

Whittier Law School Center for Children's Rights: Comprehensive Training for Children's Advocates

Deborah L. Forman,
Whittier Law School

Whittier Law School Center for Children's Rights Educational Goals and Methods

The heart of the Whittier Law School Center for Children's Rights (CCR) is its Fellowship Program. The Center accepts up to 20 students per year as Fellows. They follow a specialized curriculum designed to train them in all aspects of child advocacy. Those who complete the program earn a certificate upon graduation. The program offers substantive courses, hands-on training through work in one of our on campus Clinics, through externships and through summer placements supported by stipends, and exposure to the multidisciplinary aspects of child advocacy through monthly colloquia and attendance at conferences. In addition, the Center seeks to serve as a resource for the community through publications such as the *Whittier Journal of Child and Family Advocacy*, by hosting the National Juvenile Law Moot Court competition and by organizing an annual symposium. Students are involved in all aspects of these endeavors as well.

The educational goals and methods of the program include the following:

1. Goal: To provide Fellows with a broad base of substantive knowledge of interest to lawyers and policy-makers working on issues related to children and families.

Method: Fellows are required to take core courses beginning in their first year with a specialized Legal Skills class focused on children's issues. In the second and third years, students take Juvenile Justice, which covers abuse and neglect, delinquency and other issues involving children's rights, and Family Law, which highlights issues involving child support and child custody. Fellows also enroll in a specialized section of Advanced Legal Skills and Interviewing, Counseling & Negotiation in their second year. Upper class Fellows round out their substantive training by completing three additional units of approved elective. Many Fellows go beyond the minimum requirements.

2. Goal: To provide Fellows with practical experience working with children's issues.

Method: Fellows are required to complete an externship with a child law related placement. In addition, students have the opportunity to enroll in three child law related clinics: Special Education, Children's Advocacy (which handles guardianships, post-foster care adoptions, child custody matters and Juvenile Hall outreach) and Family Violence. The CCR program also provides financial support for Fellows working for approved organizations or agencies during their first and second summers.

3. Goal: To introduce Fellows to the multidisciplinary aspects of children's advocacy.

Method: Fellows are required to attend monthly colloquia and an annual symposium that feature speakers from a variety of disciplines, including mental health, medicine, social work and education. In addition, all Fellows attend the day-long, multidisciplinary Los Angeles Partnership conference. Upper class Fellows are also eligible to attend an additional conference of their choosing.

4. Goal: To support and encourage students to pursue careers in children's advocacy and public interest.

Method: Summer stipends support Fellows who choose to work in a child or family law related placement. The Director and other faculty provide career advice and counseling, and Fellows are encouraged to connect with the many alumni working in the field.

5. Goal: To expose Fellows to the wide range of children's advocacy, both in terms of subject matter and methodology.

Method: Diverse course offerings give students a chance to learn about different legal issues affecting children. Fellows are encouraged to work or extern at a variety of placements, and colloquia are deliberately planned to highlight the many facets of children's advocacy.

6. Goal: To foster cohesiveness among the students based on a shared purpose and commitment to child advocacy.

Method: Fellows meet several times during the year on an informal basis. Each Fellow is assigned an upper-class mentor, and Fellows serve on committees that assist in organizing events and developing policies for the program.

7. Goal: To call attention to the importance of children's advocacy and to serve as a resource for the community.

Method: The annual symposium draws lawyers, other professionals who work with children, and members of the public. The *Whittier Journal of Child Advocacy* provides a forum for publication of scholarly articles, and the National Juvenile Law Moot Court competition brings teams from around the country to argue fictional cases involving children. The clinics serve low income members of the community who need legal assistance in a variety of matters impacting children.

Further information about the Whittier Law School Center for Children's Rights can be found at www.law.whittier.edu/centers/childrens-rights.asp.