

# 2019

## ANNUAL REPORT



Debra Parkes, President

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Providing legal services to the many women in BC who can't access counsel has always been a daunting prospect, and it has taken determination and innovation over the last three and a half years to build a women's legal centre from the ground up. But here we are in 2019, stronger than ever. We are thrilled to have completed our pilot phase at the end of 2018, and are now looking to the future with optimism and resolution.

Since opening our doors in 2016 as a joint initiative of West Coast LEAF and the Peter A Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, Rise has continued to evolve in our delivery of services to women in BC. In addition to our student clinic, Rise's programs now include a case management and triage program, a Virtual Legal Clinic and a Family Advocates Support Line. We work collaboratively with many community partners throughout BC and believe that by sharing knowledge and integrating legal services with existing resources we can make the biggest impact.

For the past year, our work has focused on connecting with community partners and women across the BC who are outside of major centres and therefore have less access to legal services. We provide support directly to frontline workers through our Family Advocate Support Line and to clients through our Virtual Legal Clinic. Just as importantly, we have been speaking directly to women across the province about their experiences with the family law system so that we can improve the way that we deliver services and provide training and mentorship to law students and new lawyers.

We are expanding the scope of the services that people find at Rise by continuing to work with a full-time articling student and social work practicum students, and our previous articling student will be building a low-bono and legal aid practice from our office as an 'incubator' lawyer. As we grow and learn, we become better able to respond to the needs of clients, and advocate for change within the legal system.

I would like to thank all of our staff, volunteers, donors, and funders for the immeasurable support they give to Rise. We also owe a special debt of gratitude to all of the community partners, frontline workers, and women across the province who have shared their knowledge and stories with us. We simply cannot do it without you.



Rise wishes to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of our inaugural president, [Kasari Govender](#). After years of tireless effort, persistence and ingenuity Kasari helped bring Rise into being and then expertly guided us through our pilot phase and first three years.

As most will be aware, Kasari has recently said goodbye to both West Coast LEAF and Rise, in order to take her place as BC's new Human Rights Commissioner. There could not have been a better appointment for this vital public position, and Rise is celebrating along with so many others in the social justice community and across British Columbia. We are looking forward to seeing what great things Kasari will accomplish, and we will never be able to thank her enough for what she has given to Rise.





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Case Manager
- [Vicky Law](#)  
Lawyer, Virtual Legal Clinic
- [Taruna Agrawal](#)  
Lawyer, Family Advocates Support Line
- [Haley Hrymak](#)  
Lawyer, Legal Researcher
- [Daniel MacNeill](#)  
Lawyer, Incubator Program
- [Lucie Krajca](#)  
Articled Student

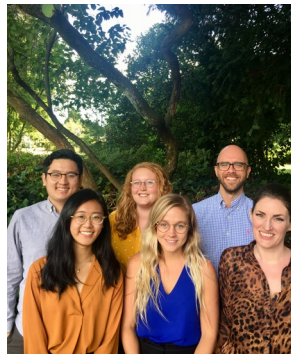
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Rise is grateful for the longterm assistance, support and wisdom of [Raji Mangat](#), West Coast LEAF’s new Executive Director and Rise’s former Liaison Lawyer, for all she has contributed to Rise’s growth and success since we opened our doors. We’re looking forward to working with you in your new role. Congratulations and thank you, Raji!

Rise would also like to acknowledge an invaluable member of our team, [Kala Bryson](#). Kala is Rise’s tireless, talented and committed volunteer administrative assistant, data custodian, and orientation instructor. Kala has volunteered with Rise since our very beginning, and we would be lost without her. Thank you, Kala!



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# THE INCUBATOR PROJECT



We are entering our second year of Rise's Incubator Project, which is generously funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario. Through this program we are creating opportunities for a few dedicated student clinicians to work as articling students and build their practice as junior lawyers at Rise.

Rise was very happy to welcome alumnus **Daniel MacNeill** as our very first articulated student in September 2018, and we were equally delighted to have him take his place as our first 'incubator lawyer' here at Rise this past September. Dan is provided office space, client referrals, opportunities for Continuing Legal Education, and ongoing support from staff lawyers as he establishes himself in his first year of family law practice. Daniel's law partner in their new firm is another Rise clinical program graduate, **Tanya Thakur**. Rise could not be prouder of our two graduates as they begin their careers, and our executive director **Kim Hawkins** and supervising lawyer **Vandana Sood** were honoured to call them both to the Bar in Rise's boardroom on 16 September 2019.

