

'Desperate situations'

Janet Buckmaster works the front lines of women fleeing domestic violence

AMANDA WALDROUPE
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Janet Buckmaster remembers helping a woman who was a victim of domestic violence while Buckmaster was a paralegal in Northern California 30 years ago. The woman was in her 30s, and her husband was in his 60s. She came to Buckmaster on "this horrible cold December day," and told Buckmaster that when her husband drank, he started to point his gun at her and her kids. Buckmaster helped the woman get a restraining order, and the office Buckmaster worked for at the time helped the woman with her divorce case.

When Buckmaster returned to work after a vacation in August of the next year, she read the local paper and learned that the husband had shot the woman five times, killing her.

Buckmaster says that when she goes to work every day, she thinks to herself that she might read about one of her clients in the paper a few weeks or months down the line.

"I've only experienced that once or twice more since I've been here, or at least that I'm aware of, which surprises me," Buckmaster says.

Working as a paralegal for Legal Aid Services of Portland, which provides legal assistance to low-income individuals living in Multnomah County, Buckmaster helps survivors of domestic violence obtain restraining orders, divorces and other legal assistance. On Oct. 9, Buckmaster, along with Rachel Payton, was awarded the Judge Herrell Award for Outstanding Collaborative Efforts to End Family Violence.

Amanda Waldroupe: *How have things changed in the 30 years that you have provided assistance to survivors of domestic violence?*

Janet Buckmaster: People would come in and want a protection order or a



"When you've got an abuser who was abused as a child, and grew up in that element, and that's all this person knows. And you layer that with drugs and alcohol. The behavior issues are still there and alcohol and drugs exacerbate that. I don't know how to stop that type of person. But that's no reason for us to stop trying."

restraining order, and we would basically say, sure. We can help you with that. But it's a piece of paper, and there's no enforceability. Even though someone got a restraining order, the abuser could violate it again and again. That's certainly changed now. Although it's still a piece of paper and it's still not magic and largely depends on the abuser's determination to do something to the survivor...there are legal consequences. The police are a lot more

involved now, more responsive. The courts are more aware. Certainly, it's come a long way. It's a lot better.

A.W.: *What are the legal needs of survivors of domestic violence?*

J.B.: Oh my goodness. People need legal protection. They need housing. They need access to governmental benefits. It's basic survival stuff that you would see of the homeless community ... We see families who are essentially on the streets.

A.W.: *What are the criteria to accept a case?*

J.B.: There's an initial screening done when someone comes in. They have to meet the federal low-income guidelines. They have to live in Multnomah County or have a court case that is already filed in Multnomah County.

A.W.: *What led you to doing the work you do?*

J.B.: I'd always worked primarily with family law matters — doing divorces cases and custody cases. To a large extent, our client population in the family law area has an element of domestic violence. But, several years ago ... funding was reduced overall and we were kind of forced to prioritize the types of cases that we handle in the family law section. We decided to focus on the cases that involved domestic violence.

those cases that involved the element of domestic violence.

A.W.: *Is domestic violence something that makes a case legally complicated?*

J.B.: Not in and of itself, but you're dealing with people who are just in desperate situations.

A.W.: *The award ceremony emphasized collaborative partnerships between organizations that work to help, in some way, survivors of domestic violence. Are those collaborative partnerships something that existed when you first began working in this field?*

J.B.: No, certainly not, and not to the extent it is now. It was much more difficult for people to get information or find out what they could do and where they could go.

A.W.: *How did it affect others?*

J.B.: I think we all felt isolated from one another. Before there was a lot of community outreach, and before the collaboration, I think it was difficult for everyone. We didn't know, for example, what may be available in the community so that we could make referrals.

A.W.: *What are your hopes for the One Stop Center's impact on domestic violence?*

J.B.: Well, certainly, I hope that it will eliminate a lot of hurdles, (and) centralize (services) for people. People in those situations don't have access to phones or the Internet, and it's difficult to put all of those pieces together. Hopefully, it will ease what they're going through.

A.W.: *Do you think domestic violence is something that can be ended?*

J.B.: That's a tall order, I think. Just given behavior patterns, when you've got an abuser who was abused as a child and grew up in that element, and that's all this person knows. And you layer that with drugs and alcohol. The behavior issues are still there and alcohol and drugs exacerbate that. I don't know how to stop that type of person. But that's no reason for us to stop trying. I get on my soap box about what we need is child care and support systems far beyond what we have. In an ideal world, I guess it would end. I don't know if I'll see that. I think great strides have been made in that regard.

A.W.: *What was happening at the time that you decided to focus on domestic violence?*

J.B.: We were getting a lot of calls (from) lots of people that had this element in their situation. Because we could no longer help anybody we could fit in because we didn't have the staff any longer, it seemed like we had to focus on the most difficult cases — the most legally complicated cases and

Kristina Smock Consulting

Research & Evaluation • Policy Analysis • Facilitating diverse stakeholders

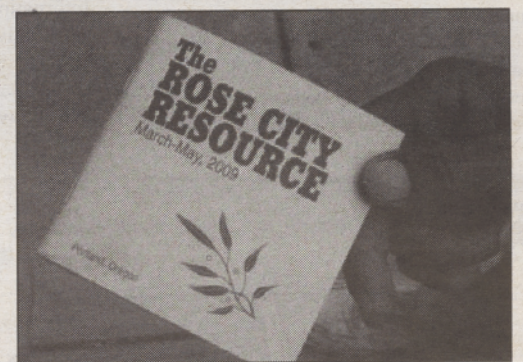
www.kristinasmockconsulting.com



www.streetroots.wordpress.com

www.rosecityresource.org

If you've ever found yourself in need of social services, you know how confusing it can all be. Long lines, limited hours, seemingly arbitrary eligibility criteria, going from place to place to connect the dots in hopes of getting the help you need.



The Rose City Resource makes it all just a little bit easier. The 100-page booklet records the hours and locations of basic services including shelters, meals, and health clinics, as well as advocacy and long-term solutions such as recovery programs, legal aid, and transitional housing. The guide includes more than 350 listings in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties and is now available in both English and on the Web. Every year, the pocket-size guide helps thousands of individuals and families independently access the services they need.

The Rose City Resource is partially funded through partnerships with the City of Portland and 211 Info. But to keep updating and publishing this all-in-one resource, Street Roots needs community support. The guides are more important than ever. While programs are shifting and shrinking, many people are finding themselves in need of services for the first time. Your support will keep the Rose City Resource in the hands of the people who need them.

Donations of any size are welcome! We are also looking for Rose City Sponsorships of \$1,000 - \$5,000. For more information, call Israel Bayer at 503-228-5657.