



# HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

TWO THOUSAND FOURTEEN ANNUAL REPORT

### *This has been an exciting year*

at Human Rights Initiative of North Texas. Over 68,000 unaccompanied children escaped the violence, poverty, and abuse of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala to seek refuge in the United States. Thousands found shelter in North Texas. In response, our staff and board asked the challenging question: *In this rapidly changing environment, what would it require from us as an institution to take the mantle of leadership locally?*

I'm proud to say we did lead in the endeavors to help these kids. That's natural because we were the only organization doing free legal services in Immigration Court for these kids for the last ten years. I was often asked, why did these children come. Well, the truth is for many reasons. But we know from our interview process that *many of them escaped from communities without the rule of law, where gang and family violence made peaceful life unattainable.* So we stepped up to lead. We became a go-to resource for local, national and international media, who wanted to know the unique needs of these children. We had legal clinics sometimes as much as three times a week to screen children. We recruited and trained lawyers, many of whom were first time volunteers. We represented these kids in Immigration Court, responding to an accelerated court process, which was called a "rocket docket." And we did all of this while upholding the highest standards of legal services.

Meanwhile our Asylum Program continued to provide legal services for individuals fleeing religious and political persecution. We provided referrals for social services to many of our great partner agencies.

*Our overwhelming sentiment, however, is one of gratitude. We are grateful to have the opportunity to change lives with our program.* We are grateful at the response of lawyers and translators, who this last year donated professional services worth over three million dollars. We're grateful to our donors who responded with generosity to our requests for the resources to increase staffing in response to unprecedented need. Truly we could not do this rewarding work without you.

Sincerely,





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## *Where liberty dwells, there is my country* – Benjamin Franklin

Since its founding, the United States of America has been synonymous with three basic tenets: freedom, justice, and opportunity. Human Rights Initiative of North Texas serves clients everyday with those same three values. HRI offers free legal representation to those victims who are most vulnerable and, often times, completely invisible to the current justice system. We have come to recognize the work we do as forging a path to safety, liberty, and opportunity for immigrant victims of violence. All of HRI's clients are immigrant survivors of human rights abuses either internationally or domestically. Their stories vary and their circumstances differ, but in the end each is faced with a decision to flee the violent situation or stay and face almost certain death. If they choose to flee, often times they leave with little to nothing to help them start a new life and are faced with financial, cultural, lingual, transportation, and legal barriers. Through professional legal services, HRI is able to help these individuals overcome at least one of these hurdles: immigration status. HRI assists our clients in gaining access to protections made available through the U.S. Immigration System. Read on to learn more about these protections and all of our programs including social services provided to our clients.

### OUR MISSION

HRI of North Texas provides legal and support services to refugees and immigrants who have suffered human rights abuses; advocates for justice; and promotes international human rights. Our work with this immigrant population fills a crucial gap in services and offers survivors a way out of their traumatic and violent pasts.

### OUR VISION

To see a world in which abuse, torture, assault, or other forms of violence are no longer used as tools to overpower and control any human being.

### OUR MODEL

Human Rights Initiative is proud of our innovative and efficient model to provide the maximum amount of services with the lowest cost to donors. Our legal services are always 100% free to the client. We are able to do this through a large, award-winning network of volunteer professionals who donate their time to help our cause. In turn, HRI offers free training and support to the professionals as they work on each legal case. This model allows us to assist over 450 clients each year.



# ASYLUM PROGRAM

*Since 2000, HRI has helped over 200 asylum seekers find safety and opportunity in the United States. Asylum-seekers, like refugees, are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. Unlike refugees, asylum-seekers come to the United States without refugee status and must then fight for government protection. Our clients possess immeasurable strength and resilience.*

**100%**

of HRI's asylum clients whose cases were decided in FY2014 were able to remain in the United States with legal immigrant status.