*"I gained unparalleled experience, acting as counsel in two trials (along with other court appearances), engaging in complex legal research, and working extensively with clients. The generous mentorship from the lawyers and staff at Rise helped me achieve everything I hoped and more out of my articles. I know that the Rise articling program is truly special, and I feel privileged to have had this unique opportunity."*

*"Now that I have been called to the bar, Rise continues to provide me support and guidance as I begin building a law practice with my friend and colleague, Tanya Thakur. As Rise's 'incubator' lawyer, I am connected to a network of lawyers and professionals who have graciously lent their time to guide Tanya and me through the process of creating our firm. Inspired by the values instilled in me during my time at Rise, our practice will be committed to assisting women who have barriers to legal services. We will focus on legal aid files, working to help women experiencing family violence find protection in both family law and immigration contexts. I look forward to putting the training I gained during articles to use. Thanks to my time at Rise, I feel I have the necessary skills to find success in all aspects of my legal practice."*

*Daniel MacNeill, Thakur MacNeill LLP*



Rise is also very happy to welcome back alumna **Lucie Krajca** as our 2019-20 articulated student. Lucie and her family were refugees of the Cold War and spent a year living in refugee camps in Austria before becoming naturalized citizens in Canada. As a result of her life experiences, Lucie always felt a strong pull to assist individuals in more substantial ways, and she knew that a career in law would allow her to do this. During law school, Lucie worked at the Law Student's Legal Advice Program and spent her second-year summer assisting Professor Asha Kaushal with immigration research.

When Lucie discovered that Rise provides free and low-cost legal services to women, she applied to become a student clinician (Winter 2019 cohort) and feels fortunate to return to Rise as our second articulated student. Lucie earned her JD at the Peter A. Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, and was one of the privileged few recipients of the Beverley McLachlin Legal Access Award, awarded to students for accepting an articling position in an area of public interest or social justice law in BC. Lucie also holds a B.A. in Sociology and Creative Writing from UBC.

Lucie will complete her articles with Rise in summer 2020, and then will stay on as Rise's next Incubator Lawyer and build her practice within the Rise community.





Invermere, BC. Photo: Haley Hrymak

In July and September of 2019, Vicky Law and Haley Hrymak travelled to nearly every corner of BC – a total of 28 communities – to advance Rise’s mandate of access to justice for all women in BC.

Vicky Law heads Rise’s Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) which is jointly funded by the Vancouver Foundation and Law Foundation of British Columbia. The VLC is Rise’s response to the well-documented lack of legal services for women living outside of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Through this project we are partnering with other community service organisations to provide basic legal services to women using videoconference.

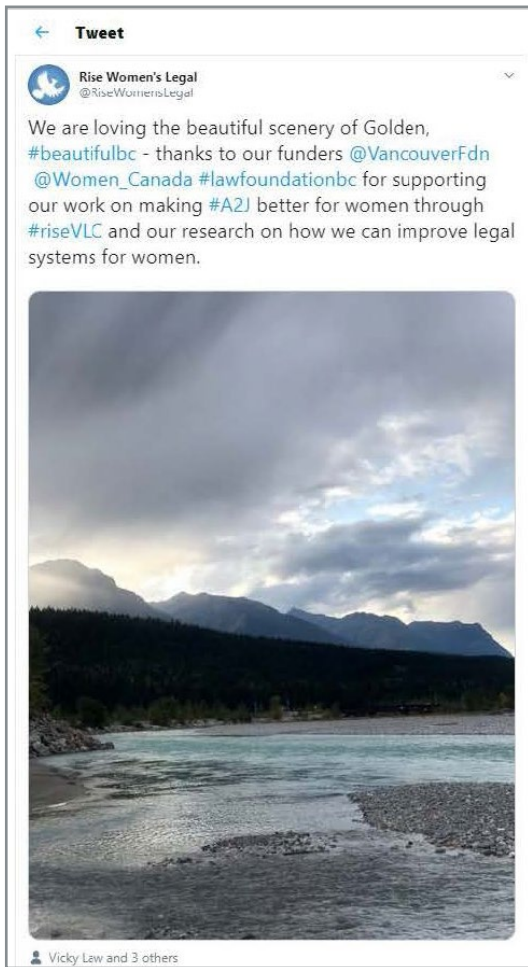
Vicky met with numerous community organizations and invited them to partner with Rise. Frontline workers and advocates spoke of the difficulties women have in obtaining lawyers in rural areas. In many of the communities there are few lawyers, and even fewer who work in the area of family law.

