

2022

ANNUAL REPORT



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT



Debra Parkes, President



Carly Teillet, Vice President

Taanishi and greetings to our volunteers, members of our community and supporters. As Board President and Vice President, we are pleased to present Rise Women's Legal Centre's 2022 Annual Report.

2021 was a year of unprecedented growth for Rise. Last year we continued to adapt to the COVID pandemic and the exacerbated gender-based violence experienced by many of our clients. Our team worked alongside community partners around British Columbia and with many organisations in the lower mainland to expand access to legal services.

Our Virtual Legal Clinic grew rapidly during COVID-19; our team of dedicated staff members assist clients in underserved areas throughout the province. The triage program has evolved into our Community Legal Clinic focused on providing summary legal advice and assisting clients navigate the legal system in Vancouver and the lower mainland. Our ability to support advocates and anti-violence and community workers continues to grow through our family advocate support line where staff can provide intensive supervision and one-on-one mentorship. Throughout all these changes our clinic, staffed by law students from the Peter A. Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, continues to provide free legal representation to clients in provincial court matters. Relationships are at the heart of our work and Rise staff

fosters community despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, technology and geography. We know that access to justice is a right that belongs to everyone and we work to build strong community to uphold that right.

We recognize that as a legal clinic Rise is embedded in and complicit with the colonial legal structure that establishes the family law rules and structures. Further, we recognize that Rise has been led and staffed predominantly by settlers. Our organization is committed to take up the ongoing work to learn, improve and decolonise Rise and how we practice law. Haley Hrymak partnered with Métis lawyer Myrna McCallum on a research report, released in January 2022, *Decolonizing Family Law Through Trauma-Informed Practices*. This work considers ways in which family lawyers can support Indigenous clients and adopt a wider more inclusive perspective on colonial family law statutes and practices. Numerous Indigenous experts shared their time and expertise with us, without which this report would not be possible. Over the past year we have engaged in several projects to encourage learning and growth throughout our organisation. As part of strategic planning, Rise completed a full audit of our internal policies with Hummingbirds Rising Consulting. Board and staff have completed three fantastic workshops with Hummingbirds Rising, and we continue to work to integrate and implement their decolonization recommendations.

2021 was a year of continued uncertainty, fear and change, but also a year of opportunity, innovation, and community. The 2022 AGM will mark a transition of another kind for Rise as leadership of the board passes from one of our founding board members, Debra Parkes, to Carly Teillet, who is starting her third term on Rise's board. We look forward to an exciting new phase at Rise. We express our gratitude to Rise staff, volunteers, community partners, donors, students, and to all of the supporters who make Rise possible. We could not do this work without you. 🐦

STUDENT LEGAL CLINIC

Rise hosts a year-round legal clinic, staffed by upper year law students from UBC's Peter A. Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, who are carefully trained and closely supervised by Rise's staff lawyers.

Over the past year, our Student Legal Clinic has seen a total of 16 students come through our doors for our Spring, Summer, and Winter classes in 2022. They have gained valuable experience and assisted 273 women. Several of these matters went to court, including a two-day trial that resulted in retroactive child support of more than \$60,000 for a mother of university age children who had been seeking financial disclosure and an income-based increase in child support since they were babies. A huge victory for the client, and our student lawyers.

Supervising lawyer for the Student Legal Clinic, Vandana Sood, said that one of the highlights of the year for her was helping a woman who came through the clinic with a controlling ex-spouse. The team was able to diffuse the situation, calming things down enough that the client received increased time with her children.

The Student Legal Clinic plays a key role in delivering services for women in the Lower Mainland. Over 70 per cent of our students go on to practice family law, building on the valuable insight and training they received from their time at Rise. Our surveys show that over half take on pro-bono work, increasing the access to the legal system.



Spring 2022 students



Winter 2022 students



Summer 2022 students



Students in court



273 clients helped



only 1 in 3 clients eligible for legal aid



80% of clients reported family violence

COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

128 clients
assisted
per month



688 clients
assisted in
first half
of 2022

1,201 clients
assisted
in 2021

Rise is thrilled to announce the creation (or evolution) of our Community Legal Clinic (CLC). The CLC, (formerly Rise's Triage Program) was re-named in early 2022, after the number of clients seeking help from Rise grew too large for one navigator to manage. The CLC now focuses on helping clients in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland navigate the legal system, access summary legal advice, and connect with appropriate resources. The CLC can also provide assistance with legal aid applications, identification applications, and can witness client signatures for documents that require a commissioner of affidavits. The CLC plays a critical role in providing access to justice for women across the Lower Mainland and is uniquely poised to help bridge the gap in support for women navigating the complexity of family law.

Rise recognizes that many clients in the DTES and the Lower Mainland have barriers which impact their ability to access legal systems. With the support of a generous anonymous donor, Rise is piloting a new community outreach advocate position to provide additional support to clients who may find it challenging to access traditional legal services. We will be partnering with local organizations to provide accessible in-person drop-in appointments for help with legal navigation and advocacy.

