

## SNAPSHOTS OF SUCCESS – South Royalton, Vermont

*“Every two minutes a woman is sexually assaulted somewhere in America”*

*“More than one million women are stalked each year”*

*“Nearly one out of three murdered women die at the hands of an intimate partner”*

*“America is responding”*

**Narrator:** In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act to address the problems of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. This landmark legislation created new federal crimes and provided resources to help states, tribes, and local communities focus on victim safety and defender accountability. These resources have made a real difference. In Vermont, programs are providing legal assistance and support to isolated victims of domestic violence.

**Wynona I. Ward, Attorney, Have Justice Will Travel:** After driving a tractor trailer unit throughout this country for 15 years, I really know that Vermont is one of the most beautiful places in which to live. But it is also very devastating for women who live in Vermont on rural back roads that become impassable by heavy winter snows or muddy spring thaws.

**Narrator:** On any given day, Winona Ward travels these back roads in her 4x4, like an old country doctor. She's making house calls, bringing support and legal assistance to victims of domestic violence victims whose physical and social isolation might otherwise prevent them from getting help.

**Wynona I. Ward, Attorney, Have Justice Will Travel:** It's hard for people to comprehend how isolation affects people that are victims of family violence. That isolation can mean that the person does not have a phone, the person does not have a driver's license or an automobile. These women do not have friends because they are so far out of town. If they reach out for help from family, or friends, or neighbors, if they may have, those people don't want to get involved when this domestic violence incident happens. So instead, what they have to do is turn to strangers. The good thing is, is that when I was growing up in the 1950s, there weren't even any strangers there to help my mother. There was nothing there to help her, but today, with the women's movement and with a lot of Grass Roots organizational work here in Vermont, organizational work that's been done by the Vermont Network against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault by Vermont Legal Aid, by the South Royalton Legal Clinic, there are many services available for women.

**Narrator:** Vermont's efforts to address domestic violence began many years ago at a grassroots level, but with the help of the Violence Against Women Act, these efforts have become more and more connected.

**Jeri Martinez, Educator, Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault:** The most important kind of growth that we've sustained in recent years is the networking that we've done in creating a web of services for victims. In making alliances with the legal community, the law enforcement community, the courts, the social services agencies, so that the flow of information is back

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and forth. They see the victims every day. They identify the problems. We work on a statewide level to provide those solutions, to give them the tools they need to do more for victims of abuse. And that has worked really, really well. We each use our own expertise in our areas to make change.

**Narrator:** Vermont's focus on the victim and the culture of collaboration among agencies created a climate which encourages finding new solutions. VAWA has made it possible to implement these solutions.

**Wynona I. Ward, Attorney, Have Justice Will Travel:** When I was still at Vermont Law School, I realized that after doing a project at the Orange County Court, the county where I grew up, I read 184 affidavits. Many women were coming in, they were getting temporary relief from abuse orders, but they didn't come back to get the final order. And I said, why is this happening? What I saw was that there was this gap that women had of not being able to get to the courthouse. That was why I organized Have Justice Will Travel so that they could get to the courthouse to get the legal representation that they needed so that I could go to their homes and sit with them where they're comfortably and look at why they need legal assistance.

**Survivor I:** I had been in an abusive relationship with him for about 13 years. I think my awareness heightened that I was a victim of domestic assault. And I didn't even realize it until I came here through the clinic and the programs going on, Safeline is one in Vermont that helps in talking with people. I realized that. I could get help and there would be help available to me if I left. And that was a very comforting thought to know that I wasn't going to be on my own having to deal with legal issues, not understanding legal issues that sometimes can prevent people, I believe from leaving.

**James C. May, Director, South Royalton Legal Clinic, Vermont Law School:** Our statute on relief from abuse allows victims to go into court and get a restraining order in the first instance, but then they have to go back to court within a very short period of time for a final hearing. And if the other side is represented by counsel and the victim is not represented, that creates a very unfair imbalance. And so, we're able, through our project monies, to hire supervising attorneys, to supervise students who will then go into court and represent the victims of domestic violence. Through the involvement of students, we're able to do more cases more effectively. On a narrow technical side, the students gain a wonderful exposure to the nuts and bolts of the practice of law, particularly one branch of family law. They learn to interview their clients, to counsel them, to negotiate with opposing counsel, to draft pleadings, to develop evidence, to learn how to present that evidence in court. But in a more important and in a larger sense, sensitizes the students to the realities of the lives of the victims of this abuse. Not all of our students will become legal aid lawyers. In fact, few will become legal aid lawyers for a variety of reasons. But what they bring from this experience is a heightened sensitivity in a caring about this area of the law. And we hope that when they go from here, they will carry into their local practices, their organizations, their bar associations, a real desire to try to address this problem wherever they may be.

**Leroy E. Yoder, Attorney at Law:** Before I had the experience with the legal clinic, domestic violence was a surface issue, it was a social issue, but it was somebody else's issue. When I was through with a legal clinic, it was probably the saddest ending of my law school experience. It was something that I very much wanted to continue on with. It's a very rewarding feeling to actually help somebody who's reaching out to you get through this process.

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**Narrator:** In Vermont, many people are reaching out to provide a helping hand to victims of domestic violence. It's a helping hand that extends across both space and for here in this small Vermont town, a new generation of lawyers is learning about domestic violence. Because of the efforts of many Vermonters, children all over the state are growing up in homes that are free from abuse.

**Wynona I. Ward, Attorney, Have Justice Will Travel:** What I saw when I was studying my own family was that wife abuse and child abuse. I traced back five generations in my family and I saw that it was passed on from generation to generation to generation. What I feel needs to happen is that children essentially need to learn that it's not okay for daddy to hit mommy.

**Survivor I:** I don't see myself as a victim anymore and take offense. When people refer to me as a victim, I'm a survivor, and I've gotten out. That is the major difference. That I am not a victim any longer. I don't have someone who has control over me anymore. The major thing for me is fear. The element of fear in my life has been removed.

**James C. May, Director, South Royalton Legal Clinic, Vermont Law School:** I think that what the domestic violence movement in Vermont is about, as well as everywhere else in the United States, is freedom. We see ourselves as people who help other people to become free from those problems so that they can live normal, decent lives. It's that simple.

“This program is dedicated to the survivors and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking whose courage, strength, and commitment to these issues have inspired and informed us all”

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