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Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc. (GLS) is a regional 501(c)3 non-profit organization providing free, comprehensive civil legal aid through counsel, advice, representation, advocacy, and education for vulnerable individuals and families in the Greater Tampa Bay area.

As Gulfcoast Legal Services grows in prominence and scope, it remains committed to the promise of equal access to justice for all by zealously championing the rights of vulnerable persons through advocacy and education.

Changing Lives Through Justice

Mission

Vision
A Letter from our Executive Director

They say time flies when you are having fun. Well, the past year flew by at Gulfcoast Legal Services! The report that follows highlights some of our accomplishments from fiscal year 2018-19. As you will see, we had a great year. I dare say GLS’s 40th year was our best yet!

Of course, none of this would have been possible without an incredibly talented staff and a dedicated Board of Directors. I am constantly amazed at the abilities of our employees. They are brilliant, committed, and, above all, empathetic to our clients’ needs. Our attorneys could work anywhere they want for a lot more money; I am truly humbled to have them at GLS.

Speaking of amazing lawyers, GLS started the Pamela Wiener Dubrule Summer Internship in 2019, to support the Birth Certificate Project that she started. Her GLS family will always miss Pam’s kind, giving presence, but her legacy of service to our community will live on.

Our terrific staff embraced the tenants of trauma-informed care, participated in community lawyering, and held an average of 45 outreaches each month throughout our service area.

Our Financial Stability unit forged partnerships with Swift, Isringhaus & Dubbeld, P.A. and Harvard Law School to create a new virtual small claims court program in the 12th Circuit.

A new Medical Legal Partnership Project began, thanks to funding from the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg. Our USDJ Human Trafficking grant was renewed for another three years. We opened two new offices in Lealman and Wimauma, thanks to funding from the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas and the Office of the Florida Attorney General, respectively.

I cannot express how grateful we are for the continued support of our funders and donors. We could not do this important work without your

Our new grants and resource development manager has taken our communications, fundraising, and grant writing to new heights. GLS was featured in the Tampa Bay Times for our immigration work and birth certificate program.

We held our inaugural Justice, Soul, & Rock n Roll annual battle of the bands, and the ‘friend-raising’ Highwaymen Networking Event in collaboration with Wallace Welch & Willingham (W3).

We were particularly proud to participate in celebrations of the populations we serve. We had a great time at St. Pete Pride and held our first annual Hispanic Heritage Celebration with guests from the InterCultural Advocacy Institute. GLS was also thrilled to have St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman and Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin join us for our first annual Black History Month Luncheon.

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This is not even half of what GLS did in 2018-2019, and I am truly honored to be part of the GLS family. We love what we do, we care about each other, and we will continue to serve our clients as long as there is a need for social justice.

Warm regards,
Tammy D. Greer
Executive Director
Board Leadership

Many of our 2019 Board members have been with the organization long term. They provided intensive supervision and support during the transition of executive leadership and have a strong working knowledge of how the organization operates. This year, GLS was fortunate to recruit several new Board members to join them, enabling us to meet our need for geographic diversity from each of the counties GLS serves.

Thank you, Pam Cichon, for 29 years of GLS board service!

President:
Shaina Bent, Esq.

Vice President:
Ama Appiah, Esq.

Secretary:
Kristen Adams, Esq.

Treasurer:
Tracy Merry, CPA

Directors:
Keith Bass, JD
Cynthia Batt, Esq.
Pamela Cichon, Esq.
Jason Miller, Esq. B.C.S.
Bradley Muhs, Esq.
Dr. Matthew Nessetti, MD, JD
Ben Sorrell, Esq.
William H. Weller, Esq.
Who We Are

GLS staff consists of attorneys and paralegals, administrative professionals, Florida natives and immigrants, volunteers, people who have had long careers already, and people who are just beginning their careers.

We are boxers and actors, readers and gardeners, jazz enthusiasts, movie buffs. We have families and pets, and are volunteers within our communities.

“As an intern and volunteer, I realized how important the services that GLS offers are to the community. As an attorney, I realize I have an opportunity to make a difference in a person’s life. I am proud to be part of such an amazing organization.”

- Attorney Sara Jones

“During my first week here, I had the privilege of calling a client to inform him that his birth certificate had arrived. I was so moved by his response on the phone: ‘Thank you, you have restored my life,’ that I have made it a personal mission to contribute all I can to ensure the same result for each client I have.”

- Lora Vineburg, Pam Dubrule Intern ’19
Who We Help

Client Stories

Hoping to make a better life for her and her two children, “Maria” walked into the Wimauma GLS office. She spoke only Spanish and was living on $8,000 per year. A victim of extensive physical, domestic abuse throughout an almost seven-year relationship, she came to GLS seeking a divorce and sole custody of her two daughters, should her abusive husband ever re-enter the United States. At the final hearing, Maria was awarded sole parental custody, with no time-sharing and all decision-making authority to obtain passports and care for the children. The court also reserved on the issue of child support, so if the father ever re-enters the country, Maria can go back at any time to obtain a support order.

William and his partner, Steve, came to GLS together to create life-planning documents. William, a veteran, is eighty-years-old and living off his pension and social security income. Steve is disabled and lives off a meager supplemental security/disability stipend. They have been together for thirty years, but because of federal law, never married or took each other’s last names. Fearing they might be kept from one another in case of an emergency, William and his partner looked into power of attorney and healthcare surrogate options. But on their limited incomes, they could not afford a private attorney to draft the necessary documents. With the support of their three children, William and Steve found GLS. The life planning documents they created with her will ensure their truest wishes are honored at the end of their lives and that they will have the ability to make healthcare decisions for one another when so many same-sex couples do not.

“You were a big help to me and everything that I went through and I just want you to know that I appreciate all of that sincerely. I wouldn’t be where I am right now without the help that you gave to me. I’m doing great. Everything is together for me. I’m doing better than I have in a really long time.”

“I am so grateful to have you working on my side. You are amazing, caring, dedicated, brave, strong, and excellent at what you do. You have shown me so much respect and love about a home for me that they didn’t. God Bless You! You gave up lunch and sleep for me and others like me. It’s hard getting older and people taking advantage of that makes it even harder. But with you in our corner of the ring, we have a better chance to battle on.”
How We Help

GLS provides exceptional high quality civil legal aid. Our expert legal team provides free, direct (not outsourced), comprehensive legal services to vulnerable, low-income clients in a sensitive, competent, trauma-informed manner. We address clients’ needs with urgency, empathy, and professionalism. We respond quickly and effectively to community and client needs. GLS professionals work not only to ensure individual vulnerable clients have access to justice but also to address systemic issues through broader impact work and policy advocacy - in ways that only those with knowledge of the legal system can.

TOTAL CASES

3922

CASES BY COUNTY

- Pinellas: 2036
- Manatee: 1074
- Sarasota: 440
- Hillsborough: 315
- Other: 57

- Outreaches Attended: 291
- Pro Bono and Volunteers:
  - Volunteers: 63
  - Volunteer Hours: 3707
Florida has approximately 32,000 residents experiencing homelessness on any given day. Homeless individuals need an ID before they can access services. Before anyone can get food stamps, rent an apartment, or motel room, they must show an ID. GLS helps obtain birth certificates for these individuals, as it is the first step in gaining food and shelter.

Over the past five years the average rent per month in our service areas has increased by 46%. GLS provides one-on-one housing counseling to current homeowners to assist them in improving their housing conditions and in meeting the responsibilities of homeownership.

In 2018, 104,914 crimes of domestic violence were reported to Florida law enforcement agencies. GLS attorneys can obtain injunctions for protection and assist DV survivors with related needs like divorce, immigration, housing, and financial stability matters.

The Need We Face

Florida is now third in the nation for human trafficking cases.

GLS is the only organization that offers comprehensive, direct civil legal services to human trafficking victims in the gulf coast region. GLS is currently an OVC funded provider of these specialized legal services.
Financials

Breakdown by Unit: Total: $3,277,755

- Administration (15%)
- Financial stability (23%)
- Housing (11%)
- Immigration (20%)
- Family (29%)
- Development (2%)

Breakdown by Office Location: Total: $3,277,755

- Pinellas (49%) 49
- Manasota (43%) 43
- Hillsborough (8%) 8

Two New Fundraising Events:
- Highwaymen Happy Hour and Networking Event
- Justice, Soul, & Rock ‘N’ Roll

Two New Grant Programs:

- Medical Legal Partnership (funded by the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg)
- Human Trafficking Assistance Grant (funded by the US Department of Justice – Office of Victims of Crime)
Thank you to our funders:

- Area Agency on Aging Pasco-Pinellas
- City of Bradenton
- City of Clearwater
- City of Largo
- Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Florida Rural Legal Services
- Hispanic Outreach Center
- Florida Office of the Attorney General
- US Department of Treasury
- Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County
- Manatee County
- US Department of Justice
- Pinellas Community Foundation
- Pinellas County
- Senior Citizens Services
- Senior Connection Center
- The Florida Bar Foundation
- United Way of Manatee County
- United Way of South Sarasota County
- James Fox
- Kristen Adams
- Neil R. Covert
- Richard Kennedy
- Robert Kaleel
- Wendy Cox
- Anonymous
Moving Forward

The world is rapidly changing, as are the needs of the diverse communities we assist. Looking forward, GLS hopes to continue to grow and change to meet these needs by expanding current programming and developing new focuses. We are thankful for our community supporters – our funders, nonprofit partners, and all those who contribute to our success.

Mission Forward
- Increase client involvement in strategic planning
- Increase board diversity
- Maintain the quality of services

Operations Efficient
- Focus on diversifying funding streams

Community Oriented
- Continue to expand our partnerships in the community
- Engage new volunteers and pro bono opportunities

“‘I’ve seen GLS grow into a healthy, stable organization that is positioned to really look to the future and all that’s possible.”
– Shaina Bent, GLS Board Chair
Contact Us

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