Veterans around Connecticut have a place to go when we really need help and can’t afford representation. The program really works.

Francisco Masis
Solving a legal matter calms the veteran down so that their clinician can address their other needs.

James “Patrick” Hayes, Veterans Justice Outreach
CVLC’s seventh year was chock-full of legal accomplishments that measurably improved the lives of veterans and events that engaged thousands of people to support veterans in recovery.

Let me share some updates from behind the scenes.

CVLC’s work family grew. We added a Veterans Liaison, Carolyn Harriston, who focuses on making our first contact with veterans rapid and supportive. We were also thrilled to add our newest Staff Attorney, Margaret Kuzma, our first attorney position totally devoted to upgrading wrongful military discharges. With this new position, CVLC became one of a mere handful of programs nationwide with a full-time advocate helping veterans with administrative claims at the Department of Defense.

This summer we said goodbye to Lorena Mitchell, as she headed to graduate school in Public Health and Social Work, but we welcomed Cara Cancelmo, a recent college graduate, as Director of Development and Communications. Finally, we are truly honored to expand our Board to include three outstanding members: The Reverend Dr. John Selders, Jr., an accomplished minister who currently serves as an Associate Chaplain at Trinity College and as one of the leaders of Moral Monday Connecticut; Mr. William J. Piper, a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and Vice President at Pentegra Retirement Services; and Attorney Donald P. Tutson, Jr., an avid supporter of CVLC who has volunteered to represent CVLC clients and ridden in The Ride for Our Vets for many years.

In 2016 CVLC became a tenant for the first time, moving into amazing office space donated by the Simon Konover Company. The new office gives our CVLC staff a quiet spot where we can write briefs, return calls, and confer with each other away from our primary veteran-facing spaces at the VA facilities in West Haven and Newington. We are so grateful to the Simon Konover Company for hosting us, and to Wiggin and Dana LLP, who donated to CVLC both quiet downtown office space for many years, and gorgeous furniture to outfit our new location. Come say hi!

All of us are so thrilled at how our capacity to serve veterans continues to grow, and so grateful to the many friends and partners who make this work possible. We hope you enjoy this report in which we capture some of the most exciting accomplishments and events of the year. Join us in 2017!
MEASURABLY IMPROVING VETERANS’ QUALITY OF LIFE
The mission of Connecticut Veterans Legal Center is to help veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare, and income. CVLC closed 567 cases in Fiscal Year 2015-2016. Here is how we help:

3.5 MONTHS The average additional number of months that CVLC kept veterans facing eviction housed. A veteran’s VA counselor notices that his post deployment PTSD symptoms get worse when his landlord threatens to evict him and his children. The veteran, counselor, and CVLC attorney work together to keep the veteran and his family in their apartment and maintain the veteran's mental health.

20 VETERANS The number of veterans for whom CVLC attorneys improved access to free high-quality lifetime healthcare from the VA. A veteran in treatment at the VA is told she is no longer eligible for care due to her military discharge status. CVLC seeks a character of service determination appealing the VA’s decision to deny her VA services.

$2.2 MILLION The amount of compensation that will be brought in over the next ten years for 17 veterans because of the VA benefits cases that CVLC closed. A VA clinician recognizes that a disabled veteran is struggling financially and has a low VA disability rating despite her severe mental health issue. CVLC helps the veteran get her disability rating increased so she can receive increased financial benefits from the VA.

FISCAL YEAR 2016 CASES CLOSED BY TYPE

567 TOTAL CASES

- FAMILY: 105
- VA BENEFITS: 100
- HOUSING: 93
- CONSUMER: 75
- CRIMINAL / PARDON: 55
- SSA: 54
- DISCHARGE UPGRADE: 37
- TAX: 20
- ESTATE / PROBATE: 19
- EMPLOYMENT: 7
- OTHER: 2
CVLC REPRESENTATION MEASURABLY IMPROVES VETERANS’ HOUSING, FINANCES AND HEALTHCARE.

Percentage of full representation cases resulting in one of CVLC’s three outcome measures: improved housing stability, improved financial status, and/or improved access to healthcare.
DOCTOR’S ORDERS: A LAWYER

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS AT THE ERRERA COMMUNITY CARE CENTER SAY VETERANS CAN FOCUS ON RECOVERY WHEN LAWYERS REMOVE LEGAL BARRIERS

The whole legal system can be quite daunting, so the access to services itself has been exponentially helpful. Connections are very easy to orchestrate, and services happen quickly – it’s rare and unusual, and an amazing resource.

