IN CELEBRATION OF
2017 NATIONAL PRO BONO WEEK

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

CLINICAL AND PRO BONO PROGRAMS
LEARNING THE LAW | SERVING THE WORLD
Faces of Excellence

Lisa Dicker and Nathan MacKenzie win Andrew L. Kaufman Pro Bono Service Award

This year, Lisa Dicker and Nathan MacKenzie won the 2017 Andrew L. Kaufman Pro Bono Service Award. They were chosen for exemplifying a pro bono public spirit and demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to improving and delivering high quality volunteer legal services in low-income communities. The award is granted each year in honor of Professor Andrew Kaufman, who spearheaded the pro bono requirement at HLS.

Nathan MacKenzie
J.D. ’17

At Harvard Law School, Nathan MacKenzie ’17 participated in Harvard Defenders, the Harvard Prison Legal Assistance Project, the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program (HIRC), and created his own independent clinical placement with the Migrants Rights Clinic at the Center of Law and Business, in Ramat Gan, Israel. He excelled in all of these organizations, earning the praise of his clinical supervisors and peers.

“Nate’s contributions to the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program, a clinic in which he participated for a year and a half, have helped transform lives,” said his clinical supervisors. One of his most consequential achievements in the clinic is the pivotal role he played in securing a reprieve from deportation for a woman who had been scheduled to be removed within a matter of days. “It was a tense situation which would have intimidated many students but Nate took immediate action,” his clinical supervisors said. He dove into the case, immediately interviewing the client’s family and gathering the supporting evidence which ultimately helped convince the government to grant the woman the opportunity to remain in the United States and apply for asylum.

MacKenzie also worked long hours and late nights orchestrating the research needed for an amicus brief challenging Trump’s Muslim ban executive order. “His calmness under pressure, honed through years of service in the U.S. Coast Guard, is one of his most impressive features,” said his clinical supervisors.

On campus, MacKenzie devoted himself to other Student Practice Organizations and causes. He worked with refugees in Israel and completed eight show-cause hearings for indigent criminal defendants as a student attorney in Harvard Defenders, as well as completed a clemency petition with the Criminal Justice Policy Program. MacKenzie also helped organize over 20 events this year as the Program Director of the HLS Democrats.

“Both the depth and breadth of his commitment to social justice is remarkable,” said his clinical supervisors. “His legal skill, his ability to work well both independently and in a group, and above all, his commitment to—and impact on—his clients and his dedication to advancing the rights of clients has been outstanding.”

“I am deeply humbled by this award and thankful for the many pro bono opportunities I have had here at HLS” said MacKenzie. “Working with the Immigration and Refugee Clinic and being a part of the Harvard Defenders have both been highlights of my law school experience and I am honored to have been a part of the great work done by these two amazing organizations.”
Lisa Dicker J.D. ’17

Lisa Dicker devoted her time to public service starting her 1L year with HLS Negotiators, serving first as a member and later as its Co-President. She also spent her 1L spring break in Nashville, TN, working pro bono with Equal Justice Under Law, a non-profit civil rights organization founded by two HLS alumni. During the trip, Dicker and her fellow students, helped challenge practices, such as jail time for failure to pay fines that penalize the poor.*

During her 2L and 3L years, Dicker participated in the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program (HNMCP) working with the New Hampshire Superior Court on judge-facilitated settlement conferences and with client organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on negotiation and conflict management in the context of the disarmament and repatriation of militants and refugees from the Eastern DRC to Rwanda, and she set up two independent clinical placements, one in Massachusetts with the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration on community mediation services and the other in Turkey with Public International Law & Policy Group providing support for the Syrian peace process.

“There are few, if any, branches of HNMCP in which she has not become involved and had a tremendous positive impact,” said her clinical supervisors. “Lisa has demonstrated deep engagement with the substance of her projects, as well as creativity and innovation in her final products.”

Throughout her time at Harvard Law School, Dicker not only performed over 1,500 hours of pro bono work but she also served as part of a corps of trained student facilitators who volunteer to facilitate discussions among members of the HLS community on challenging and politically fraught topics. She also twice served as Teaching Assistant for the Negotiation Workshop, and has emerged as a leader in mentoring, coaching, and simply listening to her peers.

“Her ability to adapt to many different contexts and partners is highly unusual in a student, and reflects her broader approach to learning: she sees true value in listening to others and uses that principle to guide her self-reflection and behavior” said her clinical supervisors. “Above all, Lisa is simply a joy and a delight to work with. Her quick sense of humor, endless energy, brave and courageous spirit, and boundless positivity are infectious, and constitute real and powerful contributions to our community.”

