

# SOUTHWESTERN LAW

for students, alumni and friends of  
Southwestern Law School

## CLINIC STUDENTS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE REAL WORLD OF LAW

When L.A. is the classroom, law students become heroes to children in need

For Jenny Rodriguez-Fee, an altruistic-minded student who was uncertain about her precise career path, they opened a way not only to truly satisfying public service but also a rewarding first job.

For Paul Isozaki, a teacher for three-plus decades who works in a tough high school with high-risk teens, they kindle vital near-peer relationships that give neglected youths a needed shot of care and hope.

For three mothers surrounded with troubles, they offered invaluable assistance to get their children off a path to ruin and to provide a real way forward to a brighter future.

The testimony is growing, the evidence builds: Southwestern Law School's three legal clinics – in Children's Rights, Immigration Law and Street Law – provide transformative educational experiences and services, say those who know them well.

**"Someone real is sitting there and asking questions, responding, challenging you. You're the lawyer now. You're not in a classroom. This isn't a simulation. What are you going to do to help?"**

– Professor Julie Waterstone

The programs allow law students to change others' lives and their own, all while giving these aspiring lawyers greater practical skills and professional polish and a fresh, invaluable grasp on the law.

Their clinic experiences expose students to well-meaning but frustrating bureaucracies, institutions, authorities, processes and practices. They also

enable students to serve and assist some of the city's most abused, neglected, downtrodden and injured people – all of them women, children and families.

Most of these clients lack financial resources, many are immigrants and all are in dire circumstances, with huge needs and without help. The law students and their professors provide for free thousands of hours of legal aid – research, representation, education, resource materials and other costs and services that are worth big sums.

"This has been my favorite experience at Southwestern because it lets me do something I love while learning more about the law and making a big difference in kids' lives," third-year student Joy Terrell says of her

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Yaretzed Anguiano counsels one of her Street Law students.

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work in the Children's Rights and Street Law Clinics. "I may not practice this kind of law, but I know now that I can never give up helping others with the law, and pro bono work will be part of my career for the rest of my life."

Gabriel Hall, a third-year student and Immigration Law Clinic participant, observes: "After years of sitting in classrooms and racing through school, I consider myself fortunate that the clinic lets me use what I've learned to help people who really need legal services and who are very appreciative and grateful for what I can do for them. It's very rewarding to be able to serve and help others."

### CHANGING LIVES

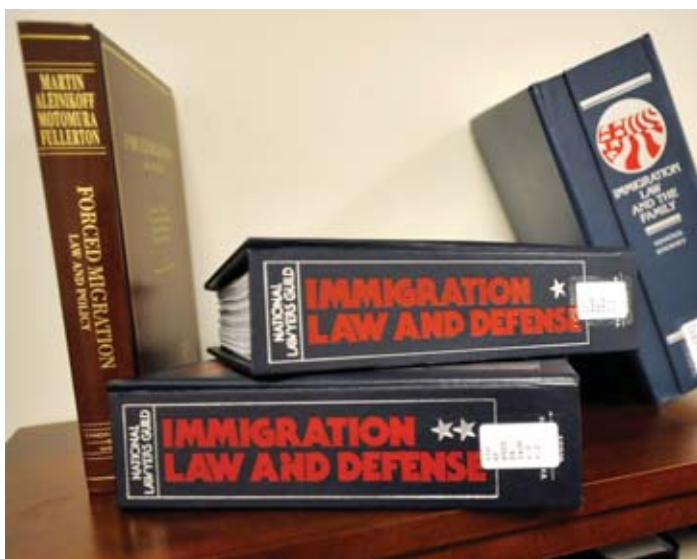
Each of the clinics has its own legal specialty and aim; however, they share many common approaches and goals, with helping real people out of tough situations a prime task and objective. In brief, as clients attest, the programs, now one- to four-years old, get students to solve concrete problems.

They touch lives when they do.

Client testimonials abound, though because the clinic cases involve children, teens, families and victimized women, they willingly tell their stories only if their names won't be disclosed.

Take, for example, the West Los Angeles mother, a federal worker who found herself thrust into an authoritarian nightmare when her second son was expelled from his high school. He was falsely accused by an intoxicated girl, who was confronted by school officials and was herself in deep trouble, for possessing drugs at a park near school after class.

