



2010



WOMEN'S BAR FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT



MARIA DURANT 2010 WBF PRESIDENT

In January 2010, a group of dedicated women gathered to kick off the Women's Bar Foundation's 17th year of service to low-income women facing legal challenges related to domestic abuse, homelessness, incarceration and end-of-life decision making. As the Board of Trustees opened that first meeting of the year, many predicted that the protracted downturn in the economy likely meant that the demand for *pro bono* legal services in 2010 would be greater than ever before. That prediction turned out to be correct. The Board was equally concerned about the effect that the economy would have on the organization's ability to retain the grant providers, corporate sponsors and individual donors

who are essential to the organization's ability to run its five *pro bono* programs. Rather than sit back and let the economy dictate the extent to which the WBF would be able to serve low-income women, the Board committed to take action—purposeful action designed both to maximize the organization's existing resources and establish a strategic plan to strengthen the organization's program structure and build upon its base of loyal and generous donors in the years ahead.

In the pages that follow, you'll see that the Women's Bar Foundation not only weathered the economic turbulence of 2010 but provided *pro bono* legal services to more low-income women than ever before. Thanks to a resourceful and tireless staff, the WBF was able to sustain and, in some cases, expand its level of service in key areas.

On the financial front, we are pleased to report that many grant providers, individual donors, and law firm and corporate sponsors remained committed to the WBF's mission. The WBF even welcomed new donors in 2010 and looks forward to the opportunity to earn their continued support in the years ahead.

The years ahead will be guided by a three-year strategic plan adopted by the Board of Trustees at the close of 2010. The strategic plan is the culmination of a year-long effort that examined the organization's strengths and weaknesses and identified goals and specific strategies for carrying the organization through the current economic conditions while laying the groundwork to take more expansive steps toward growth and development in an improved economy.

A heartfelt "thank you" to the members of the Board of Trustees who decided, in January 2010, that the WBF's work would not be limited by a sputtering economy and to the WBF's dedicated staff, volunteer attorneys, grant providers, and corporate and individual donors for making it possible for the WBF to continue to serve the legal needs of low-income women. I am honored to have worked with the many people identified in the back pages of this report. Because of them, the Women's Bar Foundation is a stronger organization today with a bright future for ensuring access to justice for low-income women. We hope you will join us in the next stage of our exciting journey.

In 2010, the WBF, a private not-for-profit 501(c) 3, separate but affiliated with the Women's Bar Association, engaged in a strategic planning process that resulted in a more clearly defined mission statement. We hope that the new mission statement helps the legal community and funders better understand the WBF's mission. The WBF advances social and economic justice by providing low-income women with access to legal representation and a means to be heard. The WBF relies on hundreds of enthusiastic volunteers and generous individuals, foundations and corporations to help low-income women and their children improve their lives.

My daughter Hayden just learned about the life cycle of a monarch butterfly. The WBF's volunteer lawyers help low-income women and their children through very difficult stages in their lives—whether it's the divorce from an abusive husband that will set them free, the will that helps them come to peace with the end of life, or the legal information to

prevent homelessness—the WBF's volunteer lawyers do make a difference.

In much the same way as a butterfly, the WBF's volunteer attorneys follow a transformational cycle. Many of our volunteers begin in law school as interns, and then take on cases as volunteer attorneys, gain incredibly rewarding experience, and then, after they have made partner or even started their own law firms, they come back to the WBF as mentors. After an experience with the WBF, our attorneys often break out of their shell, much like a caterpillar, and realize that they have made a difference in the life of a low-income, homeless, incarcerated, or battered woman by helping them to secure safety, housing, peace of mind and freedom through the WBF. Helping attorneys find optimism in these pessimistic times, the WBF continues to help attorneys and donors re-connect with their idealism in a way that has a sustaining impact on the lives of a low-income women and their families. Like the “butterfly effect”, your



NICCI MEADOW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

individual, firm, foundation or corporate support of the WBF can make a large difference in the WBF's ability to provide low income women with access to legal representation and a means to be heard.