**FY2014**  
Casework

**510**  
days

**58**

Principal  
Asylum Cases

**56**

Family  
Petitions

is the average  
processing time for  
legal relief in Dallas  
Immigration Court\*

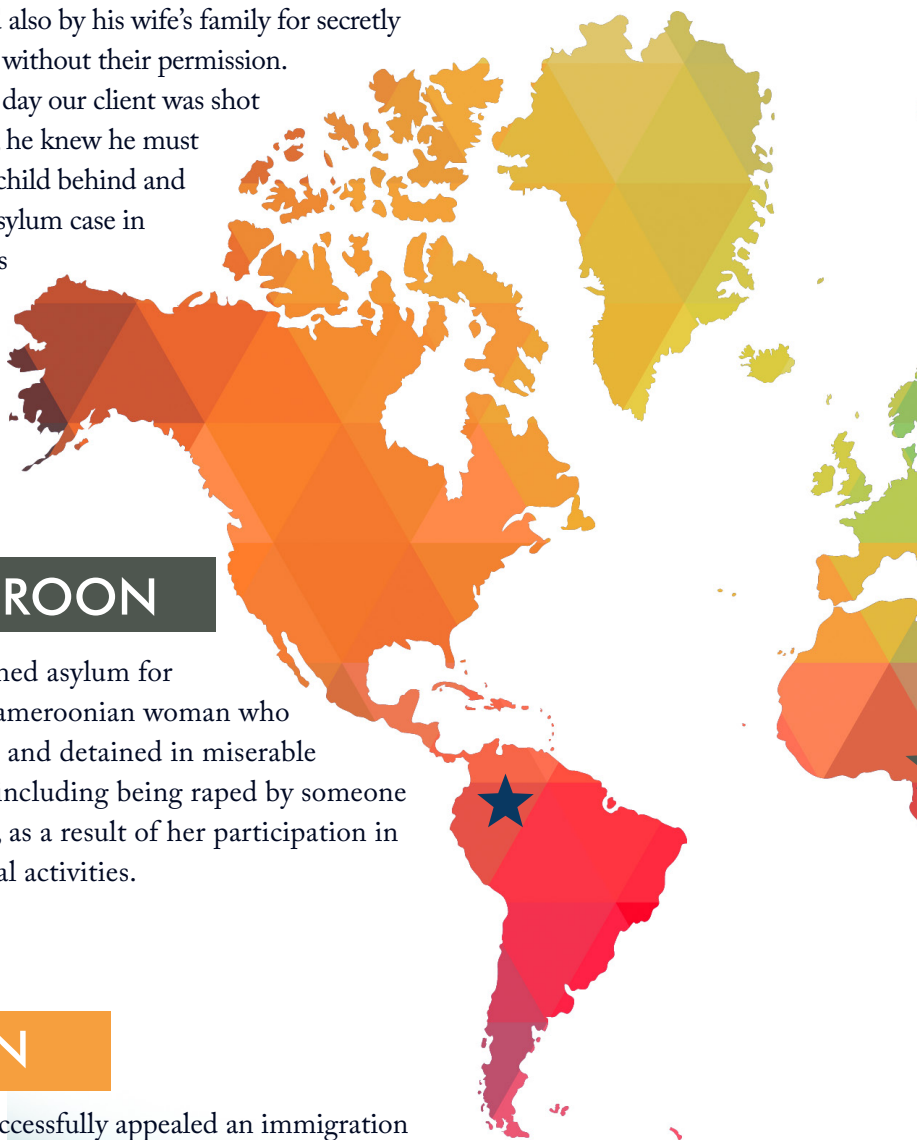




## AFGHANISTAN

HRI obtained asylum for Ahmad, an interpreter from Afghanistan working with the U.S. Military. The client was targeted by the Taliban for his service to the United States and also by his wife's family for secretly marrying her without their permission.

After receiving death threats, one day our client was shot at while driving. At that moment, he knew he must leave. He left his wife and young child behind and came to America. HRI filed his asylum case in 2011, and was granted asylum this year. HRI is now in the process of helping this client bring his wife and child to America.



## CAMEROON

HRI obtained asylum for Doris, a Cameroonian woman who was beaten and detained in miserable conditions, including being raped by someone in her jail cell, as a result of her participation in opposition political activities.