"My son insisted he was innocent – and we knew he was telling the truth," the mother said. "I knew it because the people from the [Children's Rights] Clinic helped me establish that I had left work and picked my son up on the afternoon when he was supposed to be drug dealing. He's no drug dealer. He wasn't at that park. But based on a statement they had extracted from this girl – who didn't even know my son – they threw him and a bunch of other kids out of school."



It would take a full year, many meetings and conferences and even appearances before the school board before her son was fully exonerated and the incident was expunged from his record.

"Maybe other families might have the resources to pay an attorney to fight a case like this, but we don't have that kind of money," the mother said. "What was I going to do? A friend told me about the Southwestern clinic and the students were amazing. They were unbelievable in their research and preparation. They met with us often. They were at our side through all those meetings. They did fabulous work for us, helping us with stuff that my family just wasn't savvy at all about."

**"My [clinic] experiences opened up my eyes and showed me the real, practical applications of the law I had studied. It was one of the best things I did in my entire time in law school."**

*– Jenny Rodriguez-Fee '08, attorney at law*

Another mother, raising three children in the South Bay after a difficult divorce, also praises the Children's Rights Clinic, calling its aid redeeming and life-saving. The clinic has assisted her three struggling sons, representing them in formal school district disciplinary proceedings, advising about available assistance programs and generally acting as their advocates in complicated, daunting educational systems and processes.

"I truly love those people," the mother says. "With one of my kids, well, his troubles got really deep. I think he might have ended up dead if I didn't get [legal] help. The students worked incredibly hard for us. They made sure my family was protected and got things we needed. My kids are going to go on and be productive members of society – and that wouldn't have happened if the clinic hadn't helped us."

Indeed, the Children's Rights Clinic has successfully aided dozens of students and families, shielding them from arbitrary or harsh disciplinary actions or obtaining more and better assistance for them if they have special educational needs.

The Immigration Law Clinic has helped dozens of children and families – victims of grim crimes, abuse or neglect – win the precious protection of lawful permanent residency or a special U-visa nonimmigrant status.

"That help makes a world of difference," says a young San Fernando Valley mother, the victim of a gang drive-by shooting that left her blind in one eye.

Students have helped her toward becoming a legal permanent resident – a status she qualifies for under immigration law as a victim of a serious crime who cooperated with authorities. Her legal status, she notes, will not only improve her job prospects and her family’s economic well-being, it will pull her out of the shadowy, scary, unprotected world of the undocumented.

“I’ve never had help like this, and I wouldn’t know what to do without it,” the mother of two young children says of the assistance the Immigration Law Clinic has provided her. “What these people are doing for me, it will help me to take care of my family and to make a better life for us.”

The Street Law Clinic, in which law students teach critical life skills from a legal point of view to youths who are about to “age out” of the delinquency and dependency systems, has reached out to hundreds now. Isozaki sees the results, both as a teacher-client and parent of a law school student-participant.

“Look,” he says, “by the time kids get to this school, they have serious challenges. Some have been involved with crime, some are teen moms, some are wards of the state and some have other special needs. Some have parents or adults who try to help them. Many don’t. This is East LA. They get in trouble, oftentimes just because they don’t know better.”

But the teens – who because they grow up in a tough, poor neighborhood are slow to trust and can be poor judges of whom to ask for good advice – establish genuine, beneficial bonds with their Street Law instructors.

“I see it in class and when the law students sit down to talk with my kids,” Isozaki says. “The kids really listen and take it all in. It’s not some old guy like me talking at them; they’re absorbing what some smart, accomplished people who are near to them in age are telling them. They look up to them as role-models, as someone who is like them but who is getting an education and going on to a good life and career.”

Because they get carefully researched, accurate legal information by the

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“All of the kids had been through so much – with gangs, crime, drugs, being gay in a tough neighborhood, you name it. But there they were, admirable on so many counts. They made a real impression on us [law students] and vice-versa.”

– Justin Mikita, Street Law Clinic

**Clinical Directors (left to right): Julie K. Waterstone, Andrea Ramos, and Laura Dym Cohen**



## THE CLINICAL FACULTY

### **Julie K. Waterstone**

**Associate Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Children’s Rights Clinic**

B.A., with honors, Law and Society, University of California, Santa Barbara; J.D., Northwestern University; law student participant, Family Justice Center at NU Bluhm Legal Clinic; litigator, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy; clinical professor, Civil Legal Clinic, Mississippi Law School; creator, Child Advocacy Clinic, Mississippi Law School; staff attorney, special education cases, and instructor for lawyers and law students on pro bono special education matters, Public Counsel.

