

*A Report from Daksha Bhatia, New York Women's Bar Association Foundation Fellow at Sanctuary for Families*

During the spring 2013 semester, I had the privilege of serving as a fellow at Sanctuary for Families Center for Battered Women's Legal Services (Sanctuary). Sanctuary offers a wide range of services to victims of domestic violence and their children, including direct representation, shelter services, and counseling. I worked on the Economic Justice/Matrimonial Project, and most of my time was spent working on divorce cases and post-judgment enforcement actions. I worked on contested divorces at various stages as well as an uncontested divorce (from the client's initial intake to the filing of her summons with notice).

I was prepared for some of the issues that arose out of divorce cases, like a batterer refusing to pay child support for example, but others took me by surprise. No two cases were the same and I had the opportunity to research many interesting issues. I was thrilled (and also nervous) when my supervisor told me to take my research and turn it into the motion that would eventually be filed. However, her helpful feedback on my drafts allayed my nervousness.

One particularly memorable case was that a client who was in the process of a custody dispute. Unfortunately, she had been pressured into having a religious divorce ceremony in another country during which an agent was appointed to represent her in lieu of her own appearance. She did not realize that this ceremony would include a custody determination, and the judgment from the religious court was in a foreign language. I was asked to find a company that would interpret the document promptly and send us a certified, notarized copy that we could attach to a motion requesting that the New York court not give this judgment full faith and credit. I contributed to the research for this motion and the court ruled in our client's favor. I was overwhelmed with happiness and a sense of relief. When our client described how she had suddenly lost custody of her children through a document she could not even read, her devastation was clear. Helping women like her fight back and win is exactly why I was eager to intern at Sanctuary.

Aside from the rewarding work, I also enjoyed the positive work environment in terms of the staff members' interactions with each other and with me. Everyone was friendly, supportive and always willing to answer any questions I had. I am grateful for the time I was able to spend at Sanctuary, and will miss the people and clients with whom I worked. This fellowship has taught me so much more than I could learn in a classroom, and I thank the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation for providing me this opportunity.

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