



PHOTOS BY KIM

SHE/HER/HERS

# Jessica Mindlin

BY DENISE SZOTT  
Contributing writer

“We believe survivors.” That’s the core principle at the Victim Rights Law Center, which was the first – and still is one of the very few – legal nonprofits in the country devoted exclusively to providing free legal services to sexual assault

survivors.

“Our clients are courageous. They’re inspiring. That they trust us with their experiences and believe in our ability to help them is truly humbling,” said Jessica Mindlin, director of the VRLC’s Oregon office.

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vors,” she said. “Dedicated colleagues bring passion, dedication and heart to this work every day.”

About six years ago, VRLC brought more intentionality to serving the LGBTIQ+ communities when it launched a project providing legal services to trans sexual assault survivors in Oregon. They also dedicate funds to help pay for new identity documents, because money can be a major barrier to survivor safety and privacy.

“I’m proud of this project, which was groundbreaking in Oregon, and that we can help trans people secure ID documents to reclaim the dignity everyone deserves,” Mindlin said.

To improve service providers’ response to LGBTIQ+ survivors, they held listening sessions with survivors and their allies. One of the outcomes was a series of tip sheets for Oregon providers. They address issues like how to make their space welcoming, using correct pronouns, providing a script for asking questions about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and examining database and intake forms to reflect a more inclusive and respectful approach.

Since 2017, VRLC has worked with consultants on racial equity, diversity and inclusion. Those efforts focused predominantly on race, but conversations now center on disability.

The organization’s leadership plays an integral role. As director, Mindlin wrote the grants that have supported their efforts and has overseen hiring a team of eight to 10 people.

“I would love to have the resources to engage in more outreach to the communities. Visibility is so important. Delivering this message takes time, staff and financial resources,” Mindlin said.

The center is trying to address an overall lack of diversity in the legal field by paying a partial stipend to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to participate in summer internships. These provide experience that can leverage job opportunities after law school.

“I am optimistic and resilient. I couldn’t be doing the work I do for the past 40 years if I weren’t. The work we do is fundamentally heartbreaking, but I’ve seen extraordinary changes come about,” Mindlin said. “There’s a long, long, way to go but compared to the 1950s and 1960s, we have come a long way. It helps to remember that while it’s slow, change is in process.”

## CLOSER LOOK

**Name:** Jessica Mindlin

**Company:** Victim Rights Law Center

**Job title:** Director, Oregon office; National Director of Training and Technical Assistance

**Program highlights:** The Victim Rights Law Center provides free legal services to sexual assault survivors and provides financial and other help to trans people for securing new identity documents.