

SLSLS Press

Because every survivor deserves a lawyer by their side.

We've Grown and Moved

In January, we welcomed **Kimberly Birdwell** as our new Director of Community Engagement! Kim previously spent 28 years working at the Family Court of St. Louis County in various roles, including as the Victim Advocacy Project Director. In that capacity, she helped to develop a program aimed at providing criminal justice advocacy and crisis intervention services for crime victims. Kim is already developing and maintaining SLSLS' relationships with both traditional victim service providers and non-traditional community partners. Through these relationships, SLSLS will ensure that survivors, particularly those from marginalized communities, are aware of and have access to free legal services and other supportive resources.

In December, we moved into an office of our very own in Olivette to accommodate our expanding team! Our new mailing address is **P.O. Box 8329, St. Louis, MO 63132**. We are incredibly grateful to **Carmody MacDonald P.C., Gray Design Group Inc.,** and the **Incarnate Word Foundation** for generously donating all of our beautiful office furniture and helping us create a welcoming, functional space for clients and staff.

SLSLS is extremely grateful for the incredible generosity of **MERS Goodwill** for providing SLSLS' first home for the past three years.



Kimberly Birdwell,
*Director of Community
Engagement*

SLSLS Staff

Michael D Burton
*Founder and
Executive Director*

Tali Katz
Deputy Executive Director

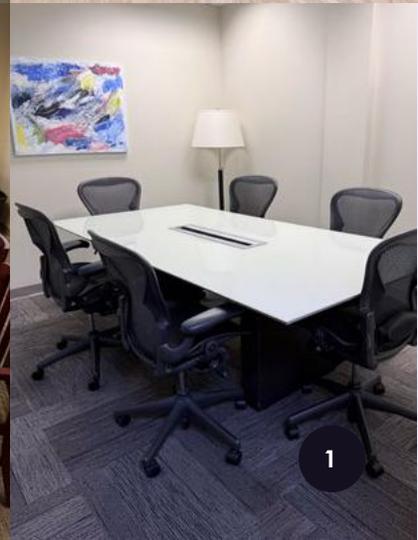
Emma Remtula
Director of Client Services

Kimberly Birdwell
*Director of Community
Engagement*

John DeMoor
Custody Attorney

Aruna Tailor
*Outreach Advocate/
Specialist in Immigration
Services (OASIS)*

Kylie Cain
Office Administrator



2025 Achievements

2025: A Year of Growth, Recognition, and Impact

This year marked a turning point for SLSLS. We received national recognition from the **U.S. Department of Justice** and the **Office on Violence Against Women**, which awarded us a significant **federal grant** to expand legal assistance for victims of intimate partner violence.

With this support, we are launching **The Custody Project** — an initiative designed to address one of the most significant gaps facing survivors in St. Louis County: representation in child custody proceedings.

While Orders of Protection provide immediate safety, they rarely resolve long-term custody issues. Custody litigation often becomes the primary vehicle through which abusers continue exerting control. Yet, the vast majority of survivors who seek custody determinations proceed without legal representation, deepening power imbalances and risking outcomes that compromise safety and stability.

SLSLS has a robust volunteer network to represent survivors in Orders of Protection litigation, but the complexity and time demands of custody cases exceed volunteer capacity. The Custody Project directly addresses that gap — with the ultimate goal of securing favorable custody determinations that protect both survivors and their children.

The federal grant supports two new positions:

- A **Custody Attorney**, expanding the legal protections available to individual survivors.
- A **Director of Community Engagement**, engaging community partners including courts, hospitals, schools, community-based organizations, faith communities, and civic institutions to achieve earlier survivor identification, streamlined referral pathways, cross-sector training, and increased awareness of free legal services.

Together, these roles deepen our impact at both the individual and community levels.

2025 Impact

- Represented **135 survivors** in **172 cases**, completely free of charge
- Provided non-legal advocacy to an additional **132 survivors**, connecting them to critical resources and assisting with OP petitions and motions to enforce their protection orders
- Ultimately, helped **179 children** impacted by violence in their homes
- Encouraged survivors to pursue longer Orders of Protection — resulting in nearly **62% obtaining protection lasting longer than the standard one year of protection**

These outcomes represent more than statistics. They mean that families are safer. Children are more stable. Abusers are held accountable. Survivors have meaningful access to justice. *We could not do this work without you.*

A Community That Shows Up

In 2025, we also hosted our most successful fundraiser yet: the **Jim Holloran Memorial Happy Hour** at McGurk's Irish Pub, honoring one of our most steadfast supporters, the late Jim Holloran.

