

Courageous Leadership + Comprehensive Legal Support = Widespread Social Impact

Rebuilding the lives of sexual assault survivors through extensive training, established trust, and hope.



THE GOALS

The Victim Rights Law Center (“VRLC”) is the nation’s first nonprofit law center dedicated to providing sexual assault survivors with comprehensive legal representation.

Born in 2003 from a novel project at a Boston rape crisis center, the VRLC focuses on two primary goals:

1. Help victims of rape and sexual assault rebuild their lives.
2. Promote a national movement to seek justice for every rape and sexual assault survivor.

From its inception, the VRLC sought to distinguish itself as the first nonprofit law center in the country solely focused on providing free, survivor-centered legal services to sexual assault victims of all ages, gender identities, and sexual orientations, and to survivors at the intersections of oppression who are often the most marginalized and in need of legal assistance.



THE UNDERLYING ISSUE

Sexual assault survivors often do not find justice in the criminal justice system and don't know where to turn for help.



Stacy Malone, Executive Director of the VRLC, recalls the most fundamental early challenges: “Too many people were quick to blame instead of believe. The focus was on the alleged drinking or promiscuity. Even now, there is only a 2% conviction and incarceration rate for perpetrators.”

THE CHALLENGES AT-HAND

In addition to gaining the trust of survivors, the VRLC had to train and mentor both local and national law enforcement, medical professionals, advocates, college administrators, and other professionals in order to improve the response to sexual violence.



Communicating complex legal issues with survivors in a way that preserves privacy rights and privileges.



Navigating the intricacies of working with many kinds of clients, including children and undocumented persons.



Cross-training in privacy, safety, finance, housing, employment, and immigration issues to facilitate coordinated actions that advance interrelated objectives.



Understanding the complex connection of criminal and civil legal issues in order to protect the legal rights and privileges of survivors.

“On top of it all,” says Malone, “we started with nothing. We had to figure out how to mobilize volunteers, gather resources, and lay a stable foundation for future growth.”

A LONG-STANDING PARTNERSHIP

Goulston & Storrs has been committed to the VRLC since before its inception. In fact, Director Karen O'Malley was one of the founding forces of the organization, serving as a veteran executive board member and legal volunteer. "Karen played a huge role in getting us off the ground, taking us from being a local project to a non-profit institution with national reach," Malone recalls.

She wasn't alone. O'Malley led a dedicated team of Goulston & Storrs attorneys, including Carla Reeves, Derek Domian, Martha Frahm, and Sonia Steele. Malone credits this team for "teaching us how to plan for growth and innovate for success."

But she says the most important contribution the law firm made was in the form of leadership. "Goulston & Storrs was courageous, stepping up to help child rape victims, undocumented immigrants, and other survivors of sexual assault, leading and enlisting others into a cause that was shrouded in secrecy, fear, and taboos. The firm has hosted conferences and training sessions, panel events and breakfasts, getting more and more leaders involved as we grow."



Photo Credit: Cheryl Richards Photography

THE PATH TO SUCCESS

Over the course of many years, Goulston & Storrs and the VRLC have worked together to overcome the organization's challenges and bring nationwide help to survivors of sexual assault through:



1. Mobilizing and enlisting volunteer lawyers nationwide.
2. Recruiting people with business experience to assist the VRLC with enterprise thinking.
3. Acting as de facto General Counsel, assisting the VRLC with real estate matters, employment issues, and other needs of a growing institution that now has five offices and 40+ people on staff in two states.
4. Providing recognition in the form of events and awards in honor of those who have contributed selflessly to a national movement seeking justice for every rape and sexual assault victim.

“I learned that providing hope is the most important part of this job,” says Malone.

THE RESULTS

With guidance from Goulston & Storrs, the VRLC is now a nationwide force, helping to rebuild the lives of numerous sexual assault survivors while shining a light on the important issues associated with sexual assault, wherever it occurs and whomever it harms.

As of 2020, the VRLC's achievements include:

1. Provided direct legal assistance to 600+ Massachusetts victims a year and 400+ in Oregon around matters involving 3,000+ types of distinct needs for assistance.
2. Provided training to 10,000+ volunteer lawyers and other professionals who assist countless victims in every U.S. state and territory.
3. Conducted nationwide education and awareness programs for K-12 and college students; modernized school and campus policies to facilitate reporting and investigation of sexual assaults.
4. Provided guidance on gender-based violence to the Office of the U.S. Vice President, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. military.
5. Earned recognition for the VRLC model of success from the U.S. Department of Justice.
6. Expanded reach by opening offices in Boston, Belchertown, New Bedford, and Worcester, MA; as well as Portland, OR.



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“When we ask Goulston & Storrs for anything, they just say ‘yes.’ They are true leaders. They stood up for us right at the start, and are now beside us every step of the way. The total commitment they’ve made to the Victim Rights Law Center is completely unique. Their leadership, character, advice, and work have been invaluable and essential ingredients to our success.”

- Stacy Malone, Executive Director, Victim Rights Law Center