### **Andrea Ramos**

**Associate Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Immigration Law Clinic**

B.A., magna cum laude, Sociology, Arizona State University; J.D., University of Southern California; Directing Attorney of Children’s Rights Project, Public Counsel; litigator, Tuttle & Taylor; adjunct faculty, Children and the Law, USC School of Law.

### **Laura Dym Cohen**

**Associate Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Street Law Clinic and Community Outreach**

B.A., Communication Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara; J.D., University of San Francisco; specialist, juvenile dependency, Los Angeles County Children’s Court; trainer of attorneys for pro bono and law-related education work; past co-chair, Juvenile Task Force, Los Angeles County Bar Association; mediator, Consortium for Children; winner, 2007, National Street Law Educator of the Year Award.

## CLINICS AT A GLANCE

Under the auspices of Southwestern's legal clinics, students gain hands-on, practical experience with real clients and cases for academic credit under close, direct supervision of faculty who are licensed, practicing attorneys. Clinic students take on heavy responsibility for strategy and execution of an array of legal matters. For many clients, students work on cases from beginning to end.

In the **Children's Rights Clinic**, law students provide representation to low-income children in the areas of school discipline, special education and other education-related issues.

In the **Immigration Law Clinic**, law students provide representation to low-income children and adults in Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases involving children who have been abused, neglected or abandoned and who are wards of a juvenile court; and U visa cases involving victims of serious crimes who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse and have cooperated in the investigation or prosecution of the crime.

In the **Street Law Clinic**, law students provide group instruction and individualized counseling on critical life skills to at-risk youths, most of whom are about to "age out" of the dependency or delinquency systems, to help them successfully transition to adulthood.



## CLINIC STUDENTS *continued from page 3*

binders full – and most important, personal time and attention paid to them – his students, Isozaki says, “won’t get cheated when they go out and rent an apartment. They learn from the law students about everything from their rights on the job to how to stay out of trouble with police. It may sound silly, but some of these kids have never even learned that it’s not right to flip off a cop. The law students discuss stuff like that. Talking through and learning the consequences of their actions, well, that’s going to be big right there for these kids.”

## BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL

The clinic experience deeply affects not only clients’ lives, it can change those of the participating law students, too. In the clinics, “many students, for the very first time in their personal and professional lives, find that there’s a real human being who is looking to them to provide help and answers, based on their knowledge of the law,” explains Professor Julie K. Waterstone, Director of the Children’s Rights Clinic. “Someone real is sitting there and asking questions, responding, challenging you. You’re the lawyer now. You’re not in a classroom. This isn’t a simulation. What are you going to do to help?”

Students mature. They find that personal characteristics, attributes and practices can make or break them as lawyers, say Professor Waterstone, and Professor Andrea Ramos, Director of the Immigration Law Clinic, and Professor Laura Dym Cohen, Director of the Street Law Clinic. Examples? Students learn the importance of client service. They find out it is vital to return phone calls, to figure out a client’s schedule for convenient meeting times, to understand that complex language and fancy terms only confuse ordinary folks.

They’re tossed into hard contact with practicing attorneys, with teachers, parents, administrators, bureaucrats, police officers, court personnel and representatives of other governments and U.S. agencies. They’ve got to stand up for their clients and be their best advocates, students are reminded.

Professor Waterstone offered a gentle laugh in observing that her students quickly pick up the importance of staying organized, even as they’re swamped with and expected to master mounds of materials and to make many meetings.

Professor Ramos says they catch on to common lawyerly practices, such as keeping copies of every bit of client communications, especially letters and key case documents. With a raised eyebrow, she says her students fill out time sheets, not because she’s a stickler about tracking their activities but so they’re comfortable with the idea of billable hours.

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## BENEFACTORS TO A WORTHY CAUSE



Southwestern Law Clinic donors Harle Montgomery, Roger Lowenstein, Randall Renick, and James Coufos.

