



**Leading
a New
Response
to Sexual
Violence**

Fall 2010 Newsletter

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear VRLC Community,

Seven years ago, I became a Rape Survivors Law Project (RSLP) volunteer for the Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC). My very first case involved a young woman raped by her work supervisor. That case changed my life. First, it broadened and deepened my effectiveness as a lawyer. I came to understand what too few of us understand – that most sexual assault victims are assaulted by someone they know (such as a coworker, acquaintance, family friend, or fellow student). As a former domestic violence volunteer, I thought that I would automatically understand sexual assault. I quickly learned that domestic violence and sexual violence are very different. While they are so often lumped together, the experiences and needs (and the legal remedies to meet those needs) of sexual assault victims are unique. For example, sexual violence victims are usually *not* related to their perpetrators, so they don't typically need help with family law (which is what most pro bono legal projects focus on). At the same time, the criminal justice system alone cannot answer sexual assault victims' needs either, because only a very small percentage of rapists are ultimately convicted. Therefore, we need to utilize civil legal tools to help victims get back on track with their education, employment, housing, privacy, safety, and immigration status – so many areas where their lives derail following an act of sexual violence. The VRLC was founded on the precept that, for rape victims, justice is more than jail. We can help rape victims find closure, healing and justice through the civil legal system. In the case of the victim I first assisted, we were able to get her released from her employment contract so that she was no longer her rapist's subordinate.

In 2004, I joined the VRLC's Board of Directors. I became acutely aware of the challenges to raising money for such unique work that, frankly, many people find hard to talk about ("civil legal remedies for rape victims" is not your typical cocktail party conversation!). While it may be difficult to broach this topic, we must: Rape is a silent epidemic which does not discriminate. *Millions* of people have been raped or sexually assaulted, but millions of dollars are not pouring in each year to help serve them. Without a doubt, we all know and care for someone whose life has been profoundly affected by a rape or sexual assault, and many of these individuals will find it terribly challenging to get back on track. This is where the VRLC comes in – we will continue to raise awareness of a topic none of us should avoid and offer remedies all of us should embrace.

I am now honored to serve the VRLC as Executive Director. I am delighted that VRLC staff attorney Lindy Aldrich is joining me in her newly appointed role of Deputy Director. I am excited to be part of an exceptional staff and work with a committed board and volunteers who all work tirelessly to lead a new response to sexual violence. We look forward to your support, and I look forward to our paths crossing.

With gratitude,

Stacy Malone

Stacy Malone, Esq.
Executive Director



Isabel's Story

"Isabel" was repeatedly sexually assaulted when she was 14 years old, resulting in anxiety issues which affected her ability to learn. Soon thereafter, Isabel was put on an individualized education plan and placed in a school serving students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Once Isabel settled into her new school, she confided in a fellow student, revealing that she had been sexually assaulted. This student proceeded to tell other students about the sexual assault, and harass Isabel both on social networking sites and via text messaging. **Within youth communities, knowledge of sexual activity is often used by young people to bully and humiliate their classmates.** Isabel continued to be tormented. The classmate began to stalk Isabel and threatened to physically harm her. When Isabel was referred to the VRLC, our staff attorney successfully secured a protective order against her harasser and secured Isabel's desired transfer to another school where she could both feel safe and learn at her own pace. Within months, Isabel's grades vastly improved and she passed the MCAS test in order to graduate. Since graduating from high school, Isabel has enrolled in a two-year program to become a certified medical assistant and continues to feel safe.

Testimonial: VRLC Volunteer Attorney

"It was truly an honor to serve as a volunteer staff attorney at the Victim Rights Law Center. As a recent law school graduate, I could not have asked for a more enriching work experience. From my first day, I saw the very real and devastating impact a sexual assault can have on a person's entire social and financial well-being. Yet, at the same time, I saw how lawyers can use their skills to minimize that impact and create opportunities more conducive to healing. We can work within the present legal framework to obtain relief for our clients, or we can advocate for change when the status quo just isn't good enough. I thank the VRLC for providing me with this opportunity of such personal and professional fulfillment. It was a privilege to serve my clients, whose strength and resilience amazed me every day; and it was an honor to work with my colleagues, whose passion, intelligence, and sheer grit will continue to motivate me in anything I do."

– Christine C. Gannon, Esq., VRLC Deferred Associate from Mintz Levin



New Website!

Visit our new website victimrights.org, and follow us on **Facebook** (Victim Rights Law Center) and **Twitter** (@VictimRightsLaw).

Serving Locally, Leading Nationally

The recent passage of M.G.L. c. 258E – a sexual assault and stalking protection order – will provide sexual assault victims in Massachusetts with unprecedented protection. As the statewide lead on 258E legal trainings, and based on the volume of new 258E clients we have already seen and continue to anticipate, the VRLC is offering 258E-specific trainings to local pro bono attorneys. The training focuses on representing clients under the new statute while still ensuring client-focused, culturally competent advocacy in the legal areas directly affecting a client's life. In September, VRLC attorneys Lindy Aldrich and Kate Lawson provided a 258E training at McCarter & English, LLP. For more information about pro bono opportunities and these specific trainings, please visit <http://victimrights.org>.

