A Year in Review 04.2014 to 03.2015 ProBono@CUALaw

2015 Alternative Spring Break
Instead of taking a break, six CUA Law students decided to give one to area social causes in need of volunteer service. The students signed up to donate their time and talent via the DC Alternative Spring Break Program, sponsored during the week of March 9-13 by the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, Georgetown University Law Center, and American University Washington College of Law.

Nearly forty volunteers spread out to help with such causes and organizations as Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) for which training began in February, Collective Action for Safe Spaces, Mothers’ Outreach Network, the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, and So Others Might Eat, to name a few.

Third-year CUA Law student Rebecca Neville (below, left) staffed a legal hotline at CAIR.

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DC Law School Pro Bono Coordinators Convening
The pro bono coordinators from the DC area law schools convened at CUA Law in June to share ideas and discuss ways to collaborate. Out of this meeting grew the 2015 Alternative Spring Break Project.

Fourth Annual Pro Bono Reception
The fourth annual Pro Bono Reception celebrating program participants was held on April 3, 2014, in the Louise H. and James Keeley Jr. Atrium. We were honored to have Jim Sandman, President of the Legal Services Corporation, serve as guest speaker. About 100 attendees, including students, faculty, staff, alumni and community organization partners, were recognized for their efforts.

Brookland Community Resources Nonprofit Incorporation
For dozens of teens and adults with developmental differences, Brookland Community Resources (BCR) in northeast Washington, D.C. is an anchor, a lifeline, and a source of encouragement and support in a world that doesn’t always offer it up on its own. BCR is a grass-roots organization that works to promote the full inclusion of people with intellectual and physical disabilities into all aspects of community life. It offers social and recreational programs for members at sites throughout the Brookland neighborhood.

Behind the story of the program’s success today lies the steady presence of the Columbus School of Law at nearby Catholic University. Over the past years, the law school has supplied a team of people with the passion, skills, and commitment to keep BCR a thriving beacon of hope to those who need it most. A CUA Law alumnus, professor, and current student have joined forces to form a ‘perfect storm’ of pro bono support behind Brookland Community Resources.

The story begins in 1994, when CUA Law alumnus Steve Riley (1979) co-founded Potomac Community Resources (PCR). A full-time attorney with a busy international law and government relations practice, Riley made the time to serve as the organization’s executive director, steering its growth and mission goals. In 2008, PCR was invited by Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who had by then become familiar with the group, to expand its reach by launching a new program in the area aimed at providing adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities an inclusive source of encouragement and support in a world that doesn’t always offer it up on its own. BCR is a grass-roots organization that works to promote the full inclusion of people with intellectual and physical disabilities into all aspects of community life. It offers social and recreational programs for members at sites throughout the Brookland neighborhood.

The opportunity to do so presented itself not long after in the form of Bethlehem House, a Christian residential program in the area aimed at providing adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities an inclusive community. Sharing similar missions, the two organizations decided to begin a formal collaboration in 2011. The new endeavor, called Brookland Community Resources (BCR), combines their resources and reach as Cardinal Wuerl had envisioned.

The next critical step in the process was for BCR to become incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Riley was connected through CUA Law’s Pro Bono Program to Professor Roger Colvinvax, who was happy to lend his tax expertise to assist. Colvinvax is among the nation’s foremost authorities on the tax code’s treatment of non-profits. Professor Colvinvax in turn enlisted the assistance of third-year Catholic Law student Patrick Belford, and together they are stewarding BCR through the nonprofit incorporation process.
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and Customs Enforcement custody; and conducting individual orientations with detainees in Immigration accompanying staff attorneys on visits to federal immigration detention in any of three pro bono endeavors: staffing CAIR's detention hotline; The Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition provided a CAIR Coalition A Year in Review Brookland Community Resources nonprofit incorporation (continued from page 1) "A project like this is a great way for students to apply some corporate legal skills, learn a bit about tax law and nonprofits, gain some experience dealing with government forms and rules, and most importantly, help worthy organizations complete an essential task," says Colinvaux (top left). "It is great that CUA was able to participate in this type of project, both for the student doing the work and for the client."

Belford (bottom left), who will graduate in May, 2015, knew his time would be well spent in part because he took Colinvaux's federal income taxation class and was eager to apply what he learned.

"Once Professor Colinvaux filled me in on the client's work, I knew that I wanted to help out," said Belford. "BCR is a fantastic group that does very important work in the local community. I really enjoyed working with the client and collaborating with Professor Colinvaux. I definitely learned a lot about the regulatory and practical considerations involved in tax matters."

CAIR Coalition

The Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition provided a training at CUA Law in January for law students interested in engaging in any of three pro bono endeavors: staffing CAIR's detention hotline; accompanying staff attorneys on visits to federal immigration detention centers in Virginia to provide "Know Your Rights" presentations and conduct individual orientations with detainees in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody; and conducting credible fear interviews.

DC Bar Pro Bono Program's Advice & Referral Clinics

This past spring and fall, the Columbus School of Law participated in the DC Bar Pro Bono Program's Brief Advice and Referral Clinic held at Bread for the City in Northwest DC. The clinic provides individuals who do not have their own lawyer an opportunity to discuss with volunteer attorneys civil legal problems governed by D.C. law. Seven CUA Law alumni were paired with seven students to co-counsel on intakes in April, and five students partnered with CUA Law alumni and attorneys from Dickensin Shapin at the Clinic in November.