## IRAN

HRI successfully appealed an immigration judge's denial of the asylum claim of Farida, an Iranian client, whose husband abused her and threatened to report her to the Iranian government as an apostate after she converted from Islam to Christianity.

## ERITREA

HRI represented an unaccompanied minor in her affirmative asylum case. The minor fled from Eritrea after she was persecuted for practicing Pentecostal Christianity. Susie and her sister fled to Sudan where they lived for over one year as they tried to save enough money to make the journey to the United States. Once she arrived in the U.S., Susie was placed in foster care since she was a minor. Through her foster care shelter, HRI screened Susie for relief and worked quickly to file her asylum claim before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to give her the best shot at attaining the status without losing her foster home. Despite the short timeline, HRI was able to secure asylum for Susie, who now attends her local high school and hopes to become a pediatrician someday.



## COLOMBIA

Marcia was attacked by the FARC because of her activities on behalf of a minority political party and her outreach to marginalized groups such as at-risk youth and single mothers in her area. Opposing party members kidnapped our client, threatened her young daughter's life, vandalized her car with threatening messages, and shot at her house. HRI secured asylum for our client and her family so they can live safely in the United States and exercise their political rights.



# WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

*The Women & Children's Program exists to help survivors of violence and abuse who qualify for immigration relief. In this program, we help clients access four major forms of relief: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-Petition, U-Visas, and DACA. In addition to these, HRI attorneys do their best to help clients access other forms of relief that will help them stay safe and stable. Read the stories below to learn more about how we help these survivors of human rights abuses.*

## UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Although we have represented immigrant children for the past ten years, for the past two years HRI has also been working with Catholic Charities Ft. Worth to serve unaccompanied immigrant minors housed in their shelter. HRI attorneys and staff provided children in the shelter with legal screenings and information on understanding their rights. In early June 2014, the U.S. saw a surge of unaccompanied minors from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala fleeing the violent and impoverished conditions of their home countries for the chance at a better life in the United States. Many of these children have been or will be returned to their home countries, but others qualify for immigration relief in the United States. HRI has been on the forefront of offering legal services to these children, some of whom reunite with a family member here and others who are truly orphans. In most cases, HRI assists these children in applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) which allows a child who has been abused, abandoned, or neglected by one or both parents to stay in the United States legally.



*Marvin* came to Dallas from El Salvador as a 17-year old. In 2011, the local MS-13 gang began harassing him. The gang threatened to kill him if he did not join them as a drug and weapons smuggler. Marvin is homosexual, but did not live openly in his home country. The gang suspected Marvin was homosexual, and when Marvin refused to join them, they threatened to out him. Marvin was so scared that he stopped attending school, until finally in 2013 he was able to escape to the United States. Here, Marvin lives with his aunt and uncle and has an opportunity to lead an educated and successful life and the freedom to live openly gay. HRI successfully secured SIJS status for Marvin in 2014.





## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ABUSE, AND VIOLENT CRIME

Immigrant survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault or other violent crime may have the opportunity to apply for immigration relief.

**THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA)** includes protections for victims of domestic abuse who were married to a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident.

*Alejandra* is a 38-year-old woman from Peru who came to the United States in 2001. She met Michael soon after arriving and they fell in love. Michael and Alejandra were happy – he was helping her learn English and was very supportive. After marriage, Michael planned to petition for Alejandra to obtain immigration status through him, but right when they were ready to file, he threw away all of the paperwork they had collected and cancelled her appointment. From that point on, Michael verbally abused Alejandra. Michael drank and sexually and physically assaulted Alejandra multiple times. Finally, after nearly 5 years of abuse, Michael abandoned Alejandra, taking all of their money. Alejandra fled to a shelter and found HRI. HRI applied under VAWA and Alejandra was approved.

**THE U-VISA**, offers immigration relief for victims of qualifying crimes who cooperate with the investigation and/or prosecution of the crime. Many of the clients we see are victims of sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, and molestation.

