

*A Report from Danielle Von Lehman, New York Women's Bar Association Foundation Fellow at Sanctuary for Families*

My internship at Sanctuary has been one of the best experiences I could have hoped to have in law school. It has been wonderful to work with Sanctuary's varied staff and volunteers (from art therapists, social workers, employment specialists) and especially the inspiring clients, and working with them reminded me why I wanted to join the legal profession.

I knew I wanted to volunteer with Sanctuary after participating in the CAP program, where students help people obtain orders of protection in family court. One case of note was a woman who was seeking an order of protection and who only spoke Spanish. Despite my rusty Spanish, I worked with her. The woman's boyfriend was sending numerous text messages (starting as tender and apologetic, and then becoming abusive threats). One morning, he came to her house, beat her and smashed his fist through her television as her young children watched. We worked through the details of her petition and she received the order of protection, but it turned out the boyfriend had called the cops, claiming she had assaulted him and hurt his hand and blaming her for his injuries from smashing the television. She was arrested and spent a day in jail. She just entered the criminal justice system and her difficult situation was compounded by her language barrier and the potential loss of her job due to the pending criminal charges. An attorney from Sanctuary tried to sort out the situation, calling the detectives, the district attorney's office, trying to get the charges against her dropped and ultimately making an enormous impact in this woman's life.

I worked with Brett Figlewski at Sanctuary, and learned that he was instrumental in extending the right to seek and obtain orders of protection to nonmarried couples and without that law, many women would not have access to the courts. His patience, dedication, and intellect never ceased to amaze me. I worked primarily with a Spanish speaking client on custody and visitation issues, and learned a great deal about the inner workings of the court system. I also had the opportunity to accompany a group of advocates to Albany to lobby for The Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act. I had never participated in the legislative process, and it was a valuable experience.

I thank Sanctuary and the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation for the opportunity to not only to have the chance to work with dedicated advocates, but to have the benefit of this generous fellowship.