Haley Hrymak works with Rise on the Women and Gender Equality-funded research project “Improving Legal Systems’ Responses to Violence.” As part of her research, Haley organised extensive consultations with women who have experienced family violence and faced the family court system.

Women all over the province met with Haley to share their experiences of the challenges they have faced, and provide recommendations for change. These obstacles include: the difficulty in qualifying for legal aid and how quickly their allotted hours run out; the ways perpetrators of violence use the court system to further the abuse; the myths and stereotypes that make it difficult for women to be believed when they do come forward with their experiences; and that the people in the legal system – including police, lawyers, and judges – often do not understand the unique dynamics of family violence.







*One woman explained that the legal process was traumatic for her, adding: "we don't have a justice system, we have a legal system."*



against them, waiting for their matter to be called. The matter is often adjourned to the next month, with no legal remedy in between, due to lack of court time. In addition, the lack of transportation in rural areas puts some women in danger because they have to hitchhike to and from the courthouse to their community.

Community workers told us that women do not get access to the family law system because their starting point for seeking safety is the criminal justice system, which is often unsuccessful in providing protection. One woman explained that she complained that her abusive ex had been breaching her protection order more than two years ago, and the matter still hadn't been dealt with; she saw no benefit in calling the police for ongoing breaches. The main recommendation from the participants of these focus groups was that family violence training is needed for all actors in the family court system.

Rise is thankful to all the community organizations and their incredibly hardworking staff, who helped us connect with women in their area. We heard from numerous women that the advocates and frontline staff, mostly from safe-homes and women's resource centres, were the only positive experience in their family law proceeding and, in many cases, saved their lives. We are grateful to them for collaborating with Rise in this project. We also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Vancouver Foundation, the Law Foundation of BC, and Women and Gender Equality Canada, who are making these projects possible.

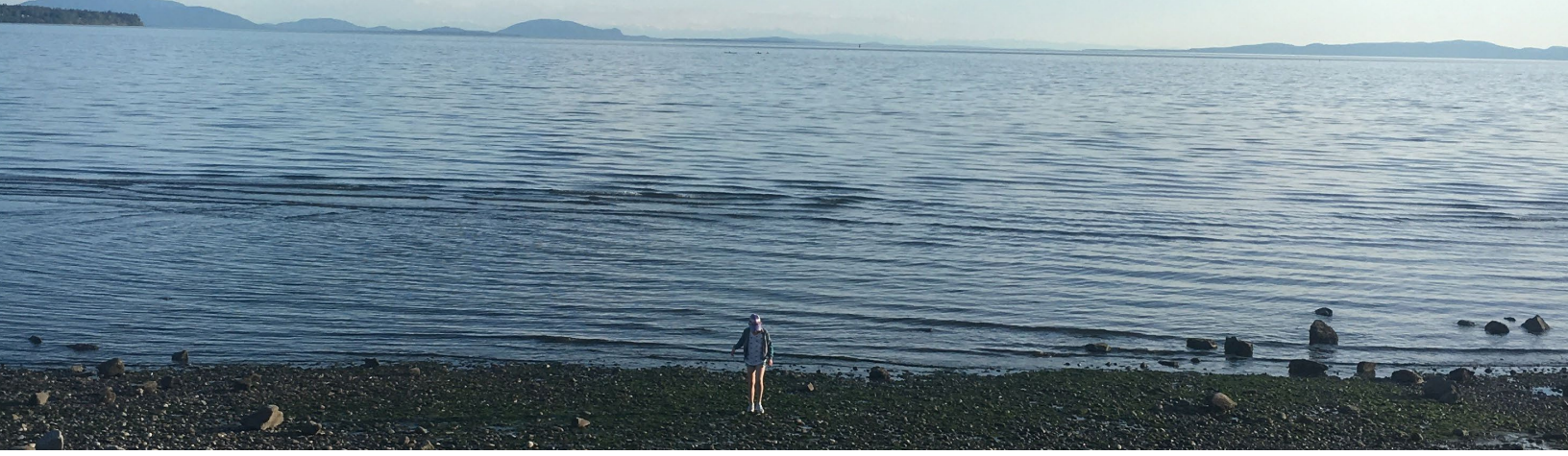


Throughout their travels, Haley and Vicky were better able to understand some challenges that are more specific to rural communities, including a lack of structured supports for fleeing violence, infrequent availability of court dates, limited public transportation to court, and lengthy delays in court proceedings.