In September, VRLC Managing Attorney Colby Bruno participated in a two-day conference hosted by the VRLC, the Middlesex District Attorney's Office and the Boston College Forensic Nursing Program entitled "Hidden Violence on Campus." Sponsored by the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the Association for Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA), the conference focused on sexual assault and workplace violence in a college setting. Ms. Bruno was on hand to present the non-criminal side of sexual assault and restraining orders on college campuses to members of the higher-education community. Both NASPA and ASCA aim to provide members with professional experiences that enhance and develop their work life and promote the sharing of knowledge and ideas.

The VRLC's Training and Technical Assistance Team (TA) proudly announces our new grant-funded partnership with Transition Projects, Inc., a ground-breaking collaboration that will address the needs of homeless sexual assault victims. (Victims of sexual assault are more likely to become homeless, and homeless women are at increased risk for sexual assault.) The Portland, Oregon-based project aims to move homeless victims of sexual assault to transitional housing, provide "Know Your Rights" legal information to homeless survivors and offer sexual assault-specific legal training for social service providers.

The TA team continues to shine as thought leaders in our nation's response to rape. TA staff attorney Laura Mahr presented a webinar to a national audience of attorneys, advocates and sexual assault service providers entitled *Sexual Assault in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer Communities: What Every Prosecutor Needs to Know*. The TA Team is launching the VRLC's newest teleconference series this fall, with Deputy Director Lindy Aldrich presenting *Public Benefits: Intake Analysis and Remedies for Sexual Assault Victims* in October and TA Director Jessica Mindlin presenting *Justice is More than Jail: What Advocates and Lawyers Can Do to Help Meet Sexual Assault Victims' Legal Needs* in November. Through these critical trainings, we educate hundreds of service providers on innovative yet practical solutions for solving the everyday problems sexual assault survivors face post-assault.

VRLC's Work Inspires International Journalists

On September 16, the United States Department of State coordinated the visit of journalists from Kosovo to the VRLC. These journalists were interested in learning about our cutting-edge work of providing civil legal services to victims of sexual violence in order to inform citizens of their home country of creative legal options. Managing Attorney Colby Bruno elaborated on our work, specifically the direct services VRLC provides. Kevin Krug, a producer from the Office of Broadcast Services, gave this feedback about the reporters' visit:

"Both reporters said afterwards that they had new ways to think about sexual assault. Their stereotyped views were shattered by the facts you provided. They were impressed at how a law center can help restore victims' civil rights much more effectively than the traditional criminal path of prosecution... Congratulations on the success of the Victim Rights Law Center. You now have a few more people who will spread the word, both personally and professionally, about the good work you do."

2010 Shining Star Awards

The VRLC's annual Shining Star Awards Reception took place on Boston's waterfront the evening of Wednesday, June 9 and was a success in every sense. This collegial celebration reflected on the VRLC's recent milestones and honored select attorneys and advocates who are leading a new response to sexual violence. The more than 150 attendees included our national counterparts from as far as Illinois and Kentucky, who were in town for the 2010 Law and Policy Colloquium (hosted by the VRLC and Goodwin Procter LLP).



2010 Shining Star Award recipient Greg Sieczkiewicz



2010 Shining Star Awards Reception attendees

Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley, VRLC's 2006 *Leadership Award* recipient, provided the keynote address; **Greg Sieczkiewicz, PhD, JD**, of Flagship Ventures received the namesake *Shining Star Award* for his unwavering dedication as a longtime VRLC pro bono attorney, adding invaluable expertise in so many practice areas; and a **rape victim who pursued justice alongside VRLC attorneys** received the *Susan Estrich Courage Award*. This individual's story of how her fear and hopelessness transformed into strength and determination left the room utterly speechless. At the end of the evening,

VRLC staff and board presented **Stacy Malone** with a *Special Thank You* for the countless hours she dedicated to the VRLC during the past year of transition with utmost loyalty, capability, and generosity. Many thanks to the sponsors, attendees, and event committee who helped us achieve record attendance and raise close to \$100,000 – an all-time high.

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VICTIM RIGHTS LAW CENTER

Boston Main Office
115 Broad Street, 3rd Flr.
Boston, MA 02110
Ph: 617.399.6720
Fax: 617.399.6722

Portland Office
520 SW Yamhill, #200
Portland, OR 97204
Ph: 503.274.5477
Fax: 503.295.6679

victimrights.org

Development Volunteer needed in office, during office hours, to perform data entry, research and filing.

For more info, call 617.399.6720 or e-mail info@victimrights.org.