

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Debra Parkes, President

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Five years ago, Rise Women's Legal Centre was created to provide much-needed legal assistance to women caught in BC's wide gap in access to justice. Rise started with just three staff members and four students from the Peter A. Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia.

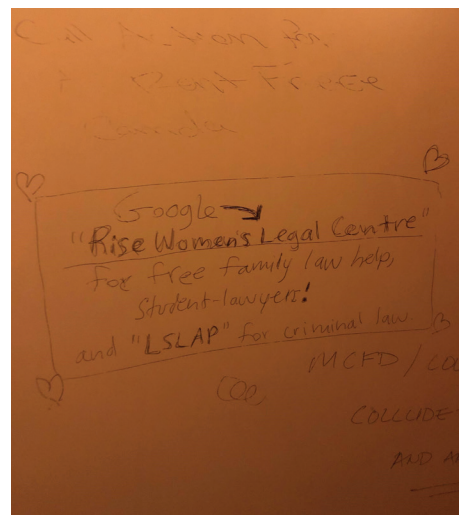
Today Rise has grown into an organization with 10 full-time staff members and four part-time staff members, who provide legal education to law students, articling students and incubator lawyers; training and legal support to anti-violence organizations and transitions homes around the province; and direct services to clients, including everything from legal navigation and triage to unbundled representational services.

Our AGM is an opportunity to connect with and thank everyone who has been with us on this journey. Thank you for your support and encouragement over the last year – a year that has highlighted the ways in which women and all those marginalized by gender oppression are particularly impacted by family violence, economic insecurity, the climate crisis, and intersecting oppressions. As we reflect on this year and the ones before, we are deeply grateful for the ongoing and steadfast support of our community which includes a wide variety of community partners, volunteers, donors, staff, students, board members and other friends. Your contributions and belief have kept us afloat during this period of transition and uncertainty.

The last year has seen Rise, along with the rest of the world, adapting to a quickly changing environment. The number of clients reaching out to Rise in crises has increased dramatically, and finding ways to meet these needs has been challenging. We have increased our focus on providing virtual legal services and identifying safe practices for working with clients and community partners. We have had to develop new ways to work together, and staff, students and board members have all risen to the challenge of online learning and moving forward while battling Zoom fatigue. We have also seen new opportunities – when we first launched our virtual legal clinic in 2018, we were still trying to convince lawyers to try their hand at videoconferencing. We could not have predicted that in the second year of the project the whole bar would be attending court using MS Teams.

Our team continues to learn and reflect on the role that we play as providers of legal services within a deeply colonial legal system and to explore ways to make our policies and practises more inclusive and accessible. We recognize that this year, which has led to the "discovery" of mass graves (long known to Indigenous communities), has taken a particular toll on Indigenous members of our community. These graves are a chilling reminder of the reality of Canada's genocide against Indigenous peoples in Canada and that taking action cannot be delayed, even if our actions are imperfect. We have worked on a report that represents our first attempt at thinking about how to decolonize family law practice. We have undertaken organizational work related to decolonization and our staff and Board were fortunate to partner with our friends at West Coast LEAF to receive training from Hummingbirds Rising Consulting, who helped us to situate and expand our learning. There is more work to do and we invite all members of our community to join with us and hold us accountable in this work.

Thank you to all those who make Rise possible.



Graffiti in a restroom at Robson Street courthouse

# OUR PEOPLE

False Creek seawall; photo courtesy Jane Dyson

## TEAM

**Kim Hawkins**

Executive Director

**Vandana Sood**

Supervising Lawyer

**Sheila Schierbeck**

Communications & Development Manager

**Andrea Bryson**

Case Manager

**Vicky Law**

Lawyer, Virtual Legal Clinic

**Taruna Agrawal & Rosanna Adams**

Lawyer, Family Advocates Support Line

**Haley Hrymak**

Lawyer, Research & Community Outreach

**Juliana Pyde**

Lawyer

**Lucie Krajca**

Lawyer, Equality Law Clinic

**T Valeska**

Articled Student

**Ellie Ericson**

Office Manager

**Carmine Dung**

Program Assistant, VLC & FASL

**Samantha Davis**

Virtual Legal Advocate

**Sierra Roberts**

Coordinator, Equality Law Clinic

**Kanwalpreet Kaur**

Research Assistant

*Rise also wishes to thank the following people, whose contributions to our work have been invaluable this year:*