*Betty*, a 32-year-old from Mexico, was brought to the United States at the age of fourteen. In October 2012, Betty was unloading groceries when her male neighbor asked her to help him take pictures of his apartment. As soon as she went into the house, he pulled out a gun and forced her to stay and perform oral sex on him. He raped her and forced her to stay the night, threatening to kill her if she refused. Thankfully, a police officer was called to the apartment but before he could help, the neighbor shot Betty in the neck. Betty recovered and HRI has completed an application for a U-Visa for her. Her application is still pending.

**DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA)** was announced on June 15, 2012 for certain minors who came to the U.S. as children and meet several guidelines about education and continuous presence as well as good moral character. HRI applies for DACA for clients who have been victims of violence but do not qualify for other relief.

*Jonothon* is a 19-year from Mexico who came to the United States with his mother in 2003. In the U.S. he began living with his father who became very abusive. From the age of seven to eleven, Jonothon endured abuse from his father, who once even tried to hang him from a tree. In 2007, his mother called CPS and Jonothon and his mother were finally separated from his father. Jonothon is now approved for DACA until 2016 and is able to live separately and safely from his father.

During FY2014 the Women and Children's Program had

# 100%

VAWA GRANT RATE • SIJS GRANT RATE  
U-VISA GRANT RATE • DACA GRANT RATE

**227**

family relief

**175**

Shelter Legal  
Screenings

**174**

Know Your Rights  
Presentations

**227**

core cases

**479**  
**TOTAL**  
**CASES**

**25**

Limited  
Representation

*In addition to representing clients for various forms of immigration relief through our Asylum and Women and Children's Programs, Human Rights Initiative also offers other legal services to our clients and the community.*

### WORK AUTHORIZATION

After receiving their new immigration status, and sometimes before, clients qualify to receive their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) so that they can work legally in the United States. HRI helps qualified clients apply and renew these documents throughout their case and sometimes beyond that.

### LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENCY

Many of the forms of immigration relief that HRI obtains for our clients lead to their eligibility to adjust their status to legal permanent residency. HRI helps all of our qualified clients apply for their green cards, including attending an interview with USCIS when needed.

**100%**  
approval rate



on 180 Employment  
Authorizations

on 72 Legal Permanent  
Residency cases

*"I cannot express in words the gratitude that my heart feels towards you. I dreamed that one day this moment would happen. Having my Green Card not only means that for the first time I could travel outside the US, but also that I would be able to help my parents. God Bless You."*

*-Anonymous Client*

# SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAM

*Our clients often have a difficult time accessing community services on their own due to language, transportation, and cultural barriers. In addition to that, many times service providers are unfamiliar with the immigration status or protections our clients hold and sometimes deny services due to this misunderstanding. The Social Services Director provides culturally sensitive and comprehensive case management with referrals, advocacy, and access to medical, dental, psychological, housing, food, and clothing services. The Social Services Director collaborates with more than 140 nonprofits to secure services for our clients.*

## SUPPORT PROGRAMS

*Holiday Wish Program* – Generous donors adopt clients and their families and provide them with gifts for the holiday season.

**163 Holiday Wish Participants in FY2014**

*Job Assistance Program* – We offer free workshops with partner agencies on resume writing, job hunting, interviewing, and employment law as well as one-on-one assistance with resumes, interview skills, and job searches.

**146 Education, Housing, Financial, and Job Assistance Referrals in FY2014**

*Essentials for Life Program* – Provides clients with personal hygiene items, grocery cards, bus passes, and other essentials. Clients are also referred to food pantries, clothing closets and given limited monetary emergency funds when necessary.

*Transitional Housing Program* – HRI was able to offer one of our most needy clients and his family transitional housing services while he waited for his case to be adjudicated. In collaboration with Reconciliation Outreach, a local Dallas non-profit agency, HRI holds one apartment on its housing structure, offering our client and his family temporary shelter.