While providing invaluable services to the community, Southwestern's clinical program allows students to hone their practical legal skills and encourages them to pursue pro bono and public interest advocacy that will enrich their future professional lives. This dual benefit is of particular interest to a number of donors to the law school.

The Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation provided a generous seed grant to the Immigration Law Clinic. According to **Harle Montgomery**, whose foundation has a particular interest in supporting public interest law coursework and clinical legal education, "We are delighted to play a role in helping Southwestern provide critically needed legal services in support of human rights while giving law students hands-on experience and encouraging their continuing commitment to public interest law."

**Roger Lowenstein**, a member of Southwestern's Board of Trustees, has also made major gifts to the law school in support of the Immigration Law Clinic. A former attorney and television producer, Lowenstein established the Los Angeles Leadership Academy, a school whose mission is to create public sector leaders by preparing inner-city students for college and graduate school. "Southwestern is on an amazing trajectory, and I want to be part of the journey," he said. "In particular, I enjoy participating in all facets of the law school's programs that provide a window on public service opportunities for students."

"This is an exciting development both for the law school and for the kids and families who will find essential help there. From my perspective, an activity that helps children in need always leads to good things."

– James Coufos

Southwestern alumnus **Randall Renick '95**, a partner in the law firm of Hadsell, Stormer, Keeny, Richardson & Renick, served as Plaintiffs' Counsel in the Smokeless Tobacco Antitrust Litigation, which resulted in a significant cy-près award to Southwestern's three legal clinics.\* He said, "I think it is important to provide law students with a hands-on opportunity to learn the value of doing real public interest work while serving clients who would not otherwise have access to attorneys."

**James Coufos**, who serves on the boards of both Southwestern and the Alliance for Children's Rights, encouraged Dean Garth to consider establishing a Children's Rights Clinic at the law school and has generously designated an annual donation toward that endeavor. The former managing director of Goldman Sachs, Coufos said, "This is an exciting development both for the law school and for the kids and families who will find essential help there. From my perspective, an activity that helps children in need always leads to good things." ❖

\* **cy-près**: a court-ordered award to a charitable organization of the excess, unallocated, unclaimed or undeliverable funds in a class-action judgment or settlement, or actions in which funds set aside for reimbursement cannot be distributed due to manageability concerns.

## THEIR VOICES TELL THE STORY STUDENT ADVOCATES MAKE A DIFFERENCE



“For the foster youth we worked with, there are supposed to be all these people and agencies helping them. But you realize they all have so many kids assigned to them. So who is spending time with a kid, just asking, ‘How are you doing? What do you need?’ Many of them don’t have parents or adults doing it. So it means a lot, it can have a big impact if we do, if we give them lessons in life from a legal point of view.”

– Justin Mikita, third-year student,  
Street Law Clinic

“This is a wonderful experience because of what you get to do for the community. It also allows us, as students, to go into the workforce, to go to employers and say, ‘I’ve done plenty. I’ve worked with clients. I’m ready and you don’t need to hold my hand.’ That makes a huge difference.”

– Maria Palomares, attorney, alumna of the Children’s Rights and Street Law Clinics

“I wanted to see if I really was interested in immigration law. I came to law school wanting to do some good and this clinic is a great opportunity to do that, especially while I am not yet having to pay back my student loans.”

– Alia Saaed, third-year student,  
Immigration Law Clinic

“My children wouldn’t have had any support in their fights with the schools without those students. They really worked with them. They gave my kids their lives back.”

– South Bay mother of three and  
Children’s Rights Clinic client

“After years of sitting in classrooms and racing through school, I consider myself fortunate that the clinic lets me use what I’ve learned to help people who really need legal services and who are very appreciative and grateful for what I can do for them. It’s very rewarding to be able to serve and help others.”

– Gabriel Hall, third-year student,  
Immigration Law Clinic



“The students do a great job of presenting information to our kids to let them know they have choices, that they can make it in the world. They help make our kids more resilient, to let them know they have more control, and, that, yes, they do have real legal rights.”

– Dave Crocker, Vice President,  
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family  
Services organization, which has worked  
since the outset with the Street Law Clinic

“This is a really great program because it lets you get practical, hands-on experience, working one-to-one with clients. I really like being able to take the lessons I’ve learned in school back to real life. I like the feeling that what I’ve learned can help someone.”

