

Have Justice—Will Travel

Ending the Generational Cycle of Violence



NEWS WINTER 2019

Access to Justice in Vermont *By Wynona I. Ward, Esq., Founding Director, HJWT*



JohnnieMae Doyle, Administrative Manager; E. Robin Goodrum, Paralegal; and Wynona I. Ward, Esq., Executive Director



Laura A. Savall, Esq., Staff Attorney and Katie Jahne, Paralegal and Client Services Coordinator

Having meaningful and beneficial access to justice in the State of Vermont is essential for families, whether it is safety for victims of domestic and/or sexual violence, a person that is homeless, a parent in fear of losing her or his child, abduction of a child by either parent, or protecting a child's or a vulnerable adult's rights in guardianship cases.

The Vermont Supreme Court, the State's highest court, recently declared the month of November to be Access to Justice Month. The Declaration stated, “. . . ensuring access to justice in adversarial proceedings involving basic human needs, such as shelter, sustenance, safety, health, and child custody is one of the Vermont Judiciary's most pressing priorities . . .”

Since it's beginning in 1998, Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc. (HJWT) has diligently worked to bring justice to hundreds of disadvantaged Vermonters each year. The need for legal services for domestic violence victims and for those who suffer emotional and economic abuse, whether in Family or Probate Court is overwhelming in Vermont.

People calling HJWT seek an attorney and/or legal advice for a variety of legal issues including relief from abuse, divorce, parentage, parental rights and responsibilities (custody), parent child contact (visitation), exchanges for children, wills, bankruptcy, landlord/tenant issues, and guardianship cases.

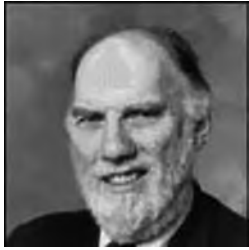
On November 6, 2019, *VT Digger*, Vermont's online nonprofit news daily, issued a commentary entitled: [Securing Access to Justice for All Vermonters](#). In that commentary, Teri Corsones, the Executive Director of the Vermont Bar Association discusses a recent report, “the first of its kind in Vermont, [which] shows that the Vermont economy gains \$11 in new or saved funds for every dollar spent on low-income legal services in civil cases.”

Corsones goes on to say, “The work of low-income legal services is the work of ensuring that none of us falls through the cracks and that legal protections meant for all are, in fact, enjoyed by all.”

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In Memory of Isaac Levi (1930 to 2018)

By Wynona I. Ward, Esq.



Isaac Levi, John Dewey Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University

Isaac Levi was the John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University for over 30 years. Isaac and his wife, Judy were summer residents of Vershire, VT, the hometown of Have Justice—Will Travel (HJWT) for over 55 years. They have been generous donors, advisors, and supporters of HJWT’s work from its inception. Each summer the Levis greeted HJWT staff for summer lunches and meetings at their home in Vershire.

Isaac was admired as one of the most creative and most fiercely independent-minded philosophers of the last half-century. His contributions to the fields of formal epistemology and decision theory and pragmatism are widely influential and greatly admired.

Among all the public outdoor sculptures on the Morningside campus of Columbia University in New York City, one of the most familiar is The Thinker (Le Penseur) by the French sculptor Rodin. Situated on the lawn outside Philosophy Hall, The Thinker sits with his chin in his hand and his elbow resting on his knee. The sculpture has come to symbolize wisdom and knowledge.

Directly behind The Thinker sitting to the left of the entrance of Philosophy Hall is a bench for students, faculty, and visitors to enjoy. On that bench is a plaque dedicated to our friend Isaac Levi. It says: “IN HONOR OF ISAAC LEVI, JOHN DEWEY PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY FROM HIS GRATEFUL COLLEAGUES. 1970 TO 2003.”