**Ayesha Ali**

**Karon Blandino**

**Kala Bryson**

**Kaelyn Burns**

**Khristelle Hizon**

**Amanda Hobbs**

**Mel Ifada**

**Rhona Lichtenwald**

**Myrna McCallum**

**Nargis Rezaie**

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Amanda Aziz

Elba Bendo

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Jamie Shorter

Samantha Simpson

Adrienne Smith

Kirby Smith

Zara Suleman

Ashley Teja

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English Bay in a smoky haze; photo courtesy Ellie Ericson

The past year and half has been incredibly difficult for so many, and none more than women and gender diverse people in BC who have been isolated in unsafe homes. Unfortunately, gender-based violence has increased dramatically alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, to the point that the United Nations identified the danger to women and girls in their own homes as a worldwide “shadow pandemic.” The need for Rise’s services increase by 60-150% since the pandemic began in spring 2020. We expected those numbers would begin to decline in 2021, as the Province began to loosen shelter-in-place orders, but instead they continue to climb -- Rise’s case manager Andrea Bryson assisted a record high of 142 women seeking help from Rise in June 2021 alone. New additions to our staff are helping us meet this challenge.



Samantha Davis

## VIRTUAL LEGAL ADVOCATE

**Samantha Davis** completed her practicum for her Master’s degree in social work at Rise in 2020, and we are lucky to have her as Rise’s first Virtual Legal Advocate. The training and experience she gained during her practicum means that Sam was able to hit the ground running -- she stepped into the role pre-equipped with a solid understanding of family law basics, experience with registry procedures, court forms and documents, along with excellent advocacy skills. Sam provides clients contacting Rise with general legal information, family violence screening and support, referrals to community and governmental resources, and help with legal forms and basic document drafting.

## PROGRAM ASSISTANT

**Carmine Dung** works closely with Rise’s case manager and the VLC and FASL lawyers to keep those programs running smoothly. Carmine is the liaison between the VLC volunteer lawyers & community partners, helps FASL advocates access online learning and workshops, assists the student clinic with scheduling clients and collecting documents, among many other organizational tasks; she also helps Rise maintain the accuracy of our data & statistical records.



Carmine Dung



Sierra Roberts

## EQUALITY LAW CLINIC

Rise was all set to open our low-barrier drop-in poverty law clinic in spring 2020, but of course we had to shelve our plans when the pandemic struck. In the interim, Rise’s former incubator lawyer **Lucie Krajca** assisted clients with niche issues, and we reconfigured the concept to better align with unmet needs in our community and neighbourhood. We renamed this new program the Equality Law Clinic.

This summer Rise brought on coordinator **Sierra Roberts** to help build and launch the program. Legal services are provided primarily by volunteers who are overseen by Lucie Krajca. The Equality Law Clinic assists clients with:

- applying for replacement or generation of foundation government ID (e.g. birth certificates)
- reclaiming Indigenous names and correcting names and/or gender markers on ID documents
- drafting and completing initial police and human rights complaints
- notarization of documents

The Equality Law Clinic’s services are for self-identifying women and gender-diverse people with very low or no incomes. Preference is given to clients living in the Downtown Eastside.



Lucie Krajca



Ellie Ericson

Rise is delighted that **Ellie Ericson** joined us this summer as our new Office Manager. She brings over 20 years experience to keeping Rise’s team and our student clinicians organized, on track and operating at peak efficiency, both in the office or working remotely.



*“My clinical experience at Rise taught me what it means to be part of a legal community.”*

## RISE ALUMNI AT RISE

Although Rise tracks and records many different metrics and a wide variety of data to determine where we are succeeding and how we can improve, there is no better measure of Rise’s success than how many of our students continue to be enthusiastically involved with Rise, long after their externship term has concluded.

From those who have joined as voting members, to those who participate on our Board and committees, to those who volunteer as lawyers, to those who donate financially, to those who simply drop in to say hello when they are in the neighbourhood, we measure our success in part by the strength of the community we have built. All of us at Rise are so very proud of our alumni, and grateful for their continuing commitment to Rise



*Mara Selanders, Rise alum, Spring 2019*

The newest member of Rise’s Board of Directors, Mara Selanders was born and raised in Saskatchewan and attended the University of Saskatchewan to obtain her undergraduate degree before moving to Ottawa to complete a Master of Journalism at Carleton University, and then on to UBC for her law degree. Rise was lucky to have Mara as a student clinician in the Spring 2019 term.

Mara has always pursued volunteer and internship opportunities that kept her community-focused, whether in Saskatoon, Ottawa, Vancouver, or further afield in India, Uganda, and Sri Lanka. Now a lawyer at the BC Regional Office of the Department of Justice Canada, Mara told us at the 5 Years of Rise anniversary celebration: “I will always say that my legal career began at Rise” and she is “thrilled to continue being part of the team.”

