekly meetings with tenants, proceeded tenant by tenant and took more than two years. Its working relationship with the Pinellas Housing Authority is reflected in the fact that two senior BALS attorneys have been invited to conduct a training session for its section 8 counselors.

The team leader of the St. Petersburg office is working to set up a medical-legal partnership along the Boston model. She notes that working with doctors addresses problems holistically, and cites the example of the habitability issue of children living with mold in Section 8 housing.

#### **PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR – EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION.**

##### **Board Governance**

**Finding 18. The board consists of dedicated volunteers who effectively govern the program. Board member contributions to the program's work are many and valuable.**

The BALS board is a model in many ways. Its membership includes leaders of the local legal community; the board takes its role seriously and appropriately oversees the work of the program. In addition to their board service, individual board members individually make financial and other contributions to the program.

The BALS board has included national figures in the defense of legal services and the promotion of pro bono. Current distinguished board or Development Council members include Drew O'Malley, William Reece Smith, Mike Bedke and David Shear – all of whom have made significant contributions to equal justice work at the local, state and national levels.

Board membership is taken very seriously. Prospective members for Hillsborough County Bar Association slots have to compete and interview for open positions. The

board maintains good geographic and ethnic diversity. Board attendance is good. Term limits are enforced; at the end of their terms, board members go off the board before being eligible to return in a successive term. There is a good plan for board officer development. Before becoming president, board members rotate through a succession of board office positions that afford them a complete understanding of board activities. The immediate past president becomes the chair of the governance committee. Board officers are sworn in.

The board is appropriately engaged in overseeing the activities of the program. It receives regular briefings on program projects. The deputy director prepares a summary of significant litigation for the program at every meeting. While board members have a great deal of confidence in the program's management, they are not adverse to stepping in and asserting their authority as policy makers. When the FBF made recommendations for program change in 2006, the board was active in setting direction and overseeing the changes. The board understands its role in priority development and seriously reviews needs assessments and priority setting. The board evaluates the executive director annually. The evaluation is tied to his salary review and includes an anonymous 360° evaluation done by program team leaders.

According to those the team spoke to – including two client board members – client members are actively involved in the work of the board and well-informed. The client board members the team spoke to did not hesitate to express ways in which they believed the program could be improved, including more outreach to and involvement with clients.

While there is an orientation session for new board members, more could be done in this area. It was suggested to the team that a little more formality and regularity in the board member orientation process would be helpful. A few noted that a board manual that was kept up to date with key documents would be helpful. One client board member indicated that she would appreciate a formal training on the role of the board and board procedures that she indicated is not necessary for most lawyers.

Board members contribute to the program in ways in addition to their board service. The board, mainly through the development council, plays a significant role in the program's fundraising. Some board members are members of the development council; others go to the council when they rotate off the board as a way to stay involved with the program. Several board members regularly make significant financial contributions; others are active in fund raising. Similarly, several board members are long-time pro bono volunteers. Client board members make it a point to speak about the program to their neighbors and associates.

### ***Recommendation***

**VI.19.1. It is suggested that a board manual be created and that training tailored to client board members be considered.**

## **Leadership**

**Finding 20. The effectiveness of the program's leadership can be seen in what the program has accomplished and in the support and praise they get from program employees.**

The program's leadership was praised by virtually everyone the team spoke to. The program leadership is, in the first instance, the executive director and the deputy director. They are joined in the leadership and management role by the legal and administrative team leaders. The leadership was praised as being very effective in embodying the mission of the program, setting goals and objectives, working to meet them and measuring the results.

Leadership is widely given credit for growing the program and for making it successful. Several people noted its growth in terms of number of staff and increased number of services provided. Others praised leadership's success in harnessing coordination and collaboration with the bench, bar and agencies devoted to working with the poverty population. The program's reputation with bench, bar and the community significantly contributes to what it can accomplish.

The team was told that morale in the program was high and that leadership is largely responsible for this. Low turnover and the program's recent ranking as one of the best workplaces in Tampa were cited as evidence of high morale. The executive director and deputy director are described as optimistic and positive in orientation.

**Finding 21. Communications within the program is good. More could be done to emphasize a sense of program mission and vision.**

Leadership has set up a structure that fosters communications throughout the program. Staff indicate that they know what is going on in the program. Weekly team meetings where team leaders report on program wide events are given credit for this. A recent innovation, a weekly email from the executive director to all staff called "Good News" was widely praised as both a good vehicle for communicating information and as a morale booster. The director and deputy director were also praised for being accessible to staff.