– Brian Nguyen, second-year student,  
Immigration Law Clinic

*"Our law clinics help build students' skills, promote an ethic of public service, and help Southwestern as an institution contribute to putting lawyering skills in the service of disadvantaged members of our community."*

– Dean Bryant G. Garth

*"Not every clinic student will go on to practice public interest law, but they will leave here with a greater appreciation and understanding of it. They'll know the difference that this work can make in lives and we hope they'll apply that lesson when they're in their firm or when they're on the board of a nonprofit or when they volunteer their legal services."*

– Professor Laura Dym Cohen,  
Director, Street Law Clinic

*"The students spoke up for us in a way we couldn't for ourselves. They didn't back down – even when they had to go before the School Board. They were so professional, the board members were very impressed and they said so."*

– Westside mother and  
Children's Rights Clinic client



*"The clinics exposed me to incredible moments in families' lives, some of their most difficult times. I learned to be a professional and an advocate. I'm passionate about what I do, but I learned how to rein in my emotions, to channel it, to check it at the door if that's what my clients needed."*

– Jenny Rodriguez-Fee '08, attorney,  
alumna of Children's Rights Clinic

*"I was interviewing a client and he got confused. He thought I was getting information to deport him. When I explained that I was here to help him, everything changed. No one had ever tried to help him before. He really opened up and his personal story was very sad, very emotional. It's rewarding to know I can help people like him."*

– Bryan Dale Navarro, third-year student,  
Immigration Law Clinic



*"This has been my favorite experience at Southwestern because it lets me do something I love while learning more about the law and making a big difference in kids' lives. I may not practice this kind of law, but I know now that I can never give up helping others with the law, and pro bono work will be part of my career for the rest of my life."*

– Joy Terrell, third-year student,  
Children's Rights Clinic and Street Law Clinic

*"Everyone makes judgments initially about other people. But you learn from the people you meet in the clinics to set those aside or to throw them out. You see how people get to a place, how things outside their control changed their lives. And you get to help them."*

– Jenny Cohn, third-year student,  
Immigration Law Clinic

## CLINIC STUDENTS *continued from page 4*

Professor Cohen gets emphatic when she notes that her law students master early the concept that their research and lesson plans must matter for the teens they teach in the Street Law clinic – not for a grade or a professor or themselves.

“One of the things I notice most, in practical and academic terms, is that students really improve their writing while they’re in the clinic,” Professor Ramos says. Why? Because they’re not scribbling assignments for grades; they’re preparing crucial legal documents that others will see and that may decide the fate of a case and change a client’s life.

“In our immigration clinic cases,” she notes, “students prepare declarations that can be long and detailed. They need to research them thoroughly by talking to the clients, police and other authorities. They need to be clear, accurate and convincing. Students are assigned to read each other’s work and we devote class time to the process of critiquing each client declaration. They write and re-write them. And they get better and better.”

Then, of course, there are issues of logistics and boundaries for the law students.

The clinics can be time-consuming and demanding, with the appropriate credits and grades awarded for so much hard work. In the Children’s Rights and Immigration Law Clinics, especially, participants – usually in their second or final year of law school – can find the duties and responsibilities heavy.

“I treat students as if they were an associate and I’m a partner,” Professor Waterstone says. “I’m going to be more supportive and nurturing than what they would find at most big firms. But make no mistake about it: Students learn to take charge of their cases. We’ll confer constantly, but they create the strategies and plans. They drive the outcomes. They’re not taking a small piece of somebody else’s deal. They are responsible for what happens.”

Because all three clinics key in on a component of community outreach, public speaking and presentation, participating law students must juggle commitments and schedules to get around a sprawling, crowded city. They go, day and night, to talk to people about the law as they may just have learned it.

“We discuss common sense and safety a lot,” says Professor Cohen. “Students teach where they are needed for the clinics’ sake.”

All three directors said that for their students’ sake, a big, continuing part of clinic learning focuses on the challenges of attorney-client relationships, especially personal limits needed for a sound practice.

“There’s no way around it: The clients we represent, their situations are all bad,” Professor Ramos said. “They wouldn’t come to us if that weren’t so. The women have been beaten, abused or assaulted. The children and families are crime victims. We’re seeing young people, who, for whatever reason, have been abandoned. They have nowhere to go.

They don’t have families or friends who care about them. From the time we first start talking with them, there are lots of tears.”

