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AUGUST 2016 • \$4

A Publication of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association

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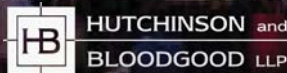


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## Miguel: Out of the Shadows and Proud

LAURENCE N.  
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**W**HEN ROBERTA BLOOM met Miguel in foster care, he was somewhat unique: he had actually chosen to be there. Miguel had come out as gay and quickly found his home life too toxic because of his newly declared orientation. As Roberta explained, "His family was okay with him being gay, but not that gay."

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) was assigned while

Miguel," Roberta shares, "I thought, 'How am I supposed to help him?' I'm an old, straight white woman. I knew that I needed to help him meet more people who had been through what he was going through."

Roberta reached out to the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center in Hollywood who matched Miguel with a mentor who could be both a friend and a role model. His attorney



Miguel's case was still being adjudicated and although Miguel could not bring himself to testify against his mother, he refused to return home. "When I met

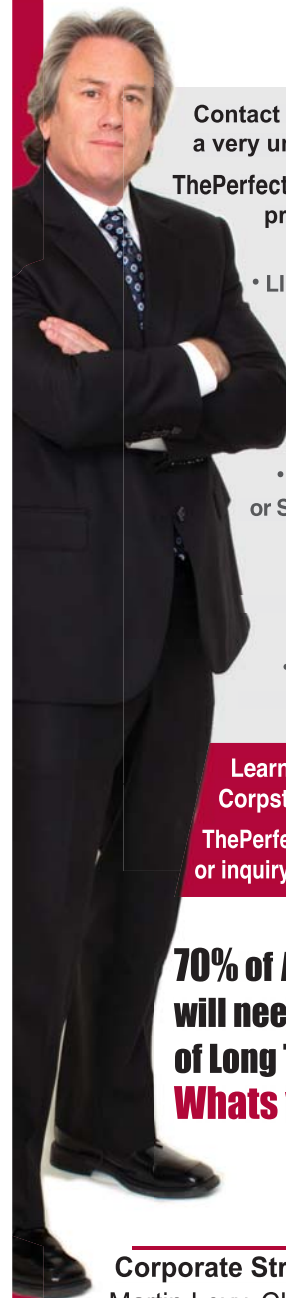
started the process of enrolling Miguel in Recognize, Intervene, Support, Empower (RISE), a project of the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center that

### 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 youths pursuing legal careers. The Foundation relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the Valley Community Legal Foundation of the SFVBA or to learn more, visit [www.thevclf.org](http://www.thevclf.org) and help us make a difference in our community.

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## THE VCLF AT WORK

The mission of CASA of Los Angeles is to improve the lives of children in the dependency system by pairing them with trained volunteer advocates. CASA seeks to reduce and reverse the effects of child abuse and neglect. Nowhere in the nation is the problem greater than in Los Angeles County, where 30,000 children who have been abused or neglected are under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court.

"There are far too many Miguel's in the San Fernando Valley that need our love and support," expresses Laurence N. Kaldor, president of the VCLF. "We are grateful for the continuous support that, you, the *Valley Lawyer* readership has provided—making a concrete and real difference for those less fortunate in the Valley. Your ongoing support allows us to help the next Miguel find happiness and peace in this world."

connects gay and lesbian youth in the foster care system with appropriate services.


Over the next two and half years Miguel bounced around between group homes and temporary placements. His grades suffered but he was beginning to build a support network outside the "traditional" foster care system.

As Miguel's support system grew, he began to find stability and success in other areas as well. He transitioned into independent living, got a job at McDonald's and did the necessary schoolwork in order to graduate. Miguel even reconnected with family in Utah, with whom he felt safe, spending part of his summers away from Los Angeles.

For Miguel, having a CASA was key. "Roberta helped me so much. I was living in a group home, and she helped to introduce me to so many people who wanted to help me."

In April 2016, Miguel did something he never thought he would do—he went to his prom. Roberta worked with Glamor Gowns and Suit Up to get Miguel outfitted for his big night. Miguel was able to spend one night being a teenager, without all the stress and responsibilities of foster care life. And then Miguel achieved something even bigger—he was accepted into college.

