

Over the course of the summer, I was able to work with a small amount of clients, but realize results for each of them in several different capacities. I found that working with domestic violence victims involves much more than simply helping them to seek prosecution of their abusers, but also involved custody and divorce issues, housing issues, and most importantly for our clients, immigration issues. All of the clients that the Latinas Know Your Rights Project served are undocumented immigrants in America seeking a better life. Unfortunately, because of the psychological affects of the abuse that they suffered, they often stay with their abusers for years out of fear. They fear being deported, caring for their children, and being on their own. In the US, domestic violence victims are eligible to apply for U-Visas which grant them employment authorization if they helped to investigate and prosecute their abuser, which is easier said than done. Once they are granted U-Visas, they are eligible to apply for legal permanent resident status after 3 years. Because of the longevity of these processes, cases are rarely "closed" in the traditional sense. Even after I filed for U-Visas for 3 clients, I was still helping them in several other ways. I helped 2 clients to transition from her home into a domestic violence shelter in order to escape her stalking abuser. I also set all of my clients (about 10) up with domestic violence advocates as well as mental health and trauma counselors.

Throughout the summer, I also helped to run a Latinas Know Your Rights community seminar which helped women dealing with the above issues, but also others such as just creating a "work-life balance" or raising children. These programs helped to empower the women to reach out to others around them. Another program that the project provided was community discussions about the recent implementation of Secured Communities. Because our clients were illegal immigrants, they were terrified by the

implementation of the legislation and did not understand how it works. We were able to educate the entire community in the Waltham area about the program, how to interact with police, and the possible effects. Because this is such a tight knit community, reaching out to about 50 people had a far-reaching impact.

I found this summer experience to be extremely rewarding and humbling for me. I was unaware of all the issues facing these women and the tremendous strength they had when leaving their abusers. I hope that a career in public interest law or a strong pro bono practice become something included in my future legal career.

Julie Gielowski
Boston College