Isaac was definitely a thinking man, he was a kind and gentle man, a man who valued the world around us, and valued family life. To be around Isaac was to be with a man who always wanted to help those around him in any way he could. Isaac was an extremely generous man who believed in the mission of HJWT. We are truly grateful to have known him. He will be truly missed by all. ♦

The mission of *Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc. (HJWT)* is to end the generational cycle of abuse in rural families by bridging the legal, cultural, geographical, psychological, and economic gaps that exist for victims of domestic abuse. *HJWT* provides legal and supportive services for battered, low-income women and their children. Wynona I. Ward, Esq., the founder and director of *HJWT*, created an innovative, mobile, multi-service program that **assists victims of domestic abuse through the legal process, from the initial interview and relief from abuse order through self-sufficiency and independence.** This holistic multi-service approach to assisting rural victims often is the key to women first escaping the abuse and then moving forward to improving the quality of their lives and their children’s lives. Since 1998, *HJWT* has been serving women in the State of Vermont and is expanding to assist women who live in rural areas throughout the United States.

Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc.

Legal Services

Representation in court for:
Relief from Abuse hearings
Child support needs
Divorce and Parentage issues
Custody and Visitation hearings

Social Services

Safety planning/Shelter referrals
Financial advice/Creditor Plans
Assess financial needs of family
Referral for continued education
Referral for driver’s license
Agency referrals/Support services
Assist/Obtain subsidized housing

In-home consultations

Transportation to:

Court hearings
Social Service appointments
Supervised visits
Doctor’s appointments
Women’s group

National toll free phone line

Women in Transition

Women’s Mentoring Group
Life skills mentoring
Job and Parenting skills
Child Care Ideas/Assistance
Psychological support
Education about Violence

Supervised Visitation

Referrals for:
Supervised Visits
Exchanges
Parenting classes
Counseling Arrangements

HJWT'S Legal Empowerment Assistance Program (LEAP)

By E. Robin Goodrum, Paralegal and Coordinator of LEAP

The purpose of the Have Justice – Will Travel, Inc., (HJWT) Legal Empowerment Assistance Program (LEAP) is to address the legal needs of those Vermonters who are unable to retain an attorney.

Hundreds of Vermonters statewide call HJWT each year. Attorneys in private practice, family and probate courts, victim advocacy groups, Guardians ad litem, law enforcement, mental health agencies, social workers, doctors, nurses, and educators refer these *pro se* litigants (those who represent themselves in court) seeking legal assistance.

In the last several years, HJWT has received over 1,000 calls each year asking for legal representation, education, and advice.

HJWT established LEAP to address the need for long-term assistance to those women, men and children who call looking for legal advice and direction throughout the development of their case. LEAP steps in when HJWT cannot provide an attorney due to an already heavy caseload.

When LEAP first began Robin spent hours on the telephone with call-ins explaining the court process, reviewing forms, and discussing the appropriate way to conduct oneself in the courtroom. HJWT has steadily increased the advice and the hands-on legal services provided for LEAP clients by offering assistance with more complex legal issues at the initial response stage; including writing motions, complaints, responses, interrogatories, proposed stipulations, and with mediation and hearing preparation.

In recent years, LEAP also started taking advantage of the Vermont unbundling rule. Robin has reached out to attorneys for *pro bono* services, on a limited basis, to enter a LEAP case at a crucial point. One example is when it becomes apparent the client could not represent herself and the HJWT attorneys do not have room in their caseloads. These collaborations have greatly enhanced the result of the LEAP experience for clients.

Inquiries that HJWT LEAP receives can range from: *"I've got just a 'simple' question it will only take a couple minutes, I am representing myself"* to *"I live in Vermont and have visits with my daughter, now seven years-old, each summer. She lives with her mother in Nevada during the school year. She's supposed to go back in a couple weeks, but child protective services from Nevada called today and advised me not to send her back because her mother just got arrested for possession of drugs and is in jail for running a meth lab from her home. I have no idea what to do--you must help me protect my daughter."*

At this time the intake process begins, which can last from fifteen minutes (It actually was a simple question.) to three hours or more. Required information goes far beyond the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the parties involved that is necessary to perform a conflict check.