John Chiechi, MSW

The relationship between the CVLC and clinicians at Errera flows – it’s always connected. Together we can get a full understanding of the issue the veteran is facing. Having CVLC here means veterans don’t have to jump through extra hurdles to get the legal help.

Ernest Johnson, Vocational Services
A NATIONAL LEADER ON DISCHARGE UPGRADES

Each year, the Department of Defense wrongly denies veterans an “honorable” discharge, often because of behaviors symptomatic of PTSD. These “bad paper discharges” make veterans ineligible for VA educational, medical, or disability benefits. They make it harder for veterans to secure jobs and escape poverty. These veterans are more likely than other veterans to commit suicide, experience homelessness, or be arrested. This means the United States fails to care for or to educate some of our country’s most wounded warriors when they need it most.

CVLC continues to be a national leader on the Discharge Upgrade Practice. This year, CVLC added a staff attorney position dedicated to the practice, one of only a small handful of such positions in the United States. We are thrilled to have Margaret Kuzma on the team working on this important social justice issue.
THE ATTORNEY WAS A DREAM. HE WAS JUST AWESOME. IF I EVER HAVE ANY PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE, HE’D BE THE FIRST LAWYER I’D CALL.  

Charlie Haviland
Mr. S was drafted to the Army in 1968 and soon after deployed to Vietnam where he served honorably as a radio operator.

Mr. S was diagnosed with ischemic heart disease after his service, a condition now linked to Agent Orange exposure. After heart surgery, Mr. S was forced to give up his career and find a new way to meet his basic needs.

Attorney Eva Puorro, a solo practitioner who had never done veterans benefits work before, appealed Mr. S’s disability compensation claim to the VA and won lifelong disability compensation for his ongoing health conditions.

Mr. S is now 100% service-connected, a designation recognizing that his disability was caused by military service. Over the next 10 years, Mr. S will be compensated with almost $350,000 of income.

“These benefits are completely life changing,” says Attorney Puorro. “Mr. S has had to take the bus to go everywhere even though he lives in chronic pain and uses a cane. Now he can buy a car and drive. Things are going to be easier for him and he deserves that. He can now concentrate on his health and his family and worry less about the basic necessities of life.”

Mr. S adds, “I honestly can’t express in words what Eva’s service means to me. I’ll forever be amazed at her kindness, professionalism and thoroughness. The members of CVLC’s legal team care about veterans from the bottom of their hearts.”
The pages within the record were not merely paper to me, but rather the story of this veteran’s life and the struggles he and his family faced. These individuals put their lives on the line for this country. I considered it an honor to be able to pay it back in some small way to help them and the CVLC in working on their behalf.

**REVIEW-A-RAMA 3.0**

CVLC is grateful to United Healthcare for building Review-A-Rama (RAR) with us this year. Over 100 UnitedHealth Group law department employees from across 26 states reviewed over 50,000 pages of veteran medical and military files between Memorial Day and Veterans Day in 2016 to help CT veterans with administrative claims.

_Eileen Sullivan_  
Senior Associate General Counsel at OptumInsight, Inc. and RAR Volunteer

Thanks to the volunteerism of Connecticut’s bar, in the last year 222 attorneys worked on 292 cases for veterans donating an estimated $1,095,000 in time.

Congratulations to 2016 Veterans Justice Award winner, Len Miller, pictured here with CT Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Sean Connolly (left) and Margaret Middleton.
JOIN US IN 2017
The summer will be here before we know it! Join CVLC on June 17, 2017, for The Ride for our Veterans!
The spectacular ride starts and ends in Stamford and takes riders on a tour of the beautiful Connecticut and New York countryside.

THE RIDE FOR OUR VETS
& HOMERUN FOR HEROES

JUNE 17, 2017

THE RIDE FOR OUR VETS
Our fifth annual Ride for Our Vets, the only charity bike ride to benefit veterans in the state of Connecticut, was a huge success, raising over $200,000. Over 100 people rode 25, 50, or 100 miles. We are so grateful to our sponsors: Barclays, Piper-Jaffray, BMO Capital Markets, and the founding sponsor Point72 Asset Management.

AUGUST 19, 2017

HOMERUN FOR HEROES
CVLC’s amazing partners at Sikorsky Aircraft will host The Seventh Annual Homerun for Heroes on August 19. Last year’s game raised almost $50,000 to support veterans in recovery! Bring the whole family to cheer on the Bridgeport Bluefish with Sikorsky & CVLC!

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