DC Bar Pro Bono Program CED Project

The Community Economic Development Project (CED Project) of the DC Bar Pro Bono Program sponsors monthly walk-in legal clinics for community-based entrepreneurs with general legal questions about their aspiring and existing small businesses. This brief advice and referral clinic helps clients with issues such as transitioning from operating as a sole proprietorship to a corporate or non-corporate business entity, distinguishing between an employee and independent contractor and negotiating reasonable lease terms. CUA Law students participated in the clinics throughout the fall, and in January, CUA Law for the first time hosted a clinic to serve Ward 5's businesses.

The CUA Innocence Project Clinic & Clemency Project

The CUA Innocence Project Clinic & Clemency Project represents persons convicted in federal court who are seeking executive clemency from the President of the United States and conducts investigations of claims of actual innocence on behalf of individuals referred to the Clinic by the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (MAIP). In the spring-summer semester the Clinic signed retainers with six federal prisoners to assist them in preparing and filing applications for commutation of sentence. Students in the Clinic also are representing four cases in which the individual is claiming actual innocence of the crime for which he was convicted. Recently, a fifth case was referred back to MAIP and a private law firm to litigate a claim of actual innocence after the Clinic completed reinvestigation of the case. A team of volunteers also have been collecting information from every state on executive clemency applications and grants over the past five years. Information from this survey will help the Clinic in its mission to expand clemency services to persons convicted in state courts.

DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers

The Community Engagement Project ("Project") is an important initiative undertaken to better understand the legal needs of low-income DC residents in order to inform the way providers deliver those services. The Project is sponsored by the DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers, whose mission is to coordinate the delivery, expand the availability, and improve the quality of legal services in the District of Columbia. Faith Mullin, who teaches in the Civil Practice Clinic at the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law, has volunteered as project manager over the past year, collaborating with other legal services providers, community based organizations, and law students, among others, to lead this unprecedented effort.

The Project has been implemented in carefully designed phases. Facilitators, including CUA Law students, conducted focus groups with over 100 community members last fall to gauge their legal service needs. The next step in the process, using a survey developed in collaboration with Dr. Enrique Pumar, Chair of the CUA Sociology Department, entailed volunteers (again, including CUA Law students) asking community members who earn less than 200% of the federal poverty level about challenges and concerns beyond traditional "legal" categories they have.

The next phase of the Project will be to use the data collected to determine how to improve the delivery of legal service in DC. This will have far-reaching positive implications for the over 180,000 people living in poverty in DC.

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless

Over the winter, CUA Law students have assisted the Homeless Family Outreach Project of the Washington Legal clinic for the Homeless (WLCH) in reaching out to families who have no safe place to sleep at night who are seeking emergency shelter. By circulating flyers and speaking one-on-one with families at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center on Rhode Island Avenue in Northeast DC, volunteers advise families of the right to shelter and other important rights during hypothermic or severe weather conditions and connect to the Legal Clinic families who believe they have been unlawfully denied shelter or who have suffered from other legal violations so that an attorney can try to assist them.

DC Pro Bono Week/ Poverty Simulation

CUA Law Pro Bono Coordinator Jen Tischkoch began chairing DC Pro Bono Week, a local celebration of the ABAG National Pro Bono Week, in 2013. This year, CUA involvement included CUA Law hosting a Hypothermia Outreach training by the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless that was attended by a dozen students in anticipation of providing families seeking shelter with critically-needed legal information; student participation in a DC Bar Pro Bono Program Small Business Brief Advice Clinic; and Vytas Vergeer '93, who transitioned from legal director at Bread for the City to Administrative Law Judge at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings last August, facilitating a Poverty Simulation that through an interactive three-hour exercise gave participants a sense of the daily challenges faced by people living in poverty.

and Customs Enforcement custody; and conducting individual orientations with detainees in Immigration centers in Virginia to provide “Know Your Rights” presentations and in any of three pro bono endeavors: staffing CAIR’s detention hotline; training at CUA Law in January for law students interested in engaging CAIR Coalition

A Year in Review

Brookland Community Resources nonprofit incorporation (continued from page 1)

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Further information can be found here: dcpobono.tumblr.com/post/103679973592/recap-our-third-annual-poverty-simulation and dcpobono.tumblr.com/post/1012379391971/a-preview-of-our-third-annual-poverty-simulation
The program provides law students with opportunities to engage in hands-on, law-related volunteer work in the DC area during their spring break. Their work serves the community, provides exposure to law-related opportunities, builds connections in the community, and accumulates student pro bono hours.

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Third-year CUA Law student Rebecca Neville (below, left) staffed a legal hotline at CAIR.

“What I really liked about CAIR was that the people who work there are so supportive and friendly,” said Neville. “And you really are helping people the whole time! Putting people in contact with their lawyers or giving them status messages. It was a truly rewarding way to spend part of my spring break.”

Working with her peers across town, CUA Law’s Pro Bono Coordinator Jen Tschirch began planning last fall – attempting to match students’ interests with available opportunities.

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