

# Strategic Collaborations

## South Texas College of Law

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Rockwell Fund, Inc. (RFI) has enjoyed a long-standing partnership with South Texas College of Law (STCL), a private, nonprofit law school founded in 1923. Its mission is to provide an accessible legal education, distinguished by its excellence, to a diverse body of students committed to serving their communities and the profession.

Since 1965, RFI has funded STCL projects ranging from scholarships to library expansion. In 2001, however, RFI approached the school with a proposal to augment the funding of STCL's General Civil Clinic, which has been providing representation to indigent residents of the Houston metropolitan area since 1990. While the Clinic traditionally had focused on indigent Social Security, disability and family law issues, RFI offered to fund the Clinic's expansion to include legal assistance to battered and homeless women.

STCL was immediately interested in the offer, and a meeting was held with STCL, Clinic staff and RFI to discuss the design of the program. In the end, Rockwell agreed to fund not only the necessary attorney salaries, office space and attendant overhead, but also to provide litigation expenses that legal aid clinics often struggle to find. As STCL staff pointed out, the threat of litigation is an empty one if your opponent knows that you cannot fund it.

RFI's intention in designing the program was not only to benefit STCL students but also the clients of local agencies that serve battered and homeless women. Beginning with the vulnerable populations served by Star of Hope Transitional Living Center, the Clinic has expanded its scope to include The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

The Clinic's partnership with these agencies provides battered and homeless women with legal services to help them end abusive relationships and avoid homelessness, and include obtaining restraining orders and litigating child custody and property issues. Another goal of the Clinic is to acquaint South Texas students with the issues of domestic violence and homelessness and motivate them to be stay involved in pro bono work after they graduate from law school.

Star of Hope's (SOH) Transitional Living Center provides long-term shelter for homeless and battered women and their children. Residents of the center frequently have civil legal problems but no means of hiring an attorney, and the agency itself has very few legal resources to offer. The Clinic offers these services on a weekly basis. Meeting onsite with residents, clinic representatives focus on three areas of family law in which these women commonly need assistance: divorces, child support and uncontested child custody. In addition to the legal services, representatives also conduct legal classes and workshops at the center in areas such as basic legal rights, social security law, family law, debtor-creditor rights, landlord-tenant issues and privacy issues. The two collaborators have established a strong relationship and the legal services are now an integral part of the shelter's service delivery system to clients.

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## South Texas College of Law (continued)

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Newer partnerships have been established with The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, an organization serving survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and homelessness, and Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, an organization providing advocacy, legal representation, battering intervention and community education and outreach. The Clinic partners with these agencies in preparing legal outreach materials.

The Clinic also participates with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in a wrap-around program to provide post-release planning, including legal services, to women who are about to be or recently have been released from prison. In this initiative, STCL partners with community-based organizations like Angela House, which provides support services to women after incarceration to reduce recidivism.

Rockwell's investment in the Clinic's expansion now totals over \$1.2 million with the Clinic handling over 150 cases in this area. The funds have enabled STCL to help clients gain divorces from abusive spouses and rightful custody of children, among other successes. One client, a victim of domestic abuse, offered the following sentiment, "Words can never express 'thank you' for giving me my peace back...I will never forget what the staff and philanthropists did for me. I now believe in new beginnings. God bless!"

For more information on the College, visit [www.stcl.edu](http://www.stcl.edu).

### Project Partner sites:

Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse: [www.avda-tx.org](http://www.avda-tx.org)

Angela House: [www.angelahouse.org](http://www.angelahouse.org)

Bridge Over Troubled Waters: [www.thebridgeovertroubledwaters.org](http://www.thebridgeovertroubledwaters.org)

Star of Hope [www.sohmission.org](http://www.sohmission.org)