While a student in Rise’s externship clinic in Spring 2020, Shanna Gu was a great help with clients who primarily spoke Mandarin and were struggling to receive legal assistance in English. As a Mandarin speaker, Shanna was able to help these clients understand the legal advice they were being given, as well as help interpret relevant documents and forms. Not only did Shanna continue to pitch in after she completed her externship term, but in January 2021 she started recruiting more Mandarin-speaking law students – 15 or so, she says – and built a roster of volunteer interpreters just for Rise.



*Shanna Gu  
Rise alum, Spring 2020*

Shanna says it’s a great opportunity for first year law students to “gain clinical experience” by attending client meetings and “becoming involved with the ins-and-outs of the file without having to do any of the groundwork – they are there to observe and learn” as well as provide a much-needed service to Rise’s Mandarin-speaking clients.

Shanna is in Toronto now, hard at work on her articles, but the team she built carries on. Shanna bequeathed the law student interpreter roster to one of her first volunteers, Maggie Lee, who says “I was interested in helping because I knew that it would be very hard for immigrants to get legal help, and access to justice is something I really care about.” Maggie reports that the roster has now grown to include Cantonese interpreters in addition to Mandarin.

Asked what will happen to the group when she leaves Allard, Maggie says she’ll pass the roster and coordination duties on to another volunteer, as Shanna did. “There will always be a need” says Maggie “and there will always be new law students who speak Chinese.”

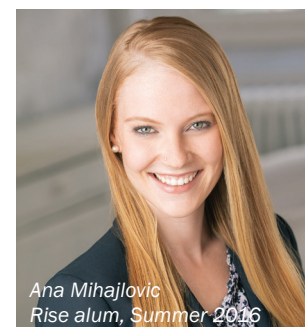
*“Rise invests so much into every student passing through the program, and we carry that investment on to our clients.”*



*Tanya Thakur  
Rise alum, Fall 2017*



*Daniel MacNeill  
Rise alum, Spring 2018*



*Ana Mihajlovic  
Rise alum, Summer 2016*

From the beginning, one of the vital skills taught and practised during Rise’s intensive orientation and training period at the top of every new semester is how to conduct an effective yet empathic client interview. In addition to careful instruction, students must observe experienced lawyers conduct intake interviews with real Rise clients before making their first effort, under close supervision. Up to now, Rise staff lawyers would oversee students’ first client interviews, but as of the Fall 2021 semester, we are adding to the breadth of experience by inviting past Rise alumni who are now practising lawyers to observe and advise the new clinicians.

Says supervising lawyer Vandana Sood: “Our alumni who have gone on to practise family law were once in the shoes of our current student clinicians, so who better to supervise and train them in how to effectively and compassionately interview prospective clients who have come to our student clinic? When we asked, they all responded with a resounding “Yes!””

*“Rise showed me what the practice of law can look like, which gave me a lot of hope.”*

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS



*Amanda Hobbs, Rise alum, Spring 2021*

My term at Rise was such an affirming, clarifying part of my law school journey. In addition to experiencing the area of law I most want to practise in, I learned a lot about where I see myself fitting into the practice of family law and how I can approach my work in more sustainable ways. The support and connectedness of staff and students was amazing even in spite of the challenges of remote work, and I can't imagine a more ideal learning environment.

One of my favourite experiences during my term was attending a family case conference and watching the opposing party flounder as he tried to explain away his abusive parenting in front of a judge. He clearly wasn't used to being accountable for his actions, and he was unsuccessful in using intimidation to escape the discussion. The family justice system can be depressing, but moments like that remind me of what is possible when we make legal assistance more accessible to those experiencing family violence.

With one month of articling and a few weeks of PLTC under my belt, I am more grateful than ever for my time at Rise. Beyond practical skills (of which I learnt even more than I expected), I learned the value of empathy, boundaries and checking in with your mentors. I think my cohort was among the few remote workers who responded to the chime of a Teams video call with relief rather than dread, and that is entirely due to the Rise Team's seemingly endless patience and kindness.



*Nazanin Panah, Rise alum, Fall 2020*

From my first day at Rise, I knew that I had been invited to take part in something special. As lawyers (and soon to be lawyers in my case), we are taught to put on a strong front for our colleagues, maintain a healthy distance from our clients and to focus exclusively on the legal issues; the trifecta! However, shortly into the Rise program I happily threw all of these misconceptions to the wind.