During the intake it is important to ask this father:

- Do you have an attorney? Does the mother have an attorney?
- If there is a court order, is it in Nevada or Vermont?
- Do you have a copy of the court order? HJWT needs to have a copy of the most recent court order so we can offer you the best legal advice.
- When was the last time you read the order?
- What does the order specify for parental rights and responsibilities (custody)?

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Robin Goodrum leaving work to meet with a client in her home.

A Heartfelt Thanks to Robin!

In 2019, HJWT celebrates Robin Goodrum being with us for 18 years!

Last week while pumping gas in Chelsea, VT, Wynona realized a client was also doing the same. Wynona took advantage of the situation and said, "Did Robin reach you about the change in the children's schedule?"

Yes, she replied. "I want you to know how fortunate you are to have her. She is super helpful and such a wonderful person. I always know I can call on her whenever I have any questions or need advice."

Everyone at HJWT and the client's she serves feel the same about Robin. She is dedicated to helping everyone she comes in contact with, whether it is a HJWT adult client or a child for whom she serves as a Guardian ad Litem.

So thank you Robin for all your spectacular work, and most importantly thank you for being you.

Providing Access to Justice for Clients in Bennington and Rutland Counties

By Laura A. Savall, Esq.



Laura Savall being sworn in to the Vermont Bar by The Honorable William D. Cohen, Vermont Superior Court Judge.

My job as Staff Attorney at Have Justice—Will Travel (HJWT) is attending the Relief From Abuse (RFA) requests, which take place Thursday mornings in Bennington and Friday mornings in Rutland. These mornings can have 5-20 requests at a time. The court has limited time from 8:30 a.m. until Noon to get through all plaintiffs' requests. I work with the local victim advocacy groups, (Project Against Violent Encounters, PAVE in Bennington and NewStory Center in Rutland) to assist any plaintiffs that request to speak to an attorney. I provide both legal advice and representation for Plaintiffs seeking Relief From Abuse (RFA) orders.

Commonly, abusers use the system against their victims. Many times they try to gain the upper hand by initiating contact with the court, emergency services, and even victim advocacy services. Abusers will try to use the legal system against the victim in any way possible.

Recently, I assisted a client unweave a situation in which the abuser was using the RFA process against her. Before I represented the victim, she agreed to a RFA without findings. This means the court does not take evidence nor does it have a courtroom hearing, instead it is an "agreement" between the parties. Here, she had agreed to an order because she wanted to see her daughter. She had not seen her daughter for several weeks

and would do anything in her power to see the child she raised for over ten years.

Unfortunately, her abuser took the RFA she agreed to and used it as evidence to get custody of their child. The court viewed her as the abuser and awarded her husband sole custody. She only got to see her daughter a few days a week and never over nights.

HJWT then stepped in to assist her against her abuser. We successfully vacated the RFA she had previously agreed to, obtained a RFA for her against the other party, and we are working on changing custody. Before she was represented, she was unable to effectively advocate for herself and her daughter.

Access to justice has recently been a hot topic throughout the Vermont legal community. The above story highlights the need for victims to have legal representation and advise so they fully understand their rights especially when in a position of representing themselves. If she had received advice previously, she would not have agreed to an RFA order, which indicated she was an abuser.

As I have completed my first year at HJWT, I find myself realizing not only how much I have learned, but also how satisfying it is to help victims start a new way of life for themselves and for their children. ♦

Serving Southwest Vermont – Bennington and Rutland Counties

By Katie Jahne, Paralegal, Client Services Coordinator, and Office Administrator

The Southern Vermont office just entered its third year of its most recent three-year grant renewal from the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women (OVW).