**in FY2014**



... **113 Food Referrals**



... **83 Clothing/Household Goods Referrals**



... **480 DART bus passes distributed**



... **\$13,300 in direct social services cash assistance**



# VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

*Volunteers participate in all aspects of Human Rights Initiative's operations. In FY2014, volunteers throughout all programs donated over 12,000 hours of service with a combined value of nearly \$3.5 million. Over the last 14 years, HRI volunteers have participated in the following programs:*



## **WILLIAM O. HOLSTON JR. PRO BONO PROGRAM**

Before he became our Executive Director, Bill Holston was a long-time volunteer attorney for HRI. Our pro bono program was renamed for him due to a generous gift from Charlie and Meredith Stimson, clients of Bill. Over the last decade, HRI has trained more than one thousand legal professionals, many of whom have gone on to provide pro bono assistance through HRI. In FY 2014, 8,047 hours were donated by 200 volunteer attorneys and supporting staff, amounting to a value of \$3.26 million in legal services. This program is the heart of our services as an agency and allows HRI to multiply every dollar donated by nearly six.

## **HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM**

Through this program, volunteer physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists provide essential forensic medical exams and psychological evaluations for our clients. These volunteers offer their services for free to clients in our Asylum Program in order to support their asylum claims. Volunteers write reports of their analysis and are sometimes asked to testify in front of a judge in immigration court.

## **INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS**

Interpreters and translators help with the conversion of documents from our clients' native languages into English. Inclusion of these documents in a client's legal application is necessary to substantiate the claims and to identify the client or specific events that may have affected the client's life. Interpreters also offer the invaluable service of translating communication between clients and attorneys for important meetings.

## **INTERNSHIPS AND SERVICE LEARNING**

Many students come to HRI seeking internship or service learning opportunities. We have supervised high school, undergraduate and graduate interns along with law students. Internships and service learning projects provide a unique opportunity and invaluable volunteer assistance.

HRI believes in teaching through hands-on experience and providing our interns with opportunities to see the true nature of practicing law, serving at a non-profit, and working as part of our team. Our interns work closely with our department directors and provide valuable work to support our clients' cases. We would not be able to do our work without them! Internship details can be found on our website.

# ADVOCACY PROGRAM

*HRI's Advocacy Program was created so that we could address systemic problems in areas of human rights and immigration law. We see how these issues affect our clients and others like them, so our work includes trying to create meaningful change that will improve our country's ability to provide immigrant victims of violence with protection in a just and efficient manner. HRI continues to monitor legislation that impacts our clients, and we inform the community about developments in immigration law and human rights through postings on our website and social media. This past year we advocated for the passage of the Senate's Comprehensive Immigration Reform bill, which would have improved the law and benefitted our clients in many ways. We also worked to educate legislators and the public about our clients, especially the influx of unaccompanied minor children from Central America, with the hope that our expertise can aid the discourse on how to help these vulnerable populations.*

## HUMAN RIGHTS CURRICULUM

One of the Advocacy Program's most innovative and exciting programs is our Human Rights Curriculum. This curriculum brings the concept of international human rights to area students. With the help of HRI staff and volunteer attorneys, we have designed and taught class-specific curricula on topics that connect broad concepts of international human rights with our work. The students see how human rights concepts play out in the real lives of local people who are seeking asylum or are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, violent crime or trafficking. HRI's volunteer attorneys help teach the classes, sharing their clients' experiences and discussing how they incorporate public service into their careers. When possible, past HRI clients also participate and convey their moving stories of courage and survival. In FY2014, we presented to over 1800 students and teachers and we strengthened our partnerships with the World Affairs Council and the Dallas Holocaust Museum. Since inception, HRI has presented this unique curriculum to more than 4,800 local college and high school students and teachers.