It is my hope that this 2010 Annual Report inspires you to break through your old skin, grow and take on new and exciting challenges to improve the lives of low-income women and their children.

FAMILY LAW PROJECT FOR BATTERED WOMEN



In 2010, the Family Law Project (FLP), managed by FLP Director **Rachel Biscardi** and FLP Staff Attorney **Lisa Jacobson**, responded to 1,662 calls to the FLP intake line. The FLP staff helped 228 women whose cases needed immediate attention by providing in-person meetings where appropriate, assisting litigants in drafting pleadings, preparing victims for court, setting up interpretative services, and answering legal questions until the cases could be referred.

In order to meet the increasing need for client referrals, the FLP recruited a record number of mentors—nearly doubling its mentor pool—with mentors who are experienced family law practitioners with an understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. As a result, the FLP’s *pro bono* attorneys, with guidance from their mentors, successfully represented clients for 130 family law and 209A Abuse Prevention Order cases.

Additionally, the FLP staff and more than a dozen seminal trainers provided family law and domestic violence training for 197 attorneys, which is the highest in the history of the FLP.

“Mary Smith” had a permanent 209A Abuse Prevention Order against her former husband, John, who served two years in jail for committing assault and battery against her. During that time, Mary obtained full legal and physical custody of the children through the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court. When John was released from jail, he used his mother’s mailing address to file for a restraining order in Connecticut seeking custody of the children. The Connecticut court, without knowledge of the past history of abuse or the Massachusetts orders, scheduled a hearing for both parties. Mary was so afraid of her husband that

she shook each time she saw him and had difficulty speaking.

The Suffolk County District Attorney’s office contacted the FLP and we referred Mary to a lawyer who was licensed in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. Mary and her volunteer attorney traveled to the hearing in Connecticut. After hearing from Mary and the FLP attorney, the judge dismissed John’s restraining order complaint with prejudice and maintained custody of the children with Mary. After the hearing, the judge complimented the FLP attorney on her advocacy and her commitment to *pro bono* work and offered her a judicial clerkship.

A FAMILY LAW PROJECT VICTORY

THE ELDER LAW PROJECT

Under the coordination of Volunteer Coordinator **Deborah Drosnin**, the WBF's Elder Law Project trained 30 lawyers in 2010 to prepare end-of-life documents (wills, health care proxies, durable powers of attorney, and living wills) for low-income elders on a *pro bono* basis. This year's ELP highlight was the opportunity to provide legal services to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRANDS), a program of Action for Boston Community Development. Through this program, 25 senior citizens were matched with WBF-trained volunteer lawyers to gain peace of mind through the preparation of end-of-life legal documents. ELP attorneys also conducted presentations about the importance of end-of-life documents to seniors in Boston, Cambridge, Roxbury, and Newton.

PEACE OF MIND FOR AN ELDER

For those of us who have achieved middle-age, the idea of being in charge of our own lives may not have the freshness and exciting appeal it did when we first embraced it as young adults. But for many elders in our communities, the daily exercise of their legal rights to decide where to live, to choose appropriate health care, or to pay bills is not something taken for granted. Often, the decline of physical agility and mental acuity necessitates the sharing (if not actual surrender) of the exercise of some of these basic legal rights.

When participating in the Elder Law Project, the contribution an attorney makes to the elder client and to the community is apparent. What the participating attorney receives is less apparent, but in my opinion, much

more valuable. The obvious benefits include practice in drafting documents and translating the client's wishes into effective legal language. But an important part of the role of counselor is the ability to listen, and, through the Elder Law Project, a volunteer attorney has the opportunity to listen generously to the fears and concerns of elders who are facing the end of life. By expressing the client's personal wishes in a legal document, the volunteer attorney provides another occasion for that elder to be in charge of her own life.