For law students confronting the cold, harsh facts of the immigration or children’s rights cases, the personal experience can be unfamiliar, shocking, emotional, stressful, and even traumatic. It happens with law students in the Street Law Clinic, when teens they’re teaching get overcome and may flee the class if discussions turn to a topic such as abusive relationships.

“For sure, we spend lots of time understanding that lawyers need to be counselors, social workers, psychologists and more,” Professor Cohen notes. “But we really get into what are the appropriate and necessary personal and professional boundaries. Many of the youth we work with have so many needs. You’ve got to know what you can and can’t do – even things like giving rides or wanting to hug someone. No, think about that. We tell students that if they give out their personal e-mail or cell phone number, well, the youths will use them. If they’re in trouble and they call you and it’s Finals Week, how will you react?”

**“What these people are doing for me,  
it will help me to take care of my family and  
to make a better life for us.”**

*– Parent/Client of the Immigration Law Clinic*

## A LIFE-CHANGING OUTLOOK ON THE LAW

Rodriguez-Fee had taken and enjoyed the Southwestern class on children’s rights and special education. Then she signed up for the Children’s Rights Clinic, and her life hasn’t been the same since.

“My [clinic] experiences opened up my eyes and showed me the real, practical applications of the law I had studied,” she says. “It was one of the best things I did in my entire time in law school.”

She had hoped to go into public interest law or include pro bono work in her practice, Rodriguez-Fee says, but she was unsure until her clinic time how she would get there. “I saw through the clinic that too many schools didn’t know what they’re legally required to do for special needs students, or that they were trying to figure out how not to help them or even to get them thrown out. I learned to work with clients, to handle cases, and I found out that this was an expanding area of the law that really intrigued me.”

Indeed, a Los Angeles attorney with a growing practice wanted a young lawyer with skills and experience in advocacy for children, families and special needs students to join him. And Rodriguez-Fee did, securing her

first job and more. "I'm driven by my passions, especially for helping people," she says. "The clinic helped create my passion for this area of law. I wish more students would consider the clinic experience because we need more people ready to help in public interest and pro bono law."

Like Rodriguez-Fee, Maria Palomares is pursuing a public interest law career with her first opportunity, working on public housing legal issues, also created by her clinic experience.

But she drew slightly different satisfactions from her labor in both the Street Law and Children's Rights Clinics for a reason: She grew up in the Koreatown neighborhood surrounding Southwestern as the eldest child of three and the first in her family to finish college, then to go on for an advanced degree. She was inspired by her mother, who worked long hours at a fast-food restaurant to give her children opportunities she didn't have.

"I always knew I had to find a way to give back, to honor all the people who had helped me," Palomares says. "The academics at Southwestern are great. But in the clinics, you deal with real people with real problems, and you see how much you affect their lives. I know, for example, that it meant something different when I sat down with teenagers in the Street Law Program, talked about the law and said, 'Look at me. You can do things for yourself. You can finish high school. You can go to community college. You can make a better life for yourself.'"

Even now, as she helps clients with legal issues concerning government subsidized housing, she says she recalls what she learned in the clinics – real people have complicated lives and their needs can't be confined to a single consideration of a current complaint. "When I talk to people now, I know from my clinic time that they may be worried about housing. But their minds also are full of worry about how their kids are going to do at school and whether they're getting treated fairly," she says.

For law students, the clinics provide invaluable training so they open their hearts and minds and leap less swiftly to judge others in circumstances that may be different from their own, the three directors said.

"The clinics are not only for law students who are interested in becoming public defenders or who are going into public interest law," says Professor Waterstone. "We try to get diversity in our participants so there are some who may become prosecutors, as well as public defenders or who will enter the private sector. No matter what kind of practice they end up in, they need to know the people, systems and institutions on the other side. They need to see how the law, at a critical moment, can change someone's life."

For Justin Mikita, the Street Law Clinic, "an awesome experience" he endorses without reservation, altered his career plans. "We all come to law school, I think, with certain ideas and plans stuck in our heads," he says, "how we'd like to earn lots of money, how great it would be to be a big corporate attorney. I didn't think I was headed to corporate, but I definitely was fixed on being in entertainment."

However, after he had witnessed the courage, perseverance and fortitude displayed by many abused and neglected teens, he had a change of heart. He's now thinking of a career in public interest law so he can help troubled kids like those he met through the Street Law Clinic.

