

Vermont Bar Foundation 2015: Reality

Reality: What is it? *Merriam-Webster* defines “reality” as “the quality or state of being real” and “something that is neither derivative nor dependent but exists necessarily.”¹

Yet, in our current culture of “Reality TV,” do we really know or understand what reality is? Ask those who enjoy a steady diet of Reality TV to name the Kardashian sisters, and you will probably get a complete list.² Yet, ask those same people to name one or two justices of the Supreme Court, and you are likely to get a blank stare.³

Perhaps, the attraction of Reality TV is the escape it provides from reality. That is understandable when, for many, reality is facing a legal issue and simply not knowing what to do or where to turn. Or, it is not having the means to hire a lawyer. It is a feeling of hopelessness and despair.

The Vermont Bar Foundation strives to change that reality with its financial support of different programs designed to provide access to justice to a swath of Vermonters. Its primary means of doing this is via its grants program, which annually awards funds to various non-profit organizations to underwrite their provision of legal services.

Consider the following realities and how the Foundation-sponsored grantees have provided positive change.

Reality: Young Mom

Young Mom has two children fathered by different men. She lives with the father of the youngest child, who regularly physically abuses her, often in front of the children. The older child’s father is under investigation for sexual abuse of his child. Young Mom receives notice of three hearings in two counties, both family and criminal. She is confused, terrified, and worried about the children as they had been removed from her care.

Enter Grantee Have Justice—Will Travel’s Legal Empowerment Assistance Program (“LEAP”); see change. LEAP helped Young Mom respond to the allegations against her, write a motion to continue, understand and gather evidence important for her case, subpoena witnesses, and prepare testimony. After several hearings, Young Mom now has the protection of a relief from abuse order for herself and her children, the custody of both children, an order for supervised contact between the children and their fathers, and a divorce case and a parentage case before the courts to grant her and her children long-term safety

and stability. Young Mom is now employed. She and her children are receiving counseling and moving toward enjoying healthy productive lives.

The Foundation helped change that reality!

Reality: Elderly Mom

A lifelong Vermont resident, eighty-nine year-old Elderly Mom has lived by herself for thirteen years in the home she has owned for over fifty years. Four years ago, her eldest son moved in with Elderly Mom; that is when her nightmare began. Son literally took over Elderly Mom’s home. He bullied and frightened her until she finally was forced to leave her own home to live with a daughter in another state. Son refused Elderly Mom’s and his siblings’ pleas to leave the home. Worse, the police refused to remove Son. The once neat, clean house is now in shambles, filled with trash and debris. Bills go ignored and unpaid.

Enter Grantee Vermont Legal Aid Elder Law Project (the “Project”); see change. Six months after being forced out of her home, Elderly Mom was referred to the Project. Working with Elderly Mom and her family, the Project developed a plan for her safe return to Vermont. Project attorneys filed for a restraining order and convinced the court that Son was financially exploiting Elderly Mom. The Court ordered Son out of the home. With this order providing safety and protection, Elderly Mom was able to move back into her home and is living there again with the assistance of her granddaughter.

The Foundation helped change that reality!

Reality: Angry Mom

Daughter is twelve years old and lives with her Angry Mom, who has some serious anger management issues. Daughter is often on the receiving end of that anger. For example, once, when Daughter was returning from a school trip, there was some confusion about who was picking her up from the bus. Angry Mom arrived and launched into a tirade, which was so severe that the school was forced to call the police. Dad is not able to afford an attorney, but is able to file a motion with the court seeking intervention.

Enter Grantee Vermont Law School Children First! (“Children First!”); see change. The Family Court appointed Children First! to represent Daughter. Staff attorneys and student clinicians met with all the par-

ties and with Daughter at her school. The teachers revealed a chilling picture of the girl’s home life; she would come to school regularly far too tired to participate in school activities in any meaningful way because Angry Mom would intentionally keep Daughter up at night as a form of punishment, often screaming at Daughter for hours. When it became clear Angry Mom had no intention of agreeing to any compromise that might end this cycle, Children First! was compelled to call the school personnel as witnesses to testify in family court to these details. In the end, Dad was awarded custody. Angry Mom responded by promptly moving out of state. Today, Daughter is living with Dad and doing well in school.

The Foundation helped change that reality!

As a member of the Vermont Bar, the Foundation’s reality—its support of programs focused on providing equal access to justice for all Vermonters—is part of your reality. Perhaps you do not view your support of the Foundation as provocative as Reality TV viewing. Yet, recall the axiom that truth is stranger than fiction. The vignettes above are but a snippet of the truth-stranger-than-fiction cases that are the realities of our fellow Vermonters. Through your support, the Foundation is helping to re-cast those realities with its funding of programs that enable positive, meaningful changes in peoples’ lives. You don’t get more real than that!

Patricia A. Killigrew, Esq., is currently the chairperson of the Vermont Bar Foundation promotion committee. She is a former member of the Foundation’s board and has served as the chairperson and as a member of the Foundation’s grants committee. Pat currently works in Connecticut, where she is the career law clerk to the Honorable Alan H. W. Shiff of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Connecticut.

¹ *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* 962 (1975 ed.).

² See, e.g., Lisa Bloom, *Young Americans Can Name More Kardashians Than Wars We’re In* (May 26, 2011), <http://lisabloom.com/site/2011/05/26/young-americans-can-name-more-kardashians-than-wars-were-in>.

³ See, e.g., Steven Eder, *Most Americans Can’t Name a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Survey Says*, Law Blog, WALL ST. J. (Aug. 20, 2012), <http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2012/08/20/most-americans-cant-name-a-u-s-supreme-court-justice-survey-says>.



Vermont Bar Foundation

2015 Grants Recipients, Programs, and Service Areas

Recipient/Program	Service Area
Competitive Grants:	
Association of Africans Living in Vermont, Inc. <i>Immigration Project</i>	Chittenden County
Have Justice-Will Travel, Inc. <i>Legal Empowerment Assistance Program</i>	Statewide
Orleans County Restorative Justice Center <i>Pro Bono Legal Clinic</i>	Orleans and Northern Essex Counties
Project Against Violent Encounters <i>Legal Representation</i>	Bennington County
The Caroline Fund <i>Pro Se Legal Clinic</i>	Chittenden County
The Community Restorative Justice Center <i>Pro Bono Legal Clinic</i>	Caledonia County
Vermont Bar Association <i>Addison County Legal Assistance Project</i> <i>Bennington County Legal Assistance Project</i> <i>Franklin/Grand Isle Counties Legal Assistance Project</i> <i>Rutland Pilot Project</i> <i>Washington County Legal Assistance Project</i> <i>Windham County Legal Assistance Project</i> <i>Windsor & Orange Counties Legal Assistance Project</i>	Addison County Bennington County Franklin/Grand Isle Counties Rutland County Washington County Windham County Windsor & Orange Counties
Voices Against Violence <i>Legal Advocacy Program</i>	Franklin/Grand Isle Counties
Women Helping Battered Women <i>Legal Clinic</i>	Chittenden County
Women's Freedom Center <i>Legal Representation</i>	Windham County
WomenSafe <i>Legal Representation</i>	Addison County
Non-Competitive Grants:	
Legal Services Law Line of VT <i>Staff Support</i>	Statewide
Vermont Bar Association <i>Statewide Legal Access Coordinator</i>	Statewide
Vermont Law School, South Royalton Legal Clinic <i>Staff Support</i>	Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, Lamoille, Orange, Rutland, Washington Windham & Windsor Counties
Vermont Legal Aid, Inc. <i>General Funding</i>	Statewide