462 trained
by CLC staff

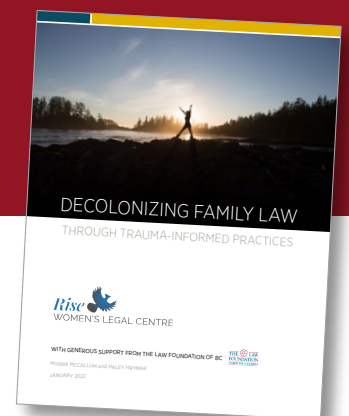


36 training sessions
conducted

RESEARCH

In 2022, Rise published two important reports. The first, *Decolonizing Family Law Through Trauma Informed Practices*, was published in January and highlighted the ways in which the colonial framework embedded in BC's family law system causes ongoing harm to Indigenous families. The report makes recommendations for improving BC's family law system and provides a toolkit for lawyers to establish trauma-informed practices and practice cultural humility. The report was co-authored by Myrna MacCullum, a Métis-Cree mother, grandmother, lawyer, educator, and expert in trauma-informed legal practice, and Haley Hrymak, a settler and Rise's research and community outreach lawyer.

The second, *Creating Safety in BC Courts: Key Challenges and Recommendations*, to be published in October 2022 authored by Haley, explores the ways in which courthouses in smaller communities in BC are not always safe places, particularly for survivors of intimate partner violence. Court often takes place in small buildings with no paging systems, where the survivor's only option is to sit in a small area close to their abuser, often for hours. The report asks: is there a way to modify courthouses and court processes to make survivors safer?



VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINIC

Rise's Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) provides free unbundled legal services for self-identifying women and gender-diverse folks, who live outside of the Lower Mainland. The VLC works in partnership with community organizations across BC in small or isolated communities to connect women who need legal help in the province with a volunteer lawyer or relevant legal resources like Legal Aid.

This year, Rise hired two full-time staff lawyers to take on cases for the VLC, and for the Community Legal Clinic (CLC), thanks to the generous support of the Department of Justice. Meet Rosanna and Gabrielle:

- **Gabrielle Clark** has a degree in women's studies from the University of Calgary, and a J.D. from the University of Victoria Faculty of Law. Before joining Rise, Gabrielle became well-acquainted with the family law system while working for six years as a family lawyer in private practice.
- **Rosanna Adams** is one of the Summary Advice Lawyers at Rise. Prior to working at Rise, Rosanna worked in private practice, where she primarily practiced family law, but also criminal, wills and estates, and general civil law.



Gabrielle Clark



Rosanna Adams

Supervised by Vicky Law, the VLC has grown substantially over the past year. Meet Stephanie, Harpreet, and Kelsey who joined the team this year. Stephanie joins us through generous funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada, and Harpreet and Kelsey through the support of the Department of Justice Canada.

- **Kelsey Borgfjord** works as the Virtual Legal Clinic's Legal Navigator and runs intake for clients across the province. She works remotely to assist clients and comes from a background in mental health so psychological safety of her clients is paramount.
- **Harpreet Kahlon** is the new VLC Program Assistant. Harpreet has worked in the human rights space for over a decade. She has a Master of Arts in Human Rights with focus on advocating for women's and children's rights.
- **Stephanie Melynk** is the VLC Program Coordinator. She comes to Rise from a victim services program where she helped folks experiencing trauma or crisis and supported them through the criminal court system.



Kelsey Borgfjord

This year the Virtual Legal Clinic team has travelled all over BC, meeting with local organizations and building relationships. In total the VLC team has performed outreach to 14 communities across the province. The VLC plays a unique role, connecting women to legal and social services that serve their needs. By working collaboratively with local community organizations, the VLC helps ensure that clients receive help that is relevant for their region.



253 clients helped in 2022 so far

284 clients helped in 2021



32 training sessions held

662 training participants



49 community partners

“As a woman who has suffered domestic violence I felt empowered. I feel that there is hope and that I can be brave.” — VLC client

“Every time I work with the lawyer I feel encouraged to keep going. There have been many days I just wanted to throw in the towel and quit, I feel empowered and stronger with each meeting. I can't thank them enough.” — VLC client

FAMILY ADVOCATE SUPPORT

Family advocates provide free legal information, advocacy, and assistance to low-income people in BC. Rise provides support to family advocates in BC in several ways.

Since 2018, the Family Advocate Support Line (FASL) funded by the Law Foundation of BC, has provided dedicated support for family advocates, anti-violence workers, support workers, and any professional who works in family law in BC, to help them better assist their own clients. To spread the word about FASL and its services Rise staff continually conduct outreach to organizations around the province. FASL also hosts monthly meetings on substantive legal subjects, which any community worker can attend. This year, FASL presented and provided training to Homelessness Association of BC, DiverseCity, and several transition houses, among others.

