



2012
Annual
Report

**CONNECTICUT
VETERANS
LEGAL
CENTER**



From the Executive Director's Desk

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CVLC Marks Banner Year

When Howard Udell and I started Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, we wanted to do what we could to help veterans who were struggling to build full and fulfilling lives. What I never expected, and have been humbled to learn, is how many people feel just like we do.

Thanks to our volunteers and funders, CVLC grew significantly in 2012, both in size and stature. The facts and figures in our "Client Statistics" and "Dollars & Cents" reports show significant gains in some of the ways you can measure a year at CVLC. We increased our capacity to serve veterans by 30%, opening almost 400 issues in 2012. Our budget grew by 60% to just over \$250,000 for this fiscal year. More than 100 attorneys volunteered to help veterans in 2012, contributing about \$567,000 worth of time. Wow!

In 2012, CVLC also emerged as a voice for vulnerable veterans in state and national policy debates. In the spring, we partnered with Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic to successfully

A message from Margaret Middleton

change state law to send more veterans for help instead of jail. We expect hundreds of veterans and their families to benefit from new second chances under this law.

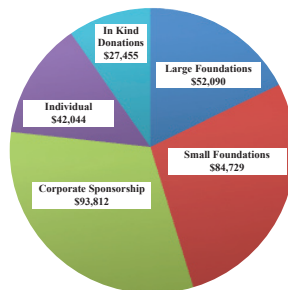
During the summer, I was honored to be called to testify before a Congressional subcommittee about the unfair VA rules that prevent victims of military sexual assault from getting the compensation they need to recover. I was very proud to be able to share stories and demand justice from Congress for Connecticut's veterans.

It is thanks to our collective efforts that we have accomplished so much. So I hope you will congratulate yourself and your colleagues; you deserve it!

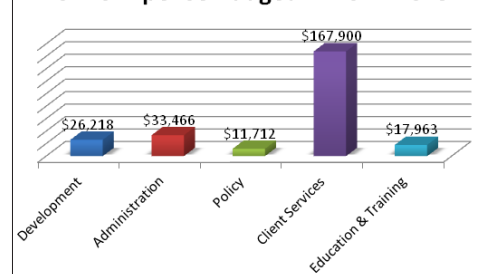


Dollars & Cents

CVLC Revenue Sources FY 2012-2013



CVLC Expense Budget FY 2012-2013



Cost per Case

It costs about \$400 each time CVLC provides a client with advice, representation or referral to a volunteer attorney.

\$400

Michele Nichols

Public Engagement Fellow

CVLC welcomed AmeriCorps VISTA Public Engagement Fellow Michele Nichols in September. Michele is a graduate of Roger Williams University School of Law. She is admitted to the Connecticut State Bar and previously worked in New Haven Superior Court.



New Faces At CVLC



Lana Bluege

Paralegal/Administrator

Lana Bluege joined CVLC in November. Lana graduated from Albertus Magnus College with a B.A. in Political Science. She previously worked at Connecticut Legal Rights Project.

Emerging as a Policy Leader

New Law Keeps Vets out of Jail

More of Connecticut's veterans charged with low-level crimes will get treatment instead of jail time thanks to a bill created by Connecticut Veterans Legal Center in partnership with Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic.

The bill, which unanimously passed the House and Senate, expands veterans' access to Connecticut's existing jail diversion programs rather than creating a costly specialized court. The law allows veterans to reuse a program that allows first time offenders of non-serious offenses to avoid jail time at a judge's discretion. The law also broadens eligibility for diversionary programs for veterans



Photo courtesy of Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register

Surrounded by members of Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy signs the bill into law.

amenable to mental health treatment without requiring that veterans be labeled with a "psychiatric disability."

Roughly 1,000 veterans are expected to benefit from the new program each year.

"While states across

the country create one-off veterans courts with limited geographical reach, we are proud Connecticut chose to make every court a veterans court," said CVLC's Executive Director Margaret Middleton. "This bill improves Connecticut's jail diversion programs to better serve the needs of veterans in recovery. The law now reflects the reality that relapse may be a part of recovery and that requiring veterans to acknowledge a stigmatizing mental illness in court may deter some from accessing necessary care."

The law, which took effect in October 2012, is expected to save the state \$3.5 million over the next three years.

