Student-attorneys in the Family Law Practice Clinic

choose field placements that build practice skills and community connections in the areas of child welfare and advocacy and assistance to survivors of domestic violence, paying particular attention to the unique concerns of immigrants, LGBTQ communities, and formerly incarcerated parents and their children.

Last semester, Brooke Salvatore, Ruth Chung, and Serena Newell worked for the Juvenile Rights Practice at Legal Aid, representing children in abuse and neglect proceedings, while fellow students Alexandria Nedd, Plinileidy Abreu, and Matthew Routh served as defenders for parents in the child welfare system at Brooklyn Family Defense Practice.

A number of students had placements in domestic violence organizations. In her placement at Manhattan Legal Services, in the Family Law and Domestic Violence Unit, Jessica Matatey engaged in significant client work, in particular with immigrant clients, where she served as an advocate on custody, visitation, and child support issues and performed extensive motion practice over the course of the semester. At NYLAG’s Domestic Violence Unit, Maria Young drafted Family Offense Petitions, motions, and affidavits associated with immigration filings and focused on trial skills and trial preparation. She prevailed at trial by obtaining a five-year “stay away” order for her client.

The clinic also had two judicial placements with family court judges, where Angela Shamay and Chelsea Rodriguez performed legal research, and assisted a court attorney and judge with case conferences and with drafting complex judicial opinions in domestic violence cases.

Radha Desai designed a special project, choosing a placement at Sanctuary for Family’s Trafficking Unit, where she focused on exploring the intersection between domestic violence and human trafficking. She did research on criminal “vacatur law” for sex trafficking victims who are seeking post-conviction relief, and drafted training materials for Vacatur Law CLE Trainings of pro-bono attorneys. She edited affidavits for trafficked individuals, and obtained criminal court and immigration documents on behalf of clients from state court clerks and the Department of Homeland Security.

Another student, Kristen Zapalac, worked on a special project with the New York City Human Rights Commission, helping to establish protocols for fielding complaints arising from domestic violence discrimination. She also performed significant work assisting with the implementation of New York City’s Fair Chance Act, which provides new protections for persons with criminal convictions seeking employment.

Along with coordinated field placements, the clinic hosts a twice-weekly intensive seminar where students deepen their understanding of robust client advocacy and family law system engagement. Last semester the class worked on the “Family Defense Project.” In this project students collectively research, make presentations, and create advocacy materials on a variety of topic areas related to the collateral consequences of criminal convictions, such as protections for those seeking employment (e.g. Fair Chance Act materials). The next phase of the project will develop a plan to make these resources widely available.

L-R: Prof. Ann Cammett, Jessica Motatey, Maria Young, Alexandria Nedd, Ruth Chung, Angela Shamay, Kristen Zapalac, Brooke Salvatore, Kelsey Rodriguez, Radha Desai, Matthew Routh, Plinileidy Abreu, Serena Newell ('16)