More than 200 supporters gathered, raising nearly **\$100,000** to sustain our mission. A highlight of the evening was the presence of 11 former SLSLS clients/survivors, who shared powerful stories of resilience and courage.



Chelsea's Story

“There were times I didn’t think I’d make it through, but SLSLS helped me keep going.” Chelsea, Survivor

Every Order of Protection represents moments people never see. This is one survivor’s story.

Twenty Years of Abuse – And Now, Twenty Years of Protection

They met in middle school, eventually married, and had children together. Over two decades, he was repeatedly incarcerated for his 23 felony convictions and 10 pending felony cases.

She believed that if he got sober, they could still be a family. But, it only got worse.

It Started With “Not That Bad”

As a teen, he punched her leg. As an adult, he punched her face, leaving bilateral black eyes.

He controlled when she showered or shaved her legs – and only let her wear makeup to cover her bruises.

Postpartum And Powerless

Days after a C-section, he beat her for refusing to go to Home Depot.

He struck her in the back of the head with a metal pole. She was holding their baby.

At a dollar store buying diapers, he bit her face to silence her pleas for help – then stole her phone and keys, leaving her and their newborn stranded in the parking lot.

He drowned their cat.

Living Under Surveillance

During her second pregnancy, he installed hidden apps to monitor her. He disabled her car. She became ill at the sound of his truck pulling up.

He held a gun to her head and said, “I can’t believe you’re making me do this.”

Escalation to Severe Assault

After their second child was born, he punched her until her head went numb. “I always tried to be quiet so the kids wouldn’t know what he was doing to me.”

He kicked her in the face, breaking her jaw – then made her listen to recordings he had secretly made of her before she could go to the hospital. She needed multiple jaw surgeries.

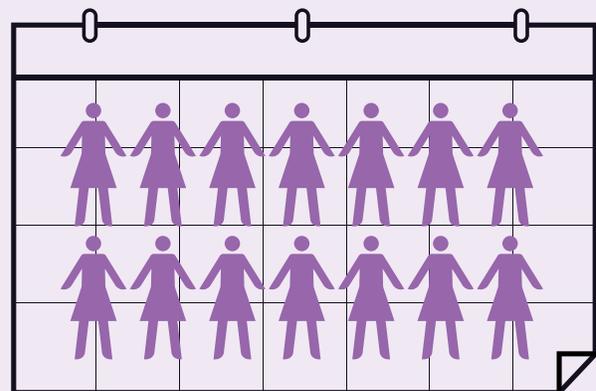
Seeking Protection

During one of his incarcerations, she rebuilt her life: therapy, nursing school, a new apartment.

He told their daughter that he would hurt mommy when he got out of prison. *She filed for an Order of Protection. He hired a lawyer and threatened to have her nursing license revoked.*

With SLSLS’ representation, she was granted a 10-year Order of Protection that will automatically renew for another 10 years.

“There were times I didn’t think I’d make it through, but SLSLS helped me keep going.”



In **32 months** of operations, SLSLS has provided free legal services to survivors in **438 cases**, averaging **14 cases per month**.

Volunteer Spotlight



“My first few times volunteering, I shadowed attorneys more experienced in this area of law. I learned how to build a case from the ground up. Now, I am a “veteran” volunteer attorney and I mentor newer volunteers. Helping victims obtain the protection they need over the past two years has been one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve St. Louis through this organization and look forward to representing victims of intimate partner violence for many years to come.”

Nicole Wurm (Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner)



“It is so rewarding to use my legal skills to make a meaningful difference in someone’s life in such an immediate and tangible way. I had just finished an order of protection for a woman who had been displaced from her home with her kids because the father of her children had burned her house down. We were walking into the hall outside of the courtroom and I was still in lawyer mode, explaining the order, and didn’t notice her fall onto a bench and burst into tears. She cried and said, “I’m finally safe now,” and it was all I could do not to burst into tears as well.”

Kristin Zurek (Cordell & Cordell)



“I have been inspired by these women who have been able to find their voice to seek protection against behavior no one should have to endure. To be able to use my legal skills to assist them in a small way has been very rewarding. The sense of relief the clients display when an order of protection is entered is amazing to be part of and share with them.”

Thomas Magee (HeplerBroom LLC)

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Legal Support

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