Congress Seeks CVLC Opinion

In July 2012, the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs asked CVLC to testify on how to improve the VA's handling of compensation claims for the victims of sexual assault.

An estimated 19,000 service members experience sexual assault while serving their country every year.

CVLC Executive Director Margaret Middleton's testimony brought a personal dimension to the issue by sharing the experience of two CVLC clients who face tough battles to win their VA benefits. The VA's current rules require these veterans to provide a nearly insurmountable level of evidence to substantiate a claim of PTSD due to sexual assault. This is especially troubling considering the stigma attached to reporting sexual assault in the military.



U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

CVLC's written testimony stated, "We create the conditions that compel traumatized people like these two women to remain silent, and then we punish them for that silence by refusing to accept their story when they come forward to tell it. We know that this is grossly unfair, and we know how to fix it."

The VA should remedy this situation by amending its regulations to provide victims of military sexual trauma the same benefit of the doubt other veterans receive. For the full testimony, visit ctveteranslegal.org.

CVLC Model Attracts National Attention

CVLC's unique medical-legal partnership with the CT VA's Errera Community Care Center gained national recognition in 2012 with the publication of a peer-reviewed article on the model authored

by CVLC staff attorney Cathy Wong.

The article, which describes the challenges and opportunities of attorneys working on-site at a VA community mental health facility, was



Cathy Wong

published in the journal *Psychological Services*.

The article has spurred interest in the model, generating requests for more information from Washington, D.C., to Albuquerque, N.M. For a link to the full text of the article, visit CVLC's website at ctveteranslegal.org.

CVLC's Clients

Client Statistics

Service in Iraq and Afghanistan

CVLC served 55 veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in 2012.

20.2%

Served in Combat

43 percent of CVLC's clients identify as combat veterans.

43%

Clients of Color

More than half of CVLC's clients self-identify as a person of color.

51%

34.7%

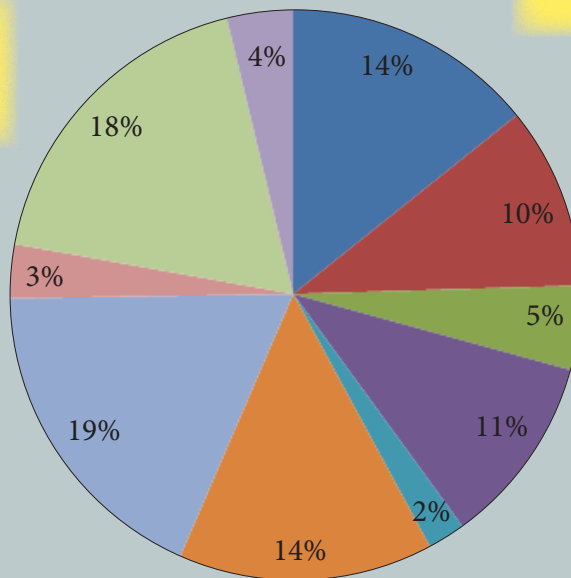
VA Disability Rating

The percentage of CVLC clients with a VA disability rating. A disability rating entitles the person to a certain degree of financial support.

55.9%

Homelessness

The percentage of CVLC clients who self-identify as currently or formerly homeless.



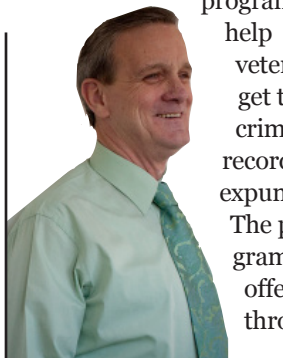
The Cases

- Criminal/Pardon
- Discharge Upgrade/Military
- Estate/Probate
- Consumer
- Other
- Housing (Eviction/Foreclosure)
- Benefits (VA and SSA)
- Tax
- Family
- Employment

Veteran Shares Personal Triumph with CVLC

Former CVLC client Mike Doyle shared the following story at CVLC's 3rd annual benefit in November 2012.

I became aware of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center in 2010 when Margaret Middleton had asked me to spread the word about a new



Mike Doyle

program to help veterans get their criminal records expunged. The program was offered through

Statewide Legal Services in conjunction with Connecticut Veterans Legal Center.

Margaret was not aware that I had a criminal background, one that I kept very quiet about. It was a matter of shame to me, something I wasn't proud of in the least.