Throughout our clinical term, students are pushed to develop the ability to openly express our concerns, fears, boundaries and ambitions with their peers. We layered intense periods of introspection, unlearning and re-learning into our days. We delved into the many complexities of family law; from child protection to domestic violence, to the over-representation of Indigenous youth in foster care. This information was integral to our understanding of our clients and our ability to serve them. Rise invests so much into every student passing through the program, and we carry that investment on to our clients. I will carry my experience into my career as a lawyer. Rise is truly contributing to a bright future for the BC Bar, and a generation of conscientious, thoughtful and dedicated lawyers.



*Victoria Baylis, Spring 2021*

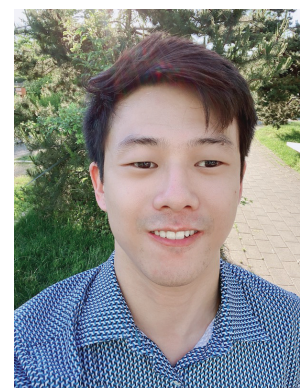
My clinical experience at Rise taught me what it means to be part of a legal community. As law students, we are often taught to fixate on the legal issues and solve problems on our own whenever possible. By contrast, Rise gave me an invaluable opportunity to meet and learn from community partners, alumni and supporters who are committed to fostering the students' personal and professional growth. Despite the challenges of a fully remote clinical term, that support, encouragement, and mentorship was crucial in helping me learn to practice family law at this early stage of my legal career. My supervising lawyers did their utmost to create a sense of camaraderie among my cohort, and they were always willing to provide me with advice and guidance, even over virtual means. We had the chance to celebrate Rise's fifth anniversary with the rest of the Rise family and community, and I hope to be able to celebrate many more anniversaries to come (hopefully in person!)

I was also struck by my clients' courage, vulnerability and resilience. Listening to their stories helped me understand the value of student-driven clinical work and taught me a client-centred and trauma-informed approach to lawyering that I will carry with me throughout my legal career.



*Charlene Tsai, Rise alum, Summer 2020*

Every time someone asks about my law school experience, I always tell them that Rise was the highlight. I was amazed and very grateful about how well the students were supported in their learning. As a student at Rise, I not only got to learn about the law, but I also felt that I was in a safe environment to challenge myself professionally and personally. Also, Rise showed me what the practice of law can look like, which gave me a lot of hope as an incoming 3L having a quarterlife crisis about my career choice. Currently, I am very happy to be articling at a family law firm and so much of this decision was thanks to everyone at Rise.



*Jay Seo, Rise alum, Summer 2021*



# RISE BY THE NUMBERS

Waugh Lake; photo courtesy Lisa Harris, Rise Alum Summer 2018

## THE STUDENT CLINIC

In 2020-21

- 161 clients received substantive legal services from Rise's student clinicians
- 90 files were closed/completed
- students attended court 22 times
- 16 clients received representation in court proceedings
- 2 clients received representation for 2-day in-person hearings for clients seeking retroactive child support; Rise students secured significant awards of many thousands of dollars for each client
- 83% of clients report family violence
- 40% of files had child and/or spousal support issues
- 1 in 3 clients seeking help from Rise's student clinic are actually eligible for provincial Legal Aid assistance

## THE FAMILY ADVOCATE SUPPORT LINE

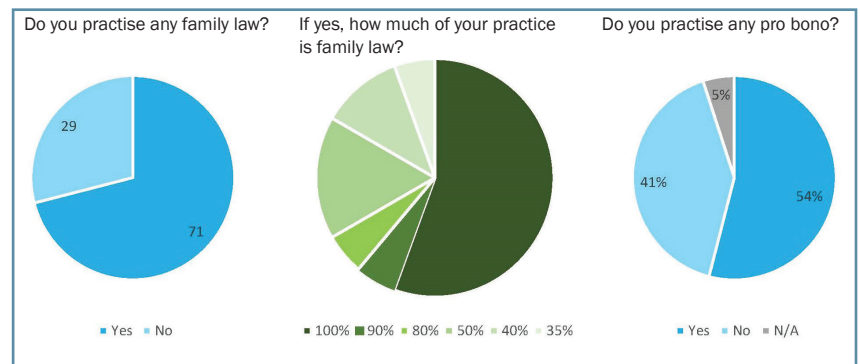
In 2020-21, FASL lawyers helped community workers and advocates across BC assist their clients with 872 matters, in addition to hosting weekly workshop meetings and presenting 36 training webinars.