On May 2, 2019, The Honorable William D. Cohen, Vermont Superior Court Judge, swore in Laura Savall to the Vermont Bar. Laura’s mother, Betty Savall flew in from Wisconsin to attend the ceremony. Wynona Ward and Katie Jahne were also in attendance for this special occasion, which was held at the Bennington Superior Court where Laura regularly appears. **Congratulations Attorney Savall.**

Both Bennington and Rutland counties continue to see a high number of Abuse Prevention Order (APO) proceedings with over 360 being filed in Bennington County so far this year and over 420 in Rutland County. Laura continues appearing at Court on APO day to assist and represent victims in these hearings. We continue working closely with advocates from our dedicated partners at both Project Against Violent Encounters (PAVE) in Bennington and NewStory Center in Rutland to make sure victim/survivors are receiving support from as many professionals as possible.

Below are cases from the Bennington-Rutland office files (names and places have been altered to protect anonymity):

HJWT represent an elderly man in a Relief From Abuse (RFA) hearing against his wife and her son. The wife and our client’s stepson had been physically, verbally and emotionally abusive to this senior citizen. The wife had threatened to kill her husband in his sleep, which he believed to be a credible threat that his wife may have acted on. The wife had moved her son into the parties’ apartment even though our client did not want him there.

Attorney Savall was able to obtain RFAs against both his wife and his stepson and he was given possession of the apartment. The client’s wife was charged with two violations of a protection order and one violation of her criminal release conditions because she kept returning to the residence.

This man also engaged HJWT to assistance with his divorce. He feared retaliation from his wife because of the on-going divorce proceedings and the fact that she escalated when he was granted the RFA. With the assistance of HJWT the client was able to obtain a divorce from his wife and move forward with his life.

This client sent the following note to HJWT:

“I wanted to write to let you know how much your help meant to me for all your help with my RFA and divorce. I am so grateful to have you by my side. I was brought up in a family where domestic violence was unheard of, where you treat others with respect. Abuse is never easy especially from a man’s perspective but with your help, I was able to get through it with your hard work and dedication.

At my divorce you were fair, communicated well, and were able to negotiate a fair property division so that I can continue to live comfortably with little interruption to my day-to-day life.

I cannot thank you enough for your assistance, time, and effort. I wish you continued success in your practice in helping others fight abuse. I would not hesitate to recommend you to any friends or family members looking for an experienced attorney handling abuse and showing them that there is a better life and they don’t have to live in a bad relationship. Again, thank you so very much for your help and guidance and a special thanks to Wynona, Laura, and Katie.”

Laura Savall recently represented a client who had struggled with excessive contact from her abuser. Our client had repeatedly tried to leave the defendant for years, to no avail. The defendant would manipulate situations to get our client to engage with him further. He showed classic signs of power and control by showing up to places where he was not invited, calling excessively all hours of the day, and texting constantly.

The defendant continued to exert control during the negotiation process. Often times he came to an agreement to have an order without findings but at the last minute wanted to go forward with a hearing. Ultimately, we followed through with a hearing.

At the hearing, we submitted countless text messages from our client pleading with him to leave her alone. He continued to message her, however, drove by her home, and showed up at her work. The most drastic situation occurred when he used a ladder to get to her second floor balcony after she did not answer her front door. When confronted about using the ladder to engage with her, he replied that she shouldn’t have left the ladder out if she didn’t want him to use it.

The court found the defendant had abused our client and even made findings with a higher standard of proof than required by law. Our client felt vindicated and relieved that the court heard her story and confirmed that the defendant’s behavior was unacceptable. She now can live in peace without the constant contact and pressure to engage with her abuser. ♦

Making a Home for a Vermont Veteran

By Wynona I. Ward, Esq.

In the fall of 2013, the Vershire, VT (hometown of Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc. (HJWT) Town Health Officer came to Wynona to discuss the health and safety of the home of a 93 year-old resident. This senior citizen was my husband, Harold's last living aunt, Verna Ervin. Verna was a World War II veteran who received the Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.

When Harold joined in the conversation, we learned that the Health Officer was prepared to condemn Verna's mobile home since the roof was leaking and caving in, the floor was rotting, and she was unable to close her front door. From inside the trailer you could look outside through cracks in the walls. The Health Officer felt that for Verna's safety she would need to leave her home. Then, more than likely, Verna would be placed in a nursing home whether she wanted to go or not.