Margaret assisted me in preparing the paperwork needed to begin the process. The paperwork was not difficult, just time consuming. I had to obtain a copy of my police record from where I had committed those crimes, as well as from the State Police, and write in my own words, details of each offense.

My police record dated back to 1976 and continued to my last offense in 1999. I had two felony convictions. As much as I disliked dredging up old

memories, the possibility of receiving a pardon was more than sufficient to continue.

One of my convictions was for "Doctor Shopping." I had been a licensed nurse here in Connecticut receiving narcotic pain medication for frequent

"I could not have done it if it wasn't for the encouragement, advice and support I received from Connecticut Veterans Legal Center."

-Mike Doyle, former client

injuries caused by my work as a nurse. I had been taking the medication for 13 years. I had become addicted and did not even realize it until I was arrested by police for trying to renew an existing prescription. It seems I had been seeing 27

doctors and receiving medication from each of them.

The offense had caused me to become divorced, homeless and addicted to heroin. Out of all of the offenses I had, this was the one I was most ashamed of. The thought of being granted a pardon for that made me work as hard as I could to follow any instruction I was given.

It took a year before I was given a date to appear before a board that would determine if I would be granted a pardon or not. Margaret gave me a ride to Hartford and sat with me through the proceedings. As it turned out, due to having 12 years sobriety and 12 years without having any criminal activity, I was granted a full pardon without even having to appear before the board.

Fundraising News



Patricia Kaplan

CVLC Executive Director Margaret Middleton presents the Veterans Justice Award to Robinson & Cole partner Edward Heath. Robinson & Cole received this year's award in recognition of the outstanding work the firm's attorneys have done for veterans.

R&C Leads by Example

CVLC presented the 2nd Annual Veterans Justice Award to the law firm of Robinson & Cole at its annual benefit. The Award recognized Robinson & Cole's firm-wide commitment to serving veterans.

More than 16 R&C attorneys have handled almost 20 cases since the firm became involved with CVLC. R&C attorneys represented veterans on a variety of matters, including landlord-tenant issues, VA benefits applications, discharge upgrade requests and immigration matters.

In presenting the award CVLC Executive Director Margaret Middleton gushed that "in every single instance an R&C attorney has taken on a case, they have done an exemplary job."

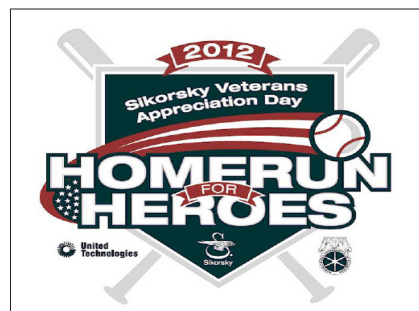
On behalf of the firm, Partner Edward Heath accepted a flag that had flown over the Errera Community Care Center in West Haven, where CVLC's office is located. Middleton told the crowd "this flag has also watched over our most vulnerable veterans, just like Robinson and Cole."

Sikorsky, Bluefish Hit Homerun for Veterans

CVLC partner Sikorsky Aircraft Corp. hosted the Bridgeport Bluefish's 2nd Annual Homerun For Heroes Charity Fundraiser at the Ballpark at Harbor Yard on August 18th.

The Bluefish donated \$3 of every \$10 ticket to veteran's

charities, including CVLC, which received \$14,000. In addition to this financial support, Sikorsky attorneys have pitched in provide free legal services to CVLC clients in landlord-tenant, pardon, discharge upgrade and VA benefits cases.



Purdue Pharma Hosts CVLC

The CVLC is grateful to Purdue Pharma LP for hosting an Introduction to the CVLC at their Stamford headquarters in 2012. The lunch-time event brought attorneys from across New York and Connecticut to learn about CVLC's mission and volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers from Sikorsky Aircraft Corp. and General Electric spoke about the personal satisfaction they experienced helping veterans in need. For information about bringing a CVLC speaker to your group, please contact CVLC paralegal administrator Lana Bluege at lbluege@ctveteranslegal.org.

Durham Football Honors Veterans

Durham's Coghinchaug High School football team honored veterans during their 2012 season by supporting CVLC. The Blue Devils sold commemorative "Veterans 1" t-shirts at every game to raise money.

"The honorary captain project is intended to provide a personal 'thank you' from the Coghinchaug community to those who have served and sacrificed," said Head Coach John Bozzi.