in FY2014

Human Rights Curriculum  
and Education to

**1800**  
students



Education and  
Training for over

**500**  
attorneys



General Outreach to over

**2345**  
DFW residents

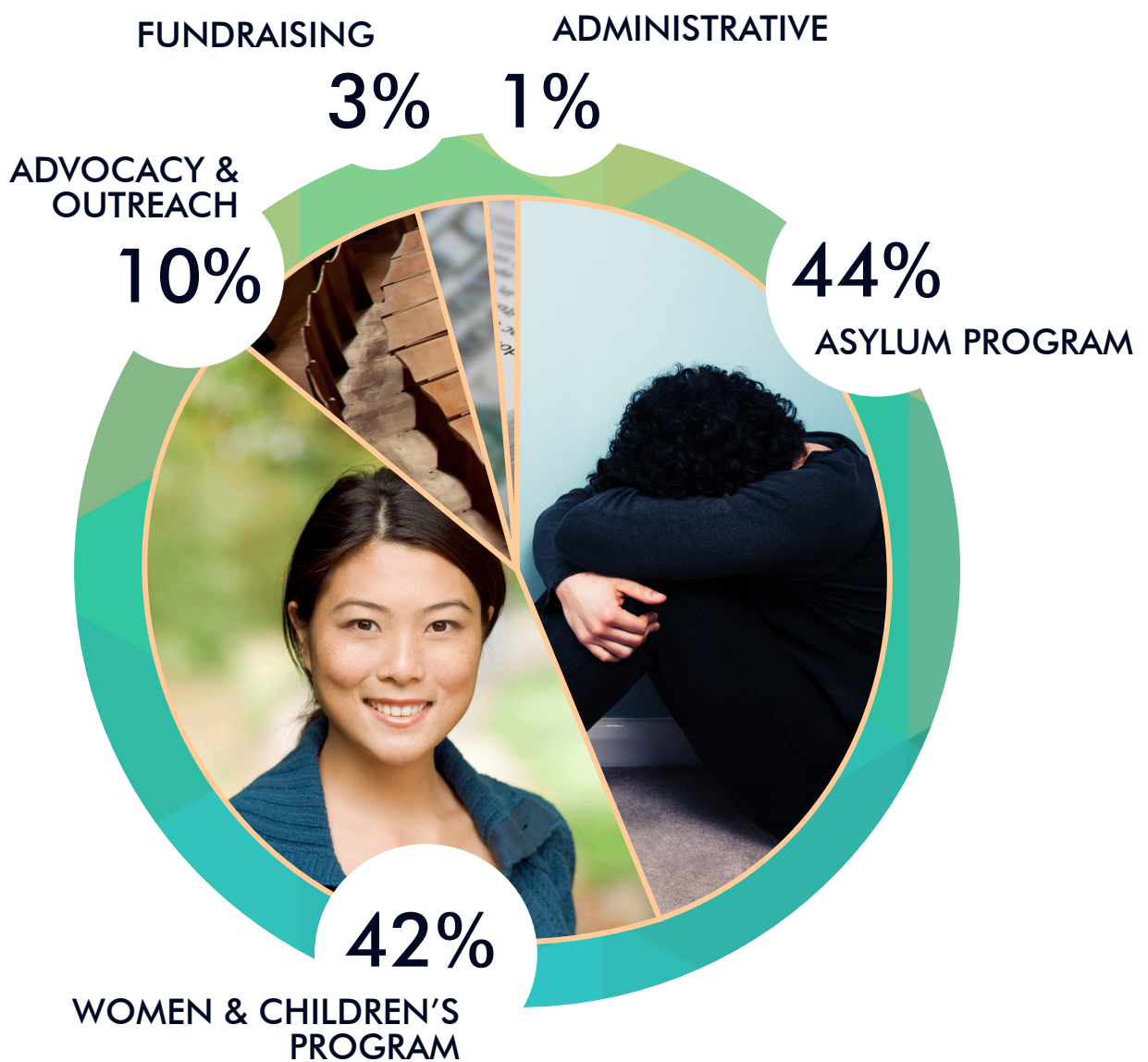


## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Outreach is especially important to Human Rights Initiative because of the very specific needs of our clients. We strive to engage interested community members, law firms, health professionals, and other community non-profit agencies in our work to create more accessible pathways for our clients to reach us. In FY2014, HRI staff did a considerable amount of outreach to the greater Dallas/Ft. Worth and North Texas Community