Previous to this Verna allowed very few people inside her mobile home which was located on a rural back road. When the exterior door would no longer close or lock, she tied a rope to it and had placed a chair against the door so no one could enter. The mobile home was packed full of furniture, appliances and garbage. Verna had no running water or septic system. She used a bucket for a bathroom and friends brought her water as needed. Verna could only hear the phone ring if she had her hearing aids in place.

After meeting with the health officer, Harold organized a "project" based around Have Justice—Will Travel (HJWT) being a 501(c)(3) organization. After spending many hours on the telephone, he arranged for a 1962 mobile home (10 x 40) to be donated. The 50 year-old trailer had been a one owner and was in good condition. Harold took photos of the trailer to Verna and told her she could live in it for free, on her own property, a short distance from where she currently lived. She agreed.

The excavation, gravel, and driveway culvert to prepare the site, as well as the moving of the trailer, and the addition of a small porch and skirting for the bottom of the trailer was donated. A new electrical box was installed, necessary wiring was upgraded, and a telephone was installed. Verna moved into the new-to-her trailer in early January 2014.

Verna truly enjoyed living in her new home with her cat. In the summer she loved sitting on her porch in the sun. She often spoke of the many wild flowers that grew around her home. The local newspaper was delivered every day and she sat for long periods enjoying the articles. Wynona arranged for a caregiver to come in twice a week to give Verna a bath and to clean the new-to-her trailer.

Both Wynona and Harold encouraged relatives and friends to visit now that Verna was settled in a suitable/safe home. Some of

Verna's friends visited on occasion and brought her donuts and cookies. One neighbor brought vegetables from her garden. Vershare, a community non-profit in town, delivered a senior meal once a month.

During summer 2014, Wynona took Verna to a local hospital to get new hearing aids. It was wonderful when leaving the Clinic to hear Verna say that now she could hear the birds singing! Previous to getting her new hearing aids, all communication was handled through a writing pad.

Wynona and Verna's friends celebrated her 94th birthday with her in her new home in October 2014. Verna continued to live in her home until she fell in the night and was unable to get up. Verna then told Wynona, "I have just got to get down out of here. I need to be where there are people around."

After a week stay in the hospital, it was recommended that she not live alone any longer. We were eventually able to place Verna in a local retirement home where she lived the last year of her life. She died at the age of 96 from natural causes.

But the story does not end there. The mobile home that provided a great home for Verna now sits on property near the HJWT office where it serves as occasional temporary housing for clients. In Vermont housing is extremely difficult to find especially for those on a fixed income. It came in handy recently when a client who needed to leave her home used it as temporary housing until she could move into permanent state/federal provided housing. We all know that Verna would be extremely pleased. ♦



Verna in her 1944 U.S. Army Uniform.

Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc.

is a nonprofit organization that operates exclusively on grants, fellowships, and private contributions. If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation, you can use your credit card on our website, www.havejusticewilltravel.org, or please make your check payable to: **Have Justice—Will Travel, Inc.** • 9580 VT Route 113, Vershire, VT 05079

HJWT is proud to say that it has provided free legal services for over twenty years in Vermont. It is a 501(c)3 non-profit—an innovative, mobile, multi-service model that assists rural families by providing free legal representation for relief from abuse cases, and assistance with all family and probate law matters.

HJWT offers Vermont victims of family violence a continuum of legal and social services. These services allow them to understand the roots of the abuse, leave the abuser, and achieve the economic and emotional self-sufficiency necessary to end the generational cycle of abuse.

Many attorneys walk in and out of the courtroom every day, taking their right to access the justice system for themselves and their clients for granted. They do not recognize that access to justice can be a matter of life or death for some indigent Vermonters who cannot afford to hire an attorney. Prosecutors, public defenders, and those who work in juvenile court, in probate court, in family court, or represent victims in the relief from abuse docket know this is true. They carry that burden with them whenever they are in the courtroom.

