California Western Community Law Project
2017 Year in Review

“I appreciate everything that was done for me today. Everyone was very courteous and helped relieve the anxiety I felt about this whole legal process. I am very blessed to have met with the Community Law Project and for the legal advice.”, Community Law Project Client

Perhaps mirroring the world we now live in, the Community Law Project experienced a year full of trials and tribulations, small successes and victories, and above all, lots of hard work performed by many dedicated individuals. To say that there is a need for our services in the community is a vast understatement. We saw increased client numbers at each of our clinic sites throughout San Diego County. Through the thoughtful use of resources and creative thinking, we were able to serve 41% more clients during 2017 than in the prior year. Even with a shortfall in annual funding, thanks to help from **over 125 volunteer attorneys and students**, the Community Law Project was able to serve **more than 1,500 individuals** through one-on-one legal services and regular community education presentations.

The Community Law Project is as much a pillar of California Western School of Law as it is a program for the community. The thirty-nine students who participated in CLP this past year entered our clinic full of questions and excited for the opportunity to serve their community, while learning about a variety of legal issues. They each completed their CLP experience having grown not only as a future attorney but also as an individual. Whether they secured legal representation for an undocumented immigrant fighting to stay in the United States with her family, educated a room full of senior citizens on how to read a credit report, or assisted a victim of domestic violence come up with a safety plan, our Community Law Project students made a difference in the lives of others.

“CLP is so amazing in the way that it’s always a surprise. You see new people with new problems and new possible solutions. [You learn] how to control an interview...[with] some of the most colorful clients I’ve ever heard. I doubt any other internship would prepare you this well. You try to understand the situation not just from a legal perspective, but from a human one as well. I have juggled several jobs simultaneously during my time in law school, but I have to admit CLP made me feel best. I felt like I was making a valuable impact in someone's life. Although all the positions help some people in one way or another, CLP seems to help the people who need it most. Every time a clinic ended I felt good about the career path I’d chosen in my life so far.”
Barbara Villa, CLP Student, Spring 2017

Through CLP’s ever-growing community education program, CLP has truly stepped up and seized the opportunity to address the unmet legal needs that arose for many in San Diego with the new presidential administration. CLP staff were kept busy this year, staying abreast of the changing laws and policies, particularly as they affect the day-to-day lives of members of our communities. CLP worked carefully with legal and non-legal organizations to ensure that the
legal information it provides is accessible, understandable and up to date. When Know Your Immigration Rights information was needed, CLP provided training and education to community members to ensure that they were aware of their constitutional rights and options if they were to face deportation. When news of DACA’s termination was released, CLP stepped up to partner with organizations across the city to assure that all who might be affected by the termination were aware of steps they should take to ameliorate the harsh consequences of this action, as well as knowledgeable about other options they might have for when their DACA status expires. With the help of our law students and attorney volunteers, CLP conducted 32 presentations on issues ranging from immigration rights to tenant rights to options for dealing with debt, and more.

Along with a changing political climate and the significant reverberating effect that these changes have had for our clients, the Community Law Project has faced some internal changes. This year, we were delighted to welcome back Supervising Attorney Rebecca Levine as she developed our new and innovative refugee support mobile clinic. At the same time, we were sad to see long time Community Education and Outreach Coordinator, Veronica Ayesta, leave our program. Veronica joined CLP nine years ago and played a key role in our program’s growth and success over the last decade. While Veronica will continue to be involved on CLP’s Advisory Council, she will be sorely missed by our partners and the community as a whole.

During this past year, Community Law Project clients have left our clinic having a plan to deal with overwhelming debt, a path to follow to gain lawful immigration status in the United States or an understanding of the process involved in getting a divorce from an abusive spouse. Clients have told us that CLP’s services are “very helpful and very informative”; that our students help them “feel more relaxed and better about their situations” and that we are an “excellent service” that “rocks”! It is in thanks to the backing of our funders, the commitment of our volunteers and the support of California Western School of Law that we have been able to provide these crucial services to the community. We are proud of all that we have done in 2017 to make our clients lives better and our students’ legal skills stronger. We approach 2018 ready to continue serving and making a difference in San Diego.

To learn more about the Community Law Project, our services, and our clinics, please visit our website (www.cwclp.org) or Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/CommunityLawProject). To make a donation to CLP, please visit https://cosmos.cwsl.edu/giving/communitylawproject/.

Thank you for your continued support!

Dana Sisitsky, Esq. Executive Director, California Western Community Law Project