We are pleased to welcome Leila Hartford as our FASL Lawyer, while Taruna Agrawal is on parental leave. Leila comes to Rise from private practice with a focus on family law. Leila obtained her JD from the University of Victoria as a mature student. As a latecomer to law Leila is particularly aggrieved at the way the justice system and the practice of law perpetuates social inequities. She is passionate about the sophistication and significance, to individuals and communities, of the work of legal service providers.

In partnership with the Law Foundation of BC, Rise will also be providing more direct legal supervision to a small

group of family law advocates this year, and we are thrilled to welcome Maggie House to our team to spearhead this new program. Maggie joins us as an experienced lawyer

with a strong social justice background and a range of practice competencies. We are excited to facilitate enhanced family law advocacy services through the introduction of this critical support system.



Maggie House



Leila Hartford

Finally, this fall, with the generous support of the Department of Justice Canada, our long-term team member and colleague Andrea Bryson will be moving to the new role of Family Advocate Educator. Andrea has worked as a case manager at Rise since 2018 and has worked in family law advocacy for many years. As Family Advocate Educator,

Andrea will provide coaching, mentorship, and training for family law advocates, helping them better serve their clients with a focus on providing improved services to clients who have experienced family violence.

VICTORIES IN COURT

West Coast LEAF and Rise Women's Legal Centre were proud to co-intervene in the *Barendregt v Grebliunas* appeal, heard on December 1 and 2, 2021 before the Supreme Court of Canada. The Court issued a rare decision from the Bench, allowing the appeal and upholding the trial judge's decision to allow a mother to relocate with her children to her home community. At the heart of this matter was the ability of the mother to rebuild her life in her hometown, surrounded by her family and support network, after separating from an abusive husband.

In July 2022, Rise's own Vandana Sood won her first BC Court of Appeal case. The appeal by the opposing party was dismissed by the judge, scoring a major victory for the client. The father had relocated with the child prior to a trial on the merits, and the ensuing court actions meant that the children had been living away from their mother for more than two years. Thanks to Vandana's hard work, the father was ordered to return to the Lower Mainland, allowing for more frequent, in person, parenting time for the client.

At the heart of the *Barendregt v Grebliunas* appeal was the ability of the mother to rebuild her life in her hometown, surrounded by her family and support network, after separating from an abusive husband.

FUND DEVELOPMENT

When donors give to Rise they are ensuring that more women in BC can receive access to justice. In Rise's fiscal year 2021–2022, many generous donors did just that, giving a total of \$434,756.

In November 2021 Rise launched our One Billable Hour Campaign, which encouraged lawyers to donate the amount they charge for one billable hour. The campaign received generous matching funds and raised over \$60,000; these funds are critical to Rise's ability to cover all of the costs that result from running a clinic. Rise additionally could not do its work without the support of our grantors; we received over \$1.1 million from our grantors in the 2021-2022 fiscal year. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the BC Community Gaming Grants, Community Impact Real Estate, Law Foundation of BC, Canadian Women's Foundation, Federation of Community Social Services, Women and Gender Equality Canada, Department of Justice Canada, University of British Columbia, and Vancouver Foundation — as well as to those donors and grantors who choose to remain anonymous.



Kate Webster

In July 2022, Rise welcomed Kate Webster as Fund Development Manager. Kate comes to Rise as an experienced fundraiser. She previously worked as the Campaign Director of a \$9 million community annual campaign and we are excited to have her join our team!

We are also thrilled to welcome Maayaa Quist-Adade to the Rise team, as our Office Assistant. Born in Ghana, Maayaa comes to Rise with seven years of people-focused experience, most recently as an HR administrator and manager of a popular East Vancouver cafe. Motivated by issues of equity, diversity, and justice, and by work that serves her community, Maayaa has also volunteered for organizations supporting children and immigrants/newcomers to Canada.

OUR PEOPLE

TEAM

Kim Hawkins
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Vandana Sood
SUPERVISING LAWYER

Andrea Bryson
FAMILY ADVOCATE
EDUCATOR

Courtney Poland
JUNIOR ADVOCATE

Carmine Dung
PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Vicky Law
LAWYER, VIRTUAL
LEGAL CLINIC

Samantha Davis
VIRTUAL LEGAL ADVOCATE

Kelsey Borgfjord
VLC LEGAL NAVIGATOR

Harpreet Kahlon
VLC PROGRAM ASSISTANT

Stephanie Melnyk
VLC PROGRAM
COORDINATOR

Taruna Agrawal
LAWYER, FAMILY ADVOCATES
SUPPORT LINE

Leila Hartford
LAWYER, FAMILY ADVOCATES
SUPPORT LINE

Maggie House
SUPERVISING LAWYER FOR
ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

Haley Hrymak
LAWYER, RESEARCH &
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Rosanna Adams
STAFF LAWYER

Gabrielle Clark
STAFF LAWYER

T. Valeska
INCUBATOR LAWYER

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...and others who requested anonymity

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