In most rural communities, family court dates are available only monthly, or biweekly, and all matters are scheduled for the morning. Women often sit in the same one courtroom all day long, alongside the perpetrator of violence







## FAMILY ADVOCATES SUPPORT LINE



With the generous support of the Law Foundation of BC, lawyer **Taruna Agrawal** has joined Rise to head up our new program, the Family Advocate Support Line (FASL). Taruna’s role is to deliver family law training and support for advocates, front-line support workers, transition house workers, and settlement workers throughout BC. This includes helping advocates identify legal issues, prioritizing clients’ legal needs, choosing solutions through legal information, advocacy and referrals. Taruna is also available to answer any family law questions that the workers may have in relation to working with their clients.

Prior to commencing work at Rise, Taruna was a sole practitioner and practised primarily in the areas of family and immigration law. She has also worked as an advocate and supervising lawyer at non-profit organizations in the Lower Mainland. She is the subject editor for the Chapter titled “Immigrants and Family Law” on Clicklaw Wikibooks. She is an active volunteer in the community and is passionate about access to justice and works daily to ensure that people, especially women leaving abusive relationships, have access to affordable counsel.

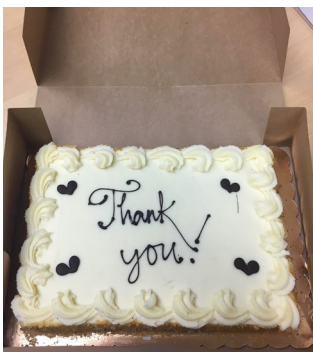
## IMPROVING LEGAL SYSTEMS’ RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

In 2017, Rise began a three-year project funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada to explore how the legal system can improve its response to family violence. Our literature review, research, and key-informant interviews identified several gaps in legal training and knowledge of family violence. In an effort to address this gap, Rise is developing an online course to provide comprehensive training for lawyers who are working with clients who have experienced family violence. The project’s objective is to increase lawyers’ understanding of the ways in which family violence impacts a client’s case and to provide practical methods which can be immediately implemented in their practice to mitigate the barriers survivors face in accessing justice.

We began conducting research on how family violence impacts survivors’ experience in the legal system by examining survivors’ lived experiences, lawyers and advocates challenges and best practices, and expert opinion across disciplines. We analyzed community resources, local roundtable discussions, survivors’ interviews, caselaw, legislation, scholarly articles, existing training and methodology, government policy, social science studies and surveys. We hope that comprehensive family violence training will improve access to justice by giving lawyers the knowledge and tools to empower survivors and truly advocate for their interests.



Rise was lucky to be able to work with Dalhousie law student, and former Rise volunteer, **Katie Filewych** this summer, on two important ongoing projects.



Sometimes clients bring us small gifts of appreciation; although unnecessary, they are always gratefully received.





## A VISIT WITH THE RIGHT HONOURABLE BEVERLEY McLACHLIN

Rise is very fortunate to enjoy the support of The Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, and so we were delighted when she joined us at small gathering at the home of Risa and Bill Levine in June, with some of our most dedicated supporters and friends, to discuss access to justice and how Rise is making a difference to women in BC.

Chief Justice McLachlin spoke intimately and eloquently on the vital importance of access to justice, in BC and across Canada, and of the importance of Rise's work. We are also very pleased and proud that she accepted our invitation to become Rise's Honorary Patron.

Rise is grateful to Risa & Bill Levine for so generously and graciously opening their home to Rise and our friends, among whom they are exceptional.



Photos on this page (except bottom centre) are courtesy John Ulan/Ulan Photography.

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Our Sustaining Circle is a special group of donors who have pledged to support Rise with ongoing annual contributions, helping us plan for long-term sustainability. We thank them for their commitment to Rise's future.

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*Rise literally could not accomplish everything we do without the help of our supporters in the community, who volunteer their time and expertise to teach, speak, advise, fundraise, sit on committees – even play music or move furniture! We are grateful to them all.*

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