It is the LSC team's impression, however, that currently, staff members tend to think of themselves as primarily attached to their team and as somewhat distant from other teams. While a certain amount of team cohesion is helpful, it is also important for staff members to identify with the program as a whole. Appreciation of the role of the program as a whole can lead to collaborations among staff members and new ways of thinking. Short of a major process, more can be done in incremental ways to emphasize leadership's vision of a single program with a single mission and vision. The director can use "Good News," his weekly newsletter, to highlight the connection between the mission and the good things that are happening. Having the planning that teams do yearly expressed in

the context of the program's mission, will be helpful. The yearly meeting can be used to emphasize these themes.

### ***Recommendation***

**IV.21.1. BALS leadership is encouraged to consider steps to promote staff members' identification with the program's mission and vision as a whole.**

### **Management**

**Finding 22. BALS leadership and team leaders combine to effectively manage its many teams and units.**

As discussed above, the team and team leadership structure has developed a strong internal capacity for management and supervision. The teams include the substantive law units (ABLE, Family Law, Senior Advocacy Unit and the Children's Law Center), the geographic offices (Dade City, New Port Richey, Plant City, St. Pete and Wimauma) and the functional units (Administrative Support, BAVLP and CTI/Senior Hotline). The team leaders are scheduled to meet with the executive director every two months. The Tampa based team leaders meet individually with the executive director every month.

The team leaders, all experienced professionals, enjoy significant autonomy and authority to oversee and develop the focus of their offices or projects. They follow uniform case oversight procedures. The leaders appear to be highly regarded by their teams. The LSC team was impressed by their thoughtfulness and the care with which they undertook management of their offices. The strong attachment that team members feel for their team speaks to their effectiveness.

### **Human Resources**

**Finding 23. BALS has appropriate human resource policies but no dedicated professional is in charge of overseeing it. Human resources decision making is currently shared by the executive director and several managers.**

The program maintains a complete set of personnel policies on its intranet. While there is also a complete set of job descriptions, some of them are out of date. Staff evaluations are conducted promptly every year. Staff that the team members talked with did not raise personnel issues as problems.

While the program maintains sound basic human resource functions, there is no defined management unit that is responsible for human resources oversight. The higher-level and policy oriented human resource responsibilities are shared by the executive director, team leaders/supervisors, deputy director, and administrator. Without a clearly defined and high-level human resources function, the organization misses an opportunity to assess how and whether its policies and procedures, as a whole, are applied consistently and best serve the short and long term interests of the organization. BALS leadership is



establishing a new Chief Operating Officer position to manage the human resources, financial and technology functions.

### *Recommendations*

**IV.23.1. In the upcoming reorganization that the program is planning, it is recommended that the human resources function be placed with a manager with sufficient expertise and responsibility to assure effective and compliant policies.**

### *Financial Administration*

**Finding 24. Appropriate procedures, policies and staffing appear to be in place for effective financial oversight.**

The fiscal staff is sufficient in number, experienced, and credentialed. It is staffed by the Interim Chief Financial Officer, a bookkeeper, an accounting clerk and fiscal clerks. The program has enjoyed a strong reputation for excellent financial systems after repeated testing by outside auditors and, most recently, the GAO. It has exercised sound judgment in keeping strong fiscal operations as a priority and by bringing in a highly experienced executive and finance professional as its interim CFO to help transition from BALS' retiring finance officer, and, in the process, identify ways to further strengthen and streamline its finance functions.

### *Technology*

**Finding 25. Several improvements in the program's technological infrastructure and in its use of technology are called for.**

The program's computers meet the standards of the LSC grant assurance. All advocates who work in the program's offices have computers with the required capacities, and all have access to on-line legal research programs.

While meeting this minimum standard, the program acknowledges that it has fallen behind in replacing computers for staff members. All staff does not have up-to-date computers. The program is now aware of this; they are starting to replace computers and are in consultation with pro bono law firm experts that are advising them on an appropriate rotation schedule.

There is also a need to improve the basic technology infrastructure. The program relies on a peer to peer network rather than a central server bank. Manual backup is relied on, rather than automatic backups. There is no off-site storage of data.

While the improvement of technology infrastructure is important, it needs to be accompanied by an understanding that technology is not just a nice-to-have augmentation, but that its effective use can significantly enhance the efficiency of program operations and service delivery. As discussed above, the working of the phone system might be able to be improved by monitoring call flow. The automation of the

screening manual and of the intake “matrix” can lead to their being easier to use and more effective. If appointments can be made by screeners to all BALS staff, interviews can be expedited. Document assembly services can significantly help those in search of pro se assistance. The more effective use of the program’s website can be used to link those with a need for information to suitable resources, including the Florida Law Help Web Site. BALS’ effort to revamp its website can be used as an opportunity to address ways in which the website can be more useful to clients.