Many of my clients have asked for provisions falling outside of the usual boilerplate. One client wanted to donate her body to science. Another was curious about disposition of remains if he died outside of the US. All of these requests prompted me to learn about

these substantive issues. And all of my clients desired some discussion about the implications of others making personal choices for them when they may no longer be able to make those choices for themselves.

My participation in the Elder Law Project was a valuable contribution to the elders of my community, but it has also made me a more skilled attorney, and more significantly, a more skilled human being.

IRIS J. MELTON
ELDER LAW PROJECT
ATTORNEY VOLUNTEER





THE FRAMINGHAM PROJECT FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN

Co-chaired by Volunteer Attorney Coordinators **Barbara Zimbel** and **Elizabeth Brusie**, the Framingham Project provides civil legal information to women involved in the corrections system. In teams of two or three, volunteer attorneys hold group educational seminars, answering inmates' questions on a broad range of topics including family law, housing, benefits, and CORI. The Framingham Project operates at MCI-Framingham, South Bay House of Correction in Suffolk County, and two Boston post-release programs, Aid to Incarcerated Mothers and the Women's Re-Entry Program of the Boston Rescue Mission. In 2010, with the aid of law students from the Suffolk University Law School Rappaport Center, the Framingham Project launched the revision of a comprehensive volunteer training manual covering relevant topics in family, housing, benefits, CORI and immigration law.

FROM PRISON TO COLLEGE

Ruth was incarcerated at MCI-Framingham when her husband filed for divorce in a distant county. She was trying to represent herself at an upcoming hearing and was drafting a memo in the prison law library when she heard about the WBF's Framingham Project. Ruth didn't know how to ask for her fair share of an asset her husband was claiming for himself, so she attended a Framingham Project educational session at the prison. WBF volunteer lawyers helped her form an argument requesting a fair division of the asset. The lawyers also talked about how to request prison transport to the courthouse on the day of the hearing; if Ruth didn't appear, the judge could rule in favor of her husband by default. Ruth made it to the hearing with her new memo, and the final divorce order included a fair division of the assets. Ruth was later released from prison and now lives in a halfway house in Boston. She currently

attends college part-time, and, as a result of the fair asset division, will be able to attend college full-time when released—giving Ruth the chance to make a successful transition from prison to her community.

ELIZABETH BRUSIE
FRAMINGHAM PROJECT CO-CHAIR AND
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY

THE WBF CONTINUED TO PROVIDE RESOURCES &
SUPPORT TO THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS :

WOMEN'S LUNCH PLACE PROJECT

The Women's Lunch Place Project of the WBF continued to share legal information and resources with the guests and dedicated staff members of the Women's Lunch Place. In 2010, WBF volunteer attorneys educated more than 30 WLP guests about topics including: student loans and disability, criminal offender record information, family law, criminal law and restraining orders under MGL c. 209A, immigration and landlord/tenant law. Many of the WLP's guests are from vulnerable communities, including low-income women, women of color, women with disabilities, women in the LGBTQ community, immigrant women, and elderly women. The WBF also continued collaborating with the Volunteer Lawyers Project to help improve the WLP's internal advocacy capacity. Volunteer Attorney Coordinator **Nikki Stewart** passed the leadership torch to **Shani Rea Collymore** late in the year.

In 2010, the law firm of Dwyer & Collora LLP handled 7 warrant clearing cases for guests of the Women's Lunch Place.



HAMPDEN COUNTY HOUSING COURT PROJECT

With some support from the WBF, the “Hampden County Housing Project”, which is run by **Suzanne Garrow**, continued the long tradition of providing critical legal services to over 350 *pro se* litigants facing homelessness in Western Massachusetts. In 2010, over 20 different volunteer lawyers and 3 volunteer paralegals helped over 60 clients. The attorneys volunteered their time to appear in Western Division Housing Court on Thursdays (known as “Eviction Day”) to lend assistance to those facing imminent homelessness.

