

Robin L. Merrell

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Experience

Pisgah Legal Services | Asheville, NC

Nonprofit legal services organization serving over 20,000 people annually by providing free civil legal aid advocacy to protect basic needs and address poverty across western North Carolina.

Managing Attorney (2006-Present)

Leadership Experience

- Direct oversight and accountability for priority areas of PLS poverty law practice within the following programs: Homelessness Prevention, Consumer Protection, Public and Government Benefits, SOAR Program, Medical Legal Partnership with RHA Health Services, Community Economic Development, Expunction/Drivers' License Restoration, Emeritus Attorney Volunteer Program (EAGLE), Veterans Law, and Healthy Opportunities Pilot.
- Direct oversight and accountability for office operations including reception, client applications and intake, and attorney support including paralegals and legal assistance.
- Manage and supervise staff of program directors, attorneys, social workers, and non-attorney advocates, overseeing client representation and setting individual case and broader advocacy priorities.
- Responsible in coordination with HR for hiring, training and evaluation of both direct and indirect supervisees.
- Work closely with Chief Operations Officer to coordinate and prioritize distribution of resources and monitor program priorities and results, responding to urgent needs and deadlines routinely.
- Provide leadership and direction to support mission and organizational priorities, lead annual program planning process and work in collaboration with PLS management Team on PLS strategic plan.
- Relationship building in all program areas and across the organization-staff, board members, volunteers, donors, community partners, clients and stakeholders; cultivate leadership within the organization through professional development of staff.
- Organize, oversee, and provide macro-level advocacy on broad-reaching poverty law issues, including homelessness, affordable housing, community economic development, domestic violence, and health access.
- Support all fundraising functions including grant writing, public speaking, donor cultivation, and governmental relations.

Select Transformative Projects and Collaborations

- Led the completion of the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Asheville and Buncombe County in 2004, the first in North Carolina. Since implementation in 2005, the number of chronic homeless individuals has been reduced by 82% based on the strategies in the plan. In 2011, Asheville and Buncombe County were recognized for these efforts by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness,
- Developed and implemented Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program for City of Asheville, providing technical assistance to participating agencies, and legal assistance to clients helping them avoid eviction and quickly access new housing.
- Led efforts in Rutherford County to secure \$650,000 in Community Development Block Grant Funding to rehabilitate 12 houses for low-income homeowners in 2019.
- Developed programming and application for IRISE, a Department of Justice funded program that provides permanent housing and support services for families who have survived domestic violence.
- Part of the team that developed the Women for Women funded Domestic Violence Prevention Plan.
- As Continuum of Care Coordinator for Asheville-Buncombe Homeless Coalition from 2001-2010, coordinated and drafted successful applications to obtain approximately \$10 million in Continuum of Care grant funding that housed approximately 100 homeless individuals and families and provided support to over 2,000 more,
- Facilitated the development of an update to the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Asheville and Buncombe County,
- Facilitated the development of and drafted the 2008 Affordable Housing Plan for the City of Asheville that included 33 recommendations for improving and increasing affordable housing, building collaboration among 40 stakeholders with divergent interests. Since 2008, Council has made its Housing Trust Fund more accessible, and has adopted zoning ordinance changes and incentives to increase the supply of affordable housing

2000-2006 Staff Attorney

- Represented approximately 2800 families or individuals to secure housing, income and legal rights in:
 - Public Housing grievance hearings
 - Section 8 termination hearings
 - Public Housing and Section 8 admissions hearings
 - North Carolina District Court (bench and jury trials)
 - North Carolina Superior Court
 - North Carolina Court of Appeals

Professional & Community Involvement

- North Carolina State Bar (active)

- Buncombe County Bar (active)
- Board of Directors, North Carolina Housing Coalition, February 2010-2021; Board Chair 2018-2021. Led organization through Executive Director transition, eliminating debt, and increasing reserve funds six-fold
- Chair, Town of Marshall Planning Board
- Vice Chair, Asheville-Buncombe Regional HOME Consortium, intergovernmental agency that distributes \$1.5 million of HUD funding annually.
- Founding member and first President of the Community Housing Coalition of Madison County; served on board from 2001-2013, an organization that provides emergency home repairs to 50 low-income families annually.
- Founding member of West Riverside Operation Weed and Seed Steering Committee; served as Chair and Secretary.
- Resilient Leadership Training
- Chair, Housing Workgroup, GroWNC, HUD Sustainable Communities grant program covering 5 counties in western North Carolina.
- Member of Racial Justice Coalition
- Scholarship Reviewer for Community Foundation of Western North Carolina
- Graduate of Community Development Academy at NC School of Government
- 2020 NC Civil Legal Needs Assessment Steering Committee
- North Carolina Leadership Forum, WNC cohort focused on Affordable Housing 2021-2022
- Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, 2021-Present

Awards & Acknowledgements

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation Sabbatical Award Recipient, 2016.

Wildacres Leadership Initiative, William C. Friday Fellow, 2006-2008, Leadership development program for emerging leaders in NC in human relations.

National Institute of Trial Advocacy, Building Trial Skills, 2004.

Management Information Exchange, Advance Beyond the Basics: Supervising for Excellence

Education

University of North Carolina School of Law, Chapel Hill, NC

- Juris Doctor, May 2000
- Civil Legal Assistance Clinic

Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC

- Bachelor of Arts with Honors, May 1997; cum laude
- Majors: Sociology and Communication
- National Merit Scholar; Brown Scholar; Study abroad in London, England