"All of them had been through so much – with gangs, crime, drugs, being gay in a tough neighborhood, you name it," he says. "But there they were, admirable on so many counts. They made a real impression on us [law students] and vice-versa.

"I wanted very much to help them to change, to get out of their circumstances," he says. "I suddenly knew what it was to be an advocate for someone else who really needed you. The experience made me realize the law is powerful and can be beautiful in the way it can impact and change lives." ❖



#### CLINICS BY THE NUMBERS

Some key statistics about Southwestern's three clinics:

##### Faculty-student ratio:

Children's Rights 1:8 ■ Immigration Law 1:8 ■ Street Law 1:10

##### Years in existence:

Children's Rights: 2 ■ Immigration Law: 1 ■ Street Law: 4

##### Credits per term:

Children's Rights: 5 ■ Immigration Law: 5 ■ Street Law: 3

##### Approximate hours per week expected of students:

Children's Rights: 17 ■ Immigration Law: 17 ■ Street Law: 12

##### Caseload:

Children's Rights: 56 cases, 33 clients

Immigration Law: 61 clients ■ Street Law: 500 youths

## STREET LAW CLINIC HELPING YOUTH IN TRANSITION

On a Friday afternoon, Yaratzed Anguiano and Stacy Marquez stood before a class of teenagers at Aviva High, an all-girl, non-public school in Los Angeles. Their charges were restless, even argumentative, but curious still about a chart the two law students had posted on the board.

That document presented a budget of living expenses alongside an individual's expected average income, based on level of education.

The numbers told the story: The less education you have, the harder it is to earn a decent living.

"That is so unfair!" one teen shouted. "How are we supposed to live on that?"

Anguiano listened to the protests but also sought to give them some perspective. "There is more to education than just learning," she said. "More education increases your earning power, and the more you know, the more you can take care of and protect yourself." Marquez told the teens that a variety of programs exist to help them finance their continuing education at a college or vocational school.

The educational moment – both for the teens and their law student teachers – is the kind of interaction that Southwestern's Street Law Clinic is designed to stimulate. The program sends law students to nonpublic, continuation, law magnet and charter schools in the community to conduct 10-week classes with teenagers, many of whom are on the brink of "aging out" of the dependency or delinquency system.



Street Law Clinic participant Stacy Marquez leads a discussion on real-life budgets.

**"More education increases your earning power,  
and the more you know,  
the more you can protect yourself."**

*Yaratzed Anguiano, Street Law Clinic*

The law students help prepare the teens for real life with lessons based in the law. They spend time talking, one-on-one and in groups, with the often lonely, troubled teens, giving them not only undivided attention, but also essential practical information, such as resources on finding jobs or dealing with the juvenile justice system.

To prepare the Southwestern students for this field work, Professor Laura Cohen, the Street Law Clinic director, conducts a weekly class, often bringing in guest speakers from the many community agencies that help at-risk youth. The experts come from groups such as the Alliance for Children's Rights, Public Counsel, the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office, Bet Tzedek, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and other organizations and agencies helping teens, especially court-involved youth.

An estimated 1,000 teens "age out" of the foster care system in Los Angeles each year. Once they reach the age of 18, the state and their foster families are no longer required to assist them, and they must fend for themselves. Most are unprepared for the challenges of the real world and lack the basic life skills necessary for surviving on their own. Foster care studies show that almost half do not finish high school or earn a GED. Many go jobless for long periods and end up needing public assistance or becoming homeless.

The Southwestern students in the Street Law Clinic hope to change this potentially bleak outlook for the teens whose lives they touch as teachers, mentors and advocates. They strive to empower these promising young adults to make better choices, overcome adversity and build a more positive future for themselves.