“Being recognized with the Kaufman Award is an enormous honor, and I am humbled that HNMCP, which has been my home and greatest support system on campus, nominated me” said Dicker. “To receive this award means to me that HLS values and encourages non-traditional legal careers and believes that in addition to being advocates, lawyers effect positive change through being problem-solvers, system-changers, and enablers of dialogue.”

*This September, these efforts led to a $14.3 million settlement for over 25,000 impoverished people in Rutherford County, Tennessee, who were the victims of the County’s decision to privatize its probation system.
The Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs offers its heartfelt congratulations to the 27 Harvard Law students who received a Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Certificate in recognition of their pro bono work. The ceremony was held at the Adams Courthouse on October 18th and the students are listed on the SJC’s Pro Bono Honor Roll website.

The recognition is presented annually to law firms, solo practitioners, in-house corporate counsel offices, government attorney offices, non-profit organizations, law school faculties, and law students who certify that, in the calendar year of 2016, they have contributed at least 50 hours of legal services without receiving pay or academic credit.

We are proud to have the students represent Harvard Law School!

Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Pro Bono Honor Roll Students:

- Katherine Ambrose JD ’18
- Jyoti Jasrasaria JD ’18
- Heather Artinian JD ’18
- Mark Lee JD ’18
- Katrina Braun JD ’18
- Megan Lee JD ’18
- Elizabeth Carter JD ’18
- Zachary Lenox JD ’18
- Gianna Ceophas JD ’18
- Yaacov Meiseles JD ’19
- Emily Chan JD ’18
- Melissa Mikail JD ’18
- Cameron Clark JD ’18
- Emil Nachman JD ’18
- Alicia Daniel JD ’18
- Madaline O’Neill JD ’19
- Andrene Dabaghi JD ’17
- Leah Juhyun Park JD ’18
- Hayley Evans JD ’19
- Charlotte Robbinson JD ’18
- Nadia L. Farjood JD ’18
- Jacob R. Steiner JD ’18
- Aaron Francis JD ’17
- Thaya Uthayophas JD ’18
- Angie Geng JD ’18
- Iris Won JD ’18
- Claire Horan JD ’18

PRO BONO BY THE NUMBERS

| The number of Student Practice Organizations at Harvard Law School, where students work entirely on a pro bono basis on real-life legal matters under the supervision of licensed attorneys. | The number of HLS placements in Student Practice Organizations for the 2016-17 academic year. | The number of average number of pro bono hours per student in the Class of 2017 during their time at Harvard Law School. | 11 | 673 | 586 |
TENANT ADVOCACY PROJECT

My three years at the Tenant Advocacy Project

By Ming-Toy Taylor J.D. ’18

I joined the Tenant Advocacy Project (TAP) as a 1L because the organization’s mission resonated deeply with me. For nearly 40 years, TAP has helped tenants and applicants navigate the bureaucracy of subsidized housing in the Greater Boston area. Having grown up in Throggs Neck Houses in the Bronx, I’ve experienced first-hand many of the challenges that TAP works to address. During high school and college, my experiences drew me to service-work related to homelessness. In college and after, I worked in underserved schools where many students dealt with housing insecurity. TAP would be my introduction to the role of the law in this space, and allow me to make an impact with my budding legal skills.

As a brand new TAP member, I learned about the administration and funding of subsidized housing programs in Massachusetts; the various legal obligations placed on housing agencies by federal and state laws; the agencies’ official and unspoken policies; and the rights and obligations of tenants. I represented a fictional tenant in a mock hearing to practice the skills that I would use on behalf of my future clients: oral and written advocacy, direct and cross-examination, opening and closing statements, and legal research.

My most important learning experience was with my first client. He had become homeless after being evicted from an apartment he shared with an abusive partner. When he requested that his public housing application be treated as an emergency due to his homelessness, a housing agency denied this request. The reason? They did not consider him homeless; despite his living in shelters or on the streets for over a year, they focused on some nights spent on a friend’s couch to recover from flare-ups of a painful, chronic medical condition. Together, he and I rehearsed how he would present his disability during an administrative hearing and gathered supporting documents. I prepared to argue that he was entitled to a reasonable accommodation based on his disability before a hearing officer, and opposite a housing authority attorney. My client, even before he knew the agency would place him in an apartment in short order, left that meeting feeling heard and empowered. And I was captivated by the experience of collaborating and succeeding with my client.

What I love about TAP—and what made me come back 2L year and devote my 3L year to being one of its presidents—is how personal the experience is. When you help someone with housing you learn about their history, their family, their hopes for the future, their neighborhood, their doctors, their support networks and more. As you do that “getting to know”, you learn about your voