

**New York Women’s Bar Association Foundation Fellowship
End-of-year Joint Report by Sofia Linarte and Lauren Irby
2013-2014**

This article provides reflections on our work with Fordham Law School’s Feerick Center for Social Justice during fall 2013 and spring 2014 as New York Women’s Bar Association Foundation (NYWBAF) Fellows. Throughout the year, we have worked primarily on the New York Unaccompanied Immigrant Children Project (“NYUIC Project”) alongside Dora Galacatos, the Feerick Center’s Executive Director, and Olga Byrne, the Project Director.

The Feerick Center launched the NYUIC Project in January 2013 to support coordinated efforts aimed at improving state and local policy and practice toward unaccompanied immigrant children. New York City and its neighboring counties are home to thousands of “unaccompanied immigrant children” who are often susceptible to exploitation, homelessness, lack of physical and mental healthcare, difficulty accessing education, and inadequate access to justice. While we worked on a wide variety of discrete matters, the bulk of our work focused on the four areas described below.

Promoting Access to Justice through Trainings for Family Court Lawyers

Last fall, in collaboration with members of the New York City Bar Association’s Committee on Immigration and Nationality, we helped develop a training program on special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) for court-appointed attorneys in the Family Courts. SIJS is an immigration benefit available to certain immigrant youth who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned, which allows these youth to adjust to lawful permanent residency and thus opens up opportunities for legal employment, stability, and access to pursue higher education. The Feerick Center and the City Bar co-sponsored trainings for 96 attorneys in the First Department and 44 in the Second.

Planning the Special Immigrant Juvenile Conference

On December 6, 2013, the Feerick Center and the New York County Lawyers’ Association co-sponsored a conference entitled *Representing Immigrant Youth: Ethics and Other Emerging Topics in Special Immigrant Juvenile Practice*. We helped organize the conference by securing panelists, framing themes, and providing logistical support. More than 100 practitioners, academics, and other participants convened to discuss key issues within the field, including adolescent development and trauma, courtroom advocacy techniques, and ethical challenges in SIJS practice. Overall, the conference was a great success. This was the first time we had ever contributed to planning such a large event and it felt wonderful to see our hard work culminate in such a worthwhile and informative manner for all in attendance.

Creating a Service Opportunity

Over the course of the year, we helped develop a service opportunity for law students in collaboration with Catholic Charities Community Services. Catholic Charities provides legal orientation presentations to the adult relatives (or “custodians”) of unaccompanied immigrant children. Many families require additional one-on-one assistance, beyond the scope of Catholic Charities’ program. We met with Catholic Charities, and further contributed by attending a legal orientation presentation and providing feedback on the recruitment and use of student volunteers .

Developing a Model Statute

One of the most significant components of our work on the Project involved work on a model state statute that will protect the rights of immigrant youth who may be eligible for SIJS. It was an incredible opportunity to collaborate closely with a working group of national experts. The model statute addresses gaps in protection with respect to access to the courts, the identification of eligible youth, access to counsel and other issues. While developing in-depth knowledge about this complex, multi-disciplinary area of the law, we also enjoyed the opportunity to take on the challenge of drafting model legislation, something we had never done before, and receiving feedback from experts with multiple perspectives.

Conclusion

Our involvement in the NYWBAF Fellowship this past academic year was productive, impactful, and enlightening. Through our work with the NYUIC Project, we have furthered the goals and fundamental principles of the Foundation. We have striven to eliminate discrimination within the legal system against unaccompanied immigrant children; worked to help promote their social and economic equality, safety and wellbeing; and to address many of their unmet legal needs through research, conducting surveys, drafting, and advocating for the underrepresented immigrant youth population in New York and beyond. We thank the New York Women’s Bar Association Foundation for this invaluable opportunity.

Sofia Linarte and Lauren Irby are 3Ls at Fordham University School of Law.