"The youth we teach are in such great need of assistance in so many different ways," according to one of the law students. "Their situations are more complex than most people realize. If they don't learn to advocate for themselves, they are at a disadvantage. However, information, resources and services exist to make it possible for these young people, who have the odds stacked against them, to not only survive, but to succeed." ❖

**Postscript:** *The two students whose experiences were captured in this snapshot of their work at Aviva High School in the inaugural year of the Street Law Clinic (2005) have since graduated from Southwestern. Both Anguiano and Marquez are members of the bar, remain committed to public interest law and continue to work with teens and young adults in the community.*

## COMPASSION AND CONNECTION CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Law students bring first-hand perspectives to immigration cases

Under the direction of Professor Andrea Ramos, Southwestern's Immigration Law Clinic commenced operation in Spring 2009 with four students – Tracy Bordignon, Franklin Jiron, Andrea Escalante and Carmen Lainez – who worked on 20 cases. Students were assigned cases on January 13 and began logging in clinic hours the next day, representing low-income children and adults in Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) (clients under the age of 21), Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and U-visa cases.

Southwestern alumnus, Judge Gilbert T. Gembacz '79, presided over immigration court for many years before retiring in June 2008. He strongly supported the establishment of Southwestern's Immigration Law Clinic and provided input as well as financial support as it was being developed.

"The lack of competent representation is possibly the biggest issue in immigration law," he said. "There are very good and very diligent attorneys in the legal community who represent persons with immigration problems. There just aren't enough of them." He pointed out, "When you compound the huge number of immigrants needing the assistance of attorneys who know what they are doing with the large number of 'notarios' who prey on the immigrant community, you have the situation of near chaos that is very present in Los Angeles today."

**"I was born in Central America and came to the U.S. when I was seven. I could easily relate to our clients."**

*Franklin Jiron, Immigration Law Clinic*

Judge Gembacz is also encouraged by the opening of the clinic as he feels "it is incumbent upon a law school or legal institution to be responsive to the needs of the community in which they're located."

All of the members of the first class of Immigration Law Clinic students were completing their third year at Southwestern and were pleased to have this unique opportunity in their last semester of law school. Three of them are immigrants themselves. "I was born in Central America and came to the U.S. when I was seven," Jiron said. "I could easily relate to our clients."

Escalante completed coursework in immigration law during her second year and was excited to get hands-on experience working with real cases while still a student. Having emigrated from Peru at age 11, she was aware from personal experience that "the immigration process can be tedious and frightening." She found it gratifying to quickly be able to put a face to a name and get to know her clients. "It's not like when you work at a job in law school and rarely meet clients because you are mainly doing research," she said. Escalante plans to continue being involved in immigration-related pro bono work in the future.



Lainez emigrated from Nicaragua with her family who sought political asylum. She saw the problems that some family friends encountered during the process and wants to work in immigration law to help those who struggle with the system. "The clinic gives you the chance to actually work with clients. It's a really great opportunity to learn every practical aspect of working on immigration cases," she said, "and the clients are so grateful for the help."

Bordignon, who also plans to practice immigration law, said that the effort is worth it. "It's nice to do this, especially in your third year when students typically have fewer reasons to be on campus. It is way more work than [theoretical] classes, but it is so enjoyable that it feels easier."

Professor Ramos agreed. "It's a different experience – working on an actual case rather than a hypothetical. It carries a great sense of responsibility."

Escalante added that it changes your priorities as a student. "You become the most important person in your clients' lives. What your client stands to gain is far more important than your grade." ❖

THEIR VOICES TELL THE STORY *continued from page 7*



“Many of my kids are lost souls so they won’t find services that might be available because they don’t know where to go. They’ll go to the street for advice. But it’s usually bad. Especially if they’re in trouble, they don’t know where to search for help. That’s what makes the Street Law program invaluable. The law students research, they teach these kids critical stuff they need to know. And they pay attention to them. They care about them.”

– Paul Isozaki, a teacher at an East L.A. school involved in Street Law, and the father of an alumna of the Street Law Clinic



“It’s an eye-opening experience for law students that when they’re working on some cases, no one wants to help, no one wants to cooperate. They have to keep after people to get them to return calls, to answer requests, to gather facts and documentation.”

– Professor Andrea Ramos,  
Director, Immigration Law Clinic

“I see that students are really able to make a difference in their clients’ lives. They’re helping people at a young age, at a critical point in their development.”

– Professor Julie K. Waterstone,  
Director, Children’s Rights Clinic



**Editor:** Leslie R. Steinberg • **Writers:** Craig Matsuda, Erin Auerbach • **Photos:** Jayne Oncea/Pro Photography Network, Elizabeth A. Reinhardt • **Layout:** Holly Strother.

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**Southwestern Law School**

3050 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90010-1106  
213.738.6700  
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