



## August 2017 Volunteer of the Month

Philadelphia VIP recognizes **Emily Vener-Giszter** as our **Volunteer of the Month** for going above and beyond in **answering the call to serve**. Thank you Emily!

While mental health issues affect millions of Americans every year, barriers to accessing care and persistent stigma prevent many from seeking help. According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), nearly 60% of adults with a mental health issue receive no help at all.

When a father experiencing mental illness lost custody of his young child, VIP volunteer Emily Vener-Giszter stepped in. "Having a mental health, substance abuse issue, or disability, doesn't mean that you're not a good parent," she says. A licensed Psychotherapist and family law attorney, Emily is representing the client in the ongoing process to regain custody while he continues to receive treatment.



"People in recovery can be very self-reflective and, in some ways, be better parents for coming out on the other end," Emily explains. "Without pro bono, there would be plenty of people with no legal representation. It's much better to negotiate that world with a lawyer than without one."

Emily's practice, [Vener Family Law and Mediation, LLC.](#), covers a wide range of issues including divorce, custody, grandparent rights, same sex partnerships, name changes, and cohabitation agreements. Mediation is integral to Emily's practice and, in her experience, helps both provide families better control over their futures and protect children from the harmful consequences of a parental conflict.

Divorce cases continue to be one of VIP's highest need areas for representation. Emily's commitment to these complex cases is extraordinary. As VIP Senior Pro Bono Case Manager Rida Haq notes, "Emily is my go-to volunteer when I have a client who is experiencing setbacks and will benefit from a more holistic approach to legal representation. Her background as a therapist makes her uniquely qualified to understand some of our most vulnerable clients."

A graduate of Temple Law School, Emily started volunteering with VIP even before she took the bar exam. Emily identifies VIP's mentorship program, which pairs new or inexperienced volunteer attorneys with expert volunteers from other firms and practices, as an invaluable part of her VIP experience. "It was the glue for me. If it weren't for my two VIP mentors early in my legal career, I probably wouldn't be where I am now, with my own practice. To this day, my mentors are always open to my calls. It's been marvelous."

Emily recommends VIP as a way to build skills and relationships in a supportive context. "It's a great place to get your feet wet, and get the support you need. You can make connections with more experienced attorneys and judges to understand how the system works. VIP is a wonderful place to explore new topics and grow in your profession."

**Emily is a dedicated volunteer who is committed to helping her community. We applaud her leadership and partnership in helping VIP achieve access to justice for all.**