Miguel's story continues to be truly inspirational. He is graduating high school with his peers, going to college in Utah near his family, and he knows that his CASA team will provide support throughout. For Miguel, Roberta's role was simple: "She helped me to become comfortable with being myself."

*CASA is supported by the generous contributions of individuals, companies, and organizations. The VCLF is proud to support CASA and amazing people like Miguel and Roberta Bloom.* 

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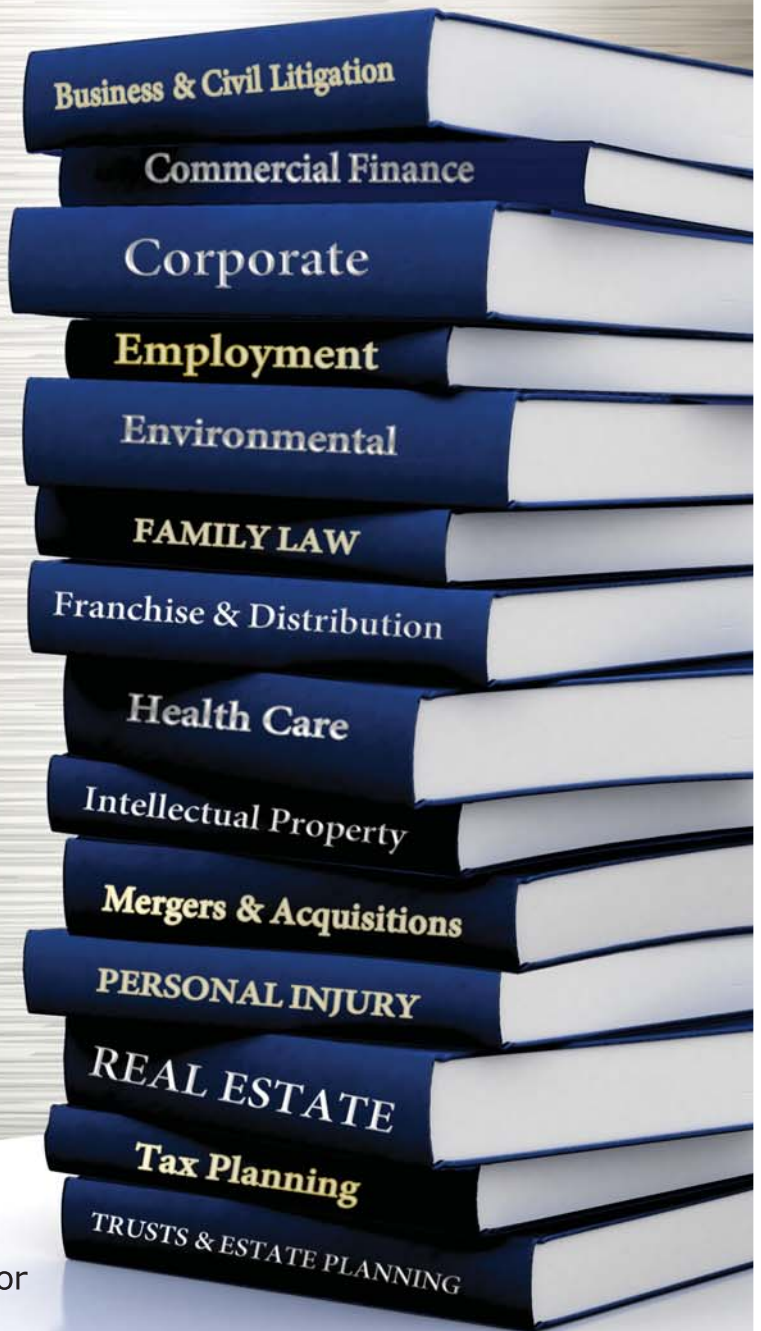
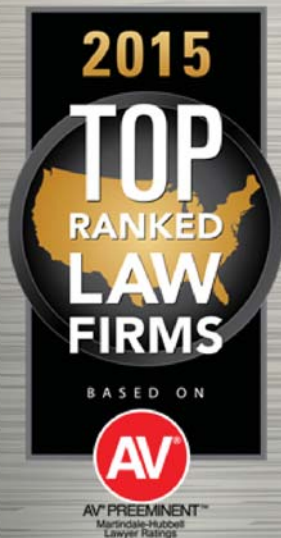
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