Not all cases that HJWT handles are a matter of life and death—but so many family and probate cases are filled with trauma, anxiety, and emotional stress. It is extremely helpful, especially when children are involved, for all family members to have complete access to the justice system, to legal education, and to legal advice to help them understand and navigate the system.

In order to continue providing services, HJWT depends on grants and individual donations to fund its work. Each year we ask that you give to HJWT so that we can continue to protect those who so desperately need our help. Any amount you can give, no matter how small, means so much to the many family members we serve so they can live without fear and abuse, and can strive to build a “normal life.”

Everyone at HJWT, especially the clients we serve, truly appreciates any support you can give. ♦

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- What does the order specific for parent child contact (visitation)?
- When was the last time you talked to the mother? Has she notified you of her current situation?
- Are there any abuse concerns or convictions? Has there ever been a relief from abuse order filed against either party? Other drug abuse concerns or convictions?
- If there has been abuse in the past what happened? Has the child been abused?
- Is there a child support order? What does that order specify?

The legal advice given and the process to follow depend on the law, but also on the facts and urgency of the case. This father needs to decide if he should:

- file a request for a relief from abuse order?
- file an emergency request for modification of custody?
- file a request to give Dad sole legal and physical custody and a request to suspend visitation with the mother?
- prepare for a hearing—available witnesses and specific testimony such as—child protective worker(s), law enforcement, teachers, counselors, or medical professionals.
- file a request to participate by telephone if the hearing is to occur in Nevada
- hire a Nevada attorney

With each step the complexities of the case become more and more complicated. It can take hundreds of hours from LEAP and/or from a HJWT attorney to assure that this seven year-old child is protected.

When LEAP clients call, HJWT realizes how important access to justice is for disadvantaged Vermonters. One single mother from the Northeast Kingdom area called asking for assistance with her child support case, after being turned away by other *pro bono* programs that could not handle her family law issue.

She wrote, “*I am very, very grateful for all you have done for me, you are the only help I have had, there is nothing else.*” LEAP helped this mother complete her financial affidavit and reviewed the opposing party’s financial affidavit. LEAP also spent several hours over the telephone and in person assisting her as she prepared for the child support hearing.

Another client wrote, “*You showed me what the court needed to know and how to say it in a way the court would listen, you helped with so many things one could not do on her own.*”

When clients let us know how much they appreciate the work HJWT does, we all grasp how important it is to continue our work, which fulfills our mission: To stop the generational cycle of abuse in rural families. ♦



Have Justice–Will Travel

9580 Vermont Route 113

Vershire, VT 05079

As HJWT moves into 2020, I ask

that you once again open your hearts and your pocket books to help continue making HJWT an organization that not only saves lives, but also gives families a chance to live without fear and abuse, so they can overcome the odds and obstacles, which confront them and move on to healthy productive lives.

(802) 685-7809 or Toll Free (877) 496-8100 www.havejusticewilltravel.org E-mail: Wynona.hjw@gmail.com.

Interesting information from a 2019 Vermont Study: **Economic Impacts of Civil Legal Assistance Programs in Vermont**

**Presented by the Vermont Access to Justice Coalition with Assistance from:
The Resource for Great Programs—www.GreatPrograms.org.**

The results of this study show that civil legal service groups provide two important benefits:

- They provide direct benefits to their clients through greater access to the legal system to defend their rights and to make meritorious claims.
- They provide indirect benefits to all Vermonters in the form of a substantial economic return to the larger economy.

For every \$1 invested in Vermont low-income legal services, the State and Vermonters see a rate of return of \$11, or a social impact return of 1106%.

This analysis reveals that Vermont civil legal aid organizations are providing essential services that help low-income residents of Vermont. Each year these organizations address critical legal issues directly affecting Vermont families, homes, incomes, jobs, and access to vital services. The gap between the need for these services and the capacity of these organizations to address them is profound.

The findings of this study demonstrate that additional investments aimed at bridging the “justice gap” not only will help many more people, but also will have dramatic economic impacts that benefit all Vermonters.