Volunteer attorneys with the Project appeared in court to assist low-income litigants approximately 40 weeks of the year in 2010. The Program issued a “hundred lawyer challenge” in mid-September 2010

aiming to commit two volunteer attorneys each week in Housing Court on Eviction Day to address the ever-growing need. The Western Massachusetts legal community met that challenge and, as a result, the Project was able substantially to increase the number of *pro se* litigants it served in 2010. With continued energy and commitment from the members of the bar, it is expected that the Project’s strong showing in 2010 will continue for an even more successful 2011.

LAWYERS STAND UP FOR THE WBF

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PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT THE WOMEN'S BAR FOUNDATION'S PRO BONO PROJECTS

LAWYERS STAND UP FOR THE WBF

The WBF hosted the sixth annual Comedy Night fundraiser on May 10, 2010. Master of Ceremonies **David L. Yas**, former Publisher and Editor-in-chief of Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly, emceed an evening of laughter and charitable giving. Lawyer-comedians **Stephanie Lovell**, Vice President and General Counsel of Boston Medical Center, and **Rick Brody**, founding partner of Brody Hardoon Perkins & Kesten, LLP, headlined the event. **Habeas Chorus**, a troupe of singing lawyers from Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, performed humorous musical parodies, poking fun at the legal community. Guests had the opportunity to bid at the Live Auction featuring such exciting

items as vacation homes on Cape Cod and in the Berkshires, a Boston Harbor boat ride, an ESPN tour and Rex Sox tickets. The WBF also hosted a silent auction which included theatre tickets, jewelry, restaurant gift certificates, and vintage wines.

The WBF honored **Seyfarth Shaw LLP** and **Deborah Drosnin** with WBF *Pro Bono* Awards. Seyfarth Shaw LLP has worked closely with the WBF's Family Law Project for the past five years to provide legal representation for low-income domestic violence survivors in their family law cases. Seyfarth Shaw consistently dedicates its vast resources, including additional lawyers and support staff, to handle particularly difficult custody disputes. With over 750 attorneys in ten offices throughout the United States, Seyfarth Shaw's *Pro Bono* & Philanthropy Department strongly encourages *pro bono* legal work by making a concerted effort to help Seyfarth attorneys find projects which reflect their own unique values, interests, and personal styles.

Deborah Drosnin Esq., a Northeastern University School of Law professor and a former principal at Jonas & Drosnin, was honored for her dedicated volunteer service to the WBF's Elder Law Project. Deborah has spent hundreds of hours coordinating the ELP. She has conducted training sessions for more than sixty volunteer attorneys, revised the attorney training manual, and made more than a dozen presentations to low-income elders about end-of-life documents. Her tireless dedication to the legal needs of the elder community is an inspiration to all *pro bono* attorneys.

THE WOMEN'S BAR FOUNDATION WOULD LIKE TO THANK ITS 2010 COMEDY NIGHT SPONSORS

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Nemens, Katherine
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Serrato, Veronica
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Domestic Violence Prevention Program

Liberty Mutual Insurance Company Legal Department

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TOTAL
INCOME \$288,799



FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES ¹

\$118,241



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\$107,000

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¹ NUMBERS INCLUDE DIRECT COSTS

JANUARY 1
DECEMBER 31 2010

TOTAL
EXPENSES \$296,063

EXPENSES*



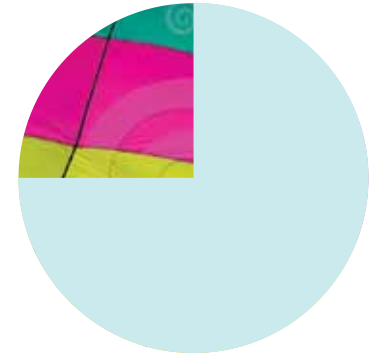
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