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The SFVBA Attorney Referral Service: All the Right Stuff



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A Little Help Goes A Lifetime...

AS A CHILD, MARGO AKOPOV admits that her father's world of addiction and abuse were something she was blind to "for only in my lacerated memories do I recall the welded stench of toxic, sweat, and liquor that had stalked my father into oblivion," she says. "Guided by the countless number of cigarettes that fed his ravenous cancer, my father had ignited his own death."

Reflecting on her past, Margo exhibits an uncommon maturity and command of the language for a 17 year old, while expressing a longing for the days of her childhood innocence when the perceptions of her father's sicknesses were shielded by, "the jovial collection of ponies that had once colonized [her] bedroom."

But plagued by her "painful revelations," as she so keenly puts it, "I am convinced that no combination of words could feasibly grasp the nefarious connotation at hand. The dim years following my father's passing were languid, but I found comfort in knowing that the devious monster responsible for my father's life had been vanquished."

Throughout her childhood, despite her mother's best to protect the family from the abusive and often violent behavior of her father, it wasn't until Margo found the Boys & Girls Clubs that she felt she'd found a truly safe harbor. Before her introduction to the Clubs, she was overwhelmed by her



fears and insecurities. As early as second grade, she "...decided that [she] was absolutely insignificant." And that, "She had no power, no influence, and no voice."

Even her first few weeks "at the Club, she found [herself] constantly sinking into the same sulky chair in the art room, too scared to participate."

LAURENCE N. KALDOR
President



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Soon, though, it wasn't long before Margo's "fortress of invisibility and insignificance" finally came tumbling down, replaced by a safe place to grow and develop her confidence and self-worth, as well as an escape from the horrors at home. Through her art classes, she was able to develop her voice and find a vehicle of positive expression that gave her the tools to transcend her financial hardships and begin healing the scars of domestic abuse. "During my 10 years as a member of the Club, I was transformed into a new person."

Currently an honors student and a leading member of several clubs, including the Girl Scouts and the Dance Team, Margo joined the Torch Club in middle school, a move that steered her towards involvement in, and current president of, Keystone, a nationally recognized teen leadership program.

"The reward of helping a person in need is a feeling that I can't put into words," she says. "I've always felt obligated to change lives, and the Club has provided me with access to

About the VCLF of the SFVBA

The Valley Community Legal Foundation is the charitable arm of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association. The Foundation's mission is to support the legal needs of the youth, victims of domestic violence, and veterans of the San Fernando Valley. The Foundation also provides educational grants to qualified students pursuing legal careers. The Foundation relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the VCLF or to learn more, visit www.thevclf.org and help us make a difference in our community.

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do so. I want to encourage youth to dream big, no matter how small they may think they are.”

Looking forward, Margo hopes to use her public speaking skills and her rising position in the community to positively influence others to rise above their own situations, avoid drug addiction and thrive. She envisions “a world where the youth of America comprehend the vast capacity of what they can accomplish” and is optimistic about, “a world where teens don’t need to intoxicate themselves to feel significant in society.”

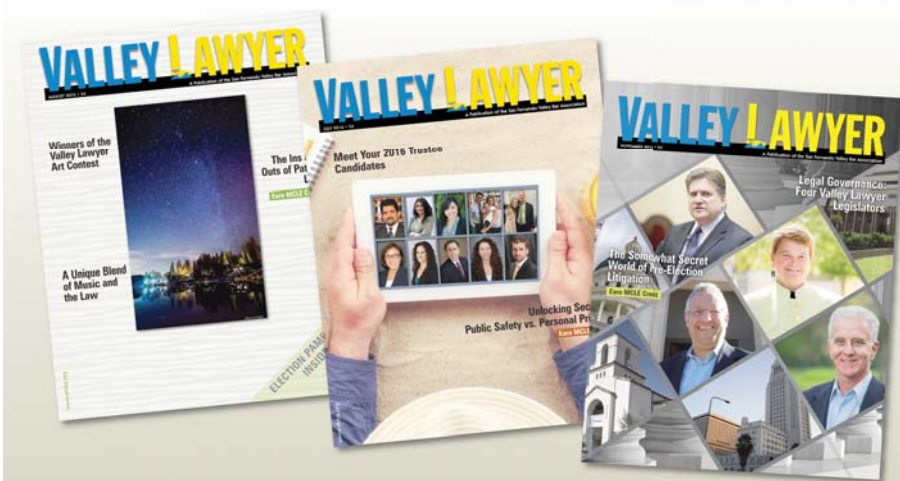
As National Youth of the Year, Margo inspires teens across the country, speaking about utilizing the Boys & Girls Clubs as an invaluable resource. Ultimately, her ambitious goal is to collaborate with Club CEOs across the country to develop a rehabilitative program for teens either battling substance abuse or coping with its destruction. Margo is optimistic and “confident that the monster pervading the lives of millions of youth will soon find itself face to face with extinction.”

Her involvement with the Boys & Girls Clubs transformed her into “a confident leader, well-equipped to take on the world,” with aspirations to “utilize [her] Youth of the Year title to express [her] everlasting gratitude for the Club by serving as an advocate for youth” and “inspire youth to get involved, so that the Clubs can do for them what it has done for [her].”

The VCLF at Work

Margo is just one of more than 3,000 local youth helped by the Boys & Girls Clubs, which are funded in part by Valley attorneys through their support of the Valley Community Legal Foundation. “The Boys & Girls Club is a great example of an organization the VCLF proudly supports,” says VCLF President Laurence Kaldor. “They are providing great and necessary services to our community, and we are proud to support their efforts.” 

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Defamation, The Play

By Anngel Benoun, VCLF Board Member



ON FEBRUARY 13, THE VALLEY Community Legal Foundation of the SFVBA was proud to sponsor a performance of the nationally acclaimed production of *Defamation* for more than 200 students from Reseda High School and James Monroe High School Law Magnets, Canoga Park High School, Hale Middle School, and the eighth grade class of St. Bernardine of Siena Elementary School.

Held in the auditorium of St. Bernardine of Siena Church, students were welcomed to a pre-performance reception, followed by a pre-play discussion with case studies led by SFVBA President Kira Masteller and VCLF President Laurence Kaldor about the meaning of defamation.

Once the six performers entered the stage and the play began, students were riveted by the brilliant and shifting jigsaw puzzle of a courtroom drama that explored the highly charged issues

of race, religion, gender, class and how the law applies. The students were engaged throughout the play because they knew that they were not just there as spectators, but would serve as the jury to deliberate the case and render a verdict.


A lively discussion followed the play, with excellent interaction between the performers and the students as they deliberated the merits of the case between the plaintiff and defendant, ultimately delivering a verdict. Students were heard leaving the event saying how much they enjoyed themselves and one excited James Monroe student went so far as to say it “was the best event “ he’s attended in high school.

“My students loved the play,” said Reseda’s Magnet Coordinator Alyse Cayen. “There was nothing but positive feedback about the event.”

Fundraising efforts by the Foundation and Reseda and James

Monroe High Schools yielded about \$4,000 in donations, just short of the \$6,000 goal set by the VCLF. “This is exactly the type of educational, thought-provoking and informative work that both the Bar and the Foundation should be supporting,” exclaimed Kaldor. “I was truly blown away by the attentiveness of the students as well as their articulated insights and discussions following the performance.”

Kaldor concluded, “We are immensely proud of the support we have received from our loyal donors in order to make this production happen, and we are all looking forward to more events like this one in the future.”

Many thanks to St. Bernardine of Siena Catholic Church and its incredible support team for providing the venue, especially Facility Manager Jean Sampson for her tremendous help and efforts. 





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