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# WVU law students help Morgantown man clear his name

December 14, 2012 7:00 AM

By KYLA ASBURY

MORGANTOWN – For the last two decades — even after his conviction was overturned — David Lazzell was required to place his name on the West Virginia Sex Offender Registry, until now.

Lazzell's name was finally cleared with help from the Innocence Project at the West Virginia University College of Law.

"For years the system failed me," Lazzell said. "But justice can be done."

In 1991, Lazzell was convicted of a sexual offense in Louisiana. His conviction was overturned in 2007 after the victim recanted her testimony.

In West Virginia, however, Lazzell was required to continue adding his name every year to the official list of the state's sex offenders.

"Our goal is to make sure that justice is served, either in the courts or by improving existing laws," said Valena Beety, associate professor of law and director the WV Innocence Project. "Only then can society — the citizens of West Virginia in our case — place their trust in the justice system."

Earlier this year, Lazzell sought legal help from the Innocence Project, and his case was taken over by student lawyers Derek Knopp and Andy Herrick.

Working with officials at the West Virginia Sex Offender Registry, they were able to permanently remove Lazzell's name and photo from the list.

"Mr. Lazzell came to us simply wanting to return his life to some sort of normalcy," Herrick said. "Sometimes it just takes some persistence and cooperation to get legal matters like this sorted out."

The Innocence Project teams a professor with third-year law students who are dedicated to post-conviction litigation and policy reform.

The Project investigates potential cases in the state and provides free legal representation to individuals with credible claims of innocence.

It is one of several law clinics at WVU that serve the public while giving students valuable legal experience.

"I'm happy we were able to have a role in helping Mr. Lazzell clear his name," Knopp said. "Fortunately, we were able to work alongside the people at the Registry to right a wrong that Mr. Lazzell has lived with for a long time."

For more information about the West Virginia Innocence Project or to apply for free legal assistance, go to [law.wvu.edu/clinical\\_law\\_program](http://law.wvu.edu/clinical_law_program) or call 304-293-7249.

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