

## A Report from Sally Shinkel, The New York Women's Bar Association Foundation InMotion Fellow

Thanks to a fellowship funded by the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation, I had the opportunity to work at inMotion Inc. during the spring semester of my second year at NYU Law School. I had hoped to use this as a chance to gain experience interacting with low-income female clients and to learn about family and immigration law. With the guidance of inMotion's talented and dedicated staff, I accomplished that and more. I reinforced a commitment that I had formed upon choosing the legal profession: to use what I have learned in law school and empower those less fortunate than I.

I was especially excited to work at inMotion because it is well known for its work assisting low-income women with family, matrimonial, and immigration law issues. During my internship at inMotion, I assisted callers on an intake hotline and, under the supervision of inMotion staff member Anna Ognibene, I also assisted in-house clients with immigration and divorce matters. Moreover, I took advantage of various CLE training seminars organized by inMotion, which provided the base of knowledge necessary for my client work.

Running the telephone intake hotline is one of the most basic forms of the assistance inMotion provides. inMotion staff and interns who answer the calls attempt to put callers on the right track by connecting them with advice and counsel for pro se assistance or, in some cases, pro bono representation. Answering the intake hotline required me to understand legal issues that just days before had been new to me. While it was a challenging experience at first, I soon came to enjoy being a first contact to the callers in need of direction, because I helped empower low-income women by giving them the tools to start toward the legal recovery they needed.

In addition to my work on the intake hotline, my other significant contribution was preparing an application for permanent residency status for a client who was the victim of domestic violence. Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), victims of domestic violence at the hands of United States citizen or permanent resident spouses can file for permanent residency without having to obtain the usual supporting documents or corroborating statements from their abusers. Instead, a domestic violence victim must prepare an affidavit and supporting documents showing, among other things, that he or she was married in a valid, good faith marriage to an abusive US citizen or permanent resident. Preparing the VAWA petition can be a daunting task for many non-citizen low-income women who, because of their immigration status, are often unable to work to earn money to pay for legal advice. inMotion's free legal services are precious to these women.

I met with my VAWA client on multiple occasions to hear about her experience. Our many meetings were intense and emotionally trying. I was forced to ask difficult questions because my goal was to retell my client's story in a complete, consistent, and compelling way for the immigration authorities. I reached out to her family and friends for supporting statements, and I collected documentation whenever possible. Along the way, I was impressed by the strength and composure of my client and I was guided by the well-reasoned advice of my