### *Recommendations*

**IV.25.1. We recommend the establishment and implementation of a regular replacement policy for computers; the move to a server rather than a peer to peer network and automatic back-ups, including back-ups off-site.**

**IV.25.2. The program should consider how it can use the move to a chief operating officer, discussed in Finding 23, as an opportunity to address its technology weaknesses.**

**IV.25.3. BALS is encouraged to review its utilization of technology -- including training on and utilization of the technology it has -- in order to expand its capacity to deliver services to clients.**

### *Marketing and communications*

**Finding 26. BALS’ communications efforts could benefit from coordinated branding.**

BALS development staff members are responsible for fundraising materials and the forms page of the website. The teams and projects such as BAVLP, Senior Helpline, and the Children’s Law Center regularly produce their own marketing materials. Because there is no centralized place for overseeing external communications, BALS’ print materials lack a common look and feel.

The program is currently beginning a high-level redesign of its web site featuring experienced people from within the program and outside of it. A focus group set up to consider how the program could increase its exposure in the community led to the project to use on-line tools such as a redesigned website, a Facebook page and the use of YouTube spots.

### *Recommendation*

**IV.26.1. The web site redesign is an opportunity to consider BALS brand and suite of print and online materials with a focus on developing a consistent brand as it continues to publicize its work in the community.**

## **Resource Development**

**Finding 27. BALS' resource development effort, aided by its Development Council, is first rate and has been very successful.**

The program has built an incredibly strong development effort from scratch. The development director brings 15 years of experience to this work and is a respected development professional and civic leader. Her assistant has five years of experience. They bring resourcefulness, dedication and professionalism to BALS' fundraising efforts. They strive to find ways to publicize BALS' compelling cases and accomplishments. In a very few years, the office has created a diverse stream of funding sources.

The cornerstone of the program's fund raising efforts is the William Reece Smith Development Council that established an endowment and has a near term goal of reaching \$3,000,000. The council consists of more than 20 leaders of the business and legal community. Chaired by long-time director and supporter, David Shear, the council has been successful in going beyond the legal community to educate potential supporters about BALS' mission. It includes among its ranks a well-known monsignor, several CEO's, a former Florida governor and the retired publisher of the Tampa newspaper. The purpose of the council and the endowment is to ensure the long-time viability of BALS. Most recently, they implemented an informal "One to One" campaign that asks each development council member to approach one person he or she knows to solicit support for the program.

Funding efforts the development office engages in include:

- A planned giving campaign
- The Pearl Society, a women's giving circle whose members pledge contributions and hold periodic events
- Annual events, including the "Cup of Hope" (formerly, "Tea Party")
- The annual bar campaign that reminds attorneys of their pro bono or monetary contribution obligation
- A campaign for Cy Pres funds to be designated for BALS
- "Lunch and Learns"
- National Philanthropy Day Celebration

These efforts are on top of BALS extensive grant development efforts that include state and federal funding for housing law, domestic violence programs, and senior citizen efforts. Overall, non-LSC funding constitutes 63% of its overall funding. The program has a low-income taxpayer clinic grant, a fair housing grant and a grant from the Public Guardian for Hillsborough.

## **State and Regional Collaboration**

**Finding 28. BALS is very effective in its work with the region; its partner programs praise its work. It is similarly a significant contributor to the state justice effort.**

BALS works closely with the three non-LSC funded Legal Aid programs in its region – Gulfcoast Legal Services, Community Legal Aid and Legal Aid of Manasota. By design, it does the centralized intake for those programs. As noted in Finding 6, the programs praised its intake work. It also provides funding for PAI efforts in Pinellas, Manatee and Sarasota Counties. As the largest of the four programs, BALS plays the lead in legal aid training in the region.

The regional design team consists of the BALS executive director, deputy director and Pinellas County team leader as well as the executive directors of the three other programs. They meet quarterly to assure integrated service delivery and to review the coordination between the CTI and each program. The MOU between the programs is updated yearly. As part of the understanding between the programs, Gulfcoast Legal Services provides representation to undocumented persons that BALS is unable to serve. Similarly, BALS plays a significant role in the state’s justice system. The executive director has served as president of the Project Director’s association and actively participates on its listserv. BALS staff members are active participants in statewide training events – often as trainers. They belong to various task forces, listservs and umbrella groups formed by Florida Legal Services Corporation. Three are on the consumer group, five on the family law group, eight on the housing law group, three on the public benefits group and five on the senior/health group. Many of the staff members the program spoke to spoke enthusiastically of the benefit of these groups.