## THE VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINIC

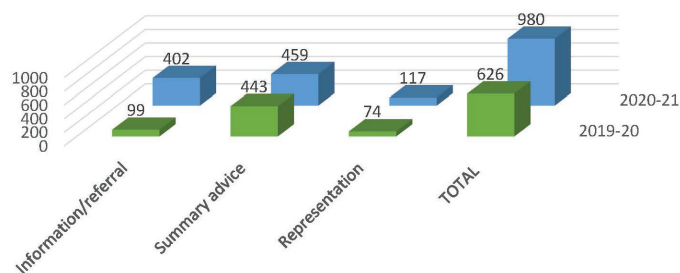
In 2020-21

- the VLC increased by 68% the number of community organizations that we partner with, from 31 to 52, all across BC
- the VLC has 14 volunteer lawyers providing free legal services directly to clients, in addition to the many dedicated volunteers at the Amici Curiae Friendship Society
- the VLC served 117 clients in 2020
- so far in 2021, January through August, the VLC has helped 182 clients -- a whopping 55% increase over 2020 in only the first 8 months of this year

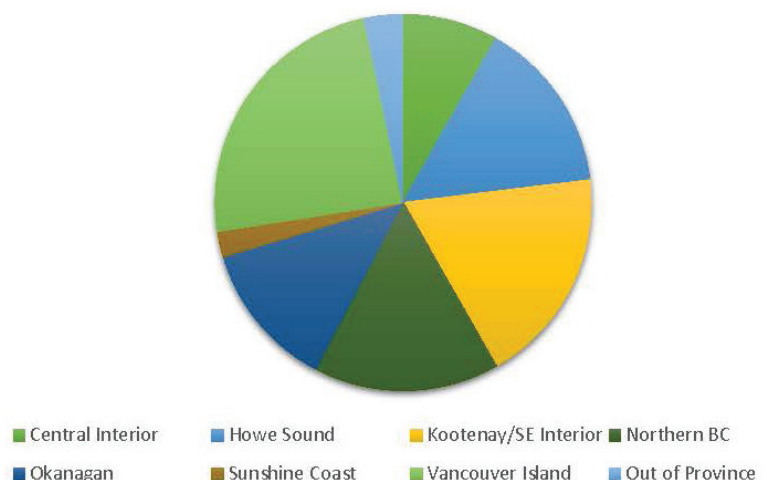
Rise believes that early clinical experience will increase the likelihood that students will go on to practise family law, and will also continue to do pro bono work. In May 2020, Rise asked 48 of our alumni who are now lawyers to tell us about their practices.



Number of clients served, with type of services, 2019-20 compared with 2020-21. Information is based on clients' first point of contact with Rise, Triage & Navigation.



Where do our VLC clients live?



# WOMEN IN BC NEED RISE RISE NEEDS YOU

White Rock; photo courtesy Sheila Schierbeck

## Help Rise increase access to family justice in BC

### Cheques

Cheques may be sent to:

Rise Women's Legal Centre  
516 Richards Street  
Vancouver BC V6B3A2  
ATTN: Sheila Schierbeck



### Credit Cards

Find our Canada Helps page at [bit.ly/risedonate](http://bit.ly/risedonate) or complete the form below and email to [sschierbeck@womenslegalcentre.ca](mailto:sschierbeck@womenslegalcentre.ca), or mail to the postal address above.

### E-Transfer

Please contact Sheila Schierbeck to arrange e-transfer, by phone at 604-757-5002 or email at [sschierbeck@womenslegalcentre.ca](mailto:sschierbeck@womenslegalcentre.ca).

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  - Sustaining Circle Patron (\$1000 a year)
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- I don't mind receiving occasional updates and invitations.
- Please don't contact me unless it's regarding my donation

Rise's charitable registration number is #76336 8099 RR0001. A tax receipt is issued for every donation.

Family law is the most significant unmet legal need in BC, and women are disproportionately affected.

Rise is helping to change that.

Without Rise, many women and gender diverse people in BC who can't afford a private lawyer and who are not eligible for provincial Legal Aid will be faced with the choice of trying to navigate the legal system alone, or abandoning their rights and entitlements – and possibly those of their children – simply because they cannot afford to claim them.

Rise needs ongoing funding to keep us operational and providing women all over BC with the much-needed legal help they can't find anywhere else. We must also plan to accommodate our clinic's growth so that we are in a position to meet the inevitable increase in need for our services.

Rise is community legal clinic that relies heavily on personal donations and grants from private foundations. While we have received project grants from certain government agencies to fund specific projects, we receive no ongoing governmental core funding.

One-time gifts are gratefully accepted, as are monthly and annual pledges. Rise is also grateful to receive gifts through wills, bequests, and estates.

Thank you for helping Rise increase access to family justice for women and gender diverse people in BC.

We literally cannot do it without you.



# Thank you!

Golden, BC; photo courtesy Haley Hrymak & Vicky Law

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The Hon. Risa Levine  
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