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Duke Law Student Amel Weaver (L) and Pisgah Legal Attorney Ed Treat advise Meranda, an inmate at the Western Correctional Center for Women (WCCW) in Black Mountain.

Overcoming Barriers for a Fresh Start

INNOVATIVE PROGRAM HELPS INCARCERATED PEOPLE ACCESS ESSENTIAL LEGAL AID WHILE DUKE LAW STUDENTS GAIN REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE

When people walk out of prison after serving their time, many have little more than a small bag of belongings and their hopes for a fresh start. One small item can make all the difference: a state-issued ID or driver's license.

Without valid identification, even the most basic steps toward rebuilding a life are incredibly difficult: applying for housing, getting a job, opening a bank account, and accessing transportation. Yet many who are incarcerated leave prison with expired or suspended

licenses and no clear path as to how to restore them. Fines, court fees and complicated legal processes often stand in the way.

Thanks to a partnership between Pisgah Legal Services, the NC Department of Adult Correction and Duke Law School's Pro Bono Program, 10 law students used their spring break to help incarcerated people at two WNC minimum-custody reentry facilities navigate those barriers.

Continued inside...



Save the Date:
October 22
Pulitzer Prize -
Winning Author
Brian Goldstone
will speak
at this year's
Justice Forum.
Learn more at
[pisgahlegal.org/](http://pisgahlegal.org/justiceforum)
justiceforum

Justice Often Requires Perseverance

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, TENACITY AND INVENTIVE STRATEGIES PAY OFF

I wanted to share this recent success with you, relayed to me by one of our staff members.

As you may know, Pisgah Legal has supported Hurricane Helene survivors since the beginning. This spring, a key FEMA appeal deadline was approaching.

FEMA would only accept appeals by certified mail, which adds extra costs, or via fax, which the average person doesn't have.

One week before the deadline, every appeal we sent on our clients' behalf through Pisgah Legal's fax line began being rejected, putting these urgent appeals at risk.

Managing Attorney Julia Horrocks coordinated with other Disaster Recovery staff to collect rejected appeals. She then set up shop at a local office supply business with fax service. It took more than a day and a half to send these lengthy appeals, but it was worth it; **they were all accepted by FEMA.**

This is just one example of how our staff and volunteers persevere every single day to get the justice our clients need, often in less-than-ideal circumstances.



Pisgah Legal Services has a wonderful history of this kind of inventiveness. In 2022, for example, Lutheran Services Carolinas and Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte came to us asking for help for dozens of Afghan evacuees brought to WNC needing asylum assistance. With only five months to file, significant language barriers, and three already booked immigration attorneys, the situation was dire. **But the alternative was unthinkable: deportation and likely death by the Taliban** for the evacuees' work with the U.S. and Allied Forces.

Together, our pro bono and immigration teams recruited, trained, and supported dozens of volunteer attorneys, both locally and out of state, to assist clients through the asylum process, even accompanying evacuees to required interviews in Virginia. **As a result, every one of our clients secured asylum.**

"Our staff and volunteers persevere every single day to get the justice our clients need, often in less-than-ideal circumstances."

In this newsletter, you'll read about other examples of perseverance and partnerships that help us serve the people who depend on Pisgah Legal.

Thank you for making this critical work possible!

We can't do it without you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Jackie Kiger in black ink.

Jackie Kiger, Executive Director

Jazz for Justice Event Raises Funds to the Tune of \$100,000!



Jesse Kitt Photo

On May 28th, 400+ supporters filled Highland Brewing in Asheville to celebrate Pisgah Legal's impact and help expand access to justice across our mountain region.

Jazz for Justice raised more than \$100,000 to support Pisgah Legal's work across WNC. During the event, supporters contributed more than \$27,000 to our **Rooted in Justice Giving Challenge**, which was amplified by an additional \$10,000 in matching gifts from Dr. and Mrs. Randall Johnson and anonymous donors. Combined with generous sponsorships and ticket revenue, the evening was a tremendous success.

Cover story continued...



This partnership drew the attention of NC First Lady Anna Stein who visited WCCW on March 11, along with the first ladies of Oklahoma and North Dakota, and NCDAC Secretary Leslie Cooley Dismukes. They are pictured here with students and staff from Duke Law's Pro Bono Program and Pisgah Legal staff and volunteer attorneys.

PLS Attorney Ed Treat supervises the program and led the first hybrid driver's license restoration clinic last November, connecting Duke Law students virtually with people in NCDAC custody.

In March, returning and new students held in-person clinics at WCCW and Craggy Correctional Center, meeting one-on-one with incarcerated individuals alongside supervising attorneys.

Treat and other pro bono attorneys taught students how to review complicated driving records, spot legal obstacles, and explain the license restoration process in easy-to-understand terms.

Clients included Brently, who said at the beginning of her meeting that she knew her license had been suspended, but she had no idea how to get it back. During her hour-long session, she received one-on-one guidance and a clarified DMV record explaining her suspension. She left with clear next steps to getting her license back.

"Sixty-five people gained valuable guidance to improve their chances of building a stable future after release, while 10 students left with hands-on legal experience, a deeper understanding of the law and the barriers incarcerated people face," says Treat. "We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make this such a positive and beneficial experience for all."

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UPDATE : We are pleased to announce that **Neven Vrbetić**, one of the participating law students, will be joining Pisgah Legal Services in early fall thanks to **Duke Law School's Keller Fellowship**. This award provides financial support to a graduating student to work in a public interest organization for one year. Neven will be working closely with Ed Treat on driver's license restoration and expunction for our clients.

PEOPLE OF PISGAH LEGAL



Congratulations to 2026 Governor's Volunteer Service Award recipient
Anne Vilen.

Anne began volunteering with Pisgah Legal by supporting Afghan refugee asylum clients, even traveling with them to Virginia. More recently, she has been assisting Hurricane Helene survivors, especially elderly, disabled, and homebound residents. One client even secured a full home rebuild through Renew NC!

Anne says, "I can see that my service makes a positive difference in clients' lives — improving their legal outcomes, sense of well-being, and their trust in the community, people, and systems that seek justice for all."



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“True patriotism hates injustice in its own land more than anywhere else.” – Clarence Darrow

Stronger Together with Community Partners

WE VALUE THE MANY COLLABORATORS WE WORK WITH ACROSS WNC. THANK YOU!

A PLS supporter recently said to us, “You guys are EVERYWHERE!”

It’s music to our ears since we are working harder than ever to meet clients “where they are” across our mountains. **Strong partnerships with other nonprofits make this possible.**

Through these collaborations, PLS now offers new “office hours” in more communities, including Newland, Columbus, Spruce Pine and Swannanoa (above).

We are also grateful to partners Vecinos, UNETE and CIMA for participating in a recent Lunch and Learn event, hosted by St. Mary’s Episcopal Church. Panelists spoke about the challenges immigrants face and how Pisgah Legal and other organizations are working to support them. Learn more at pisgahlegal.org/outreach.