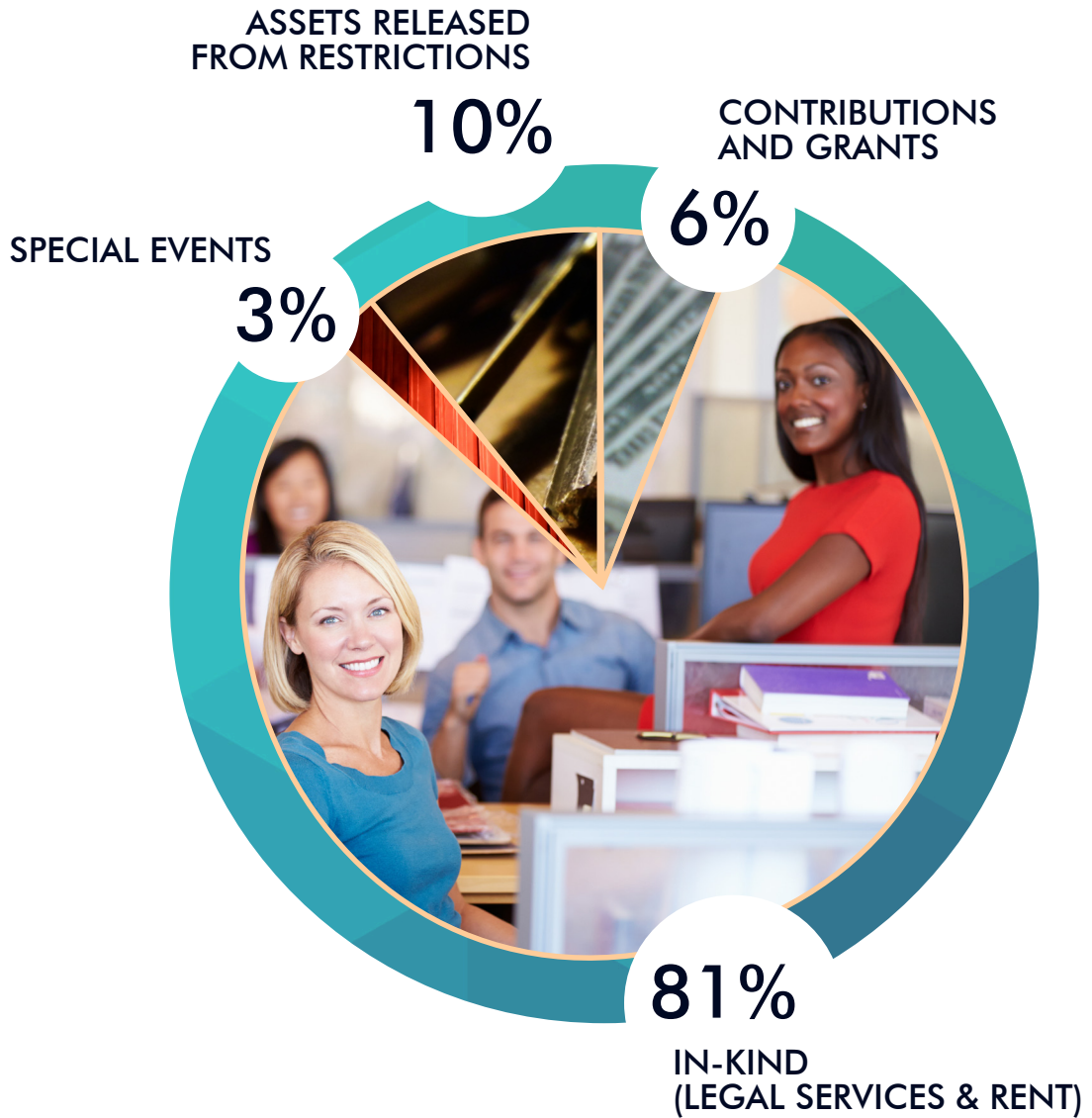
FISCAL YEAR JULY 2013– JUNE 2014

## EXPENSES BY PROGRAM





# REVENUE AND SUPPORT



EXPENSES ..... \$532,886  
cash

REVENUE & SUPPORT ..... \$774,487  
cash

**\$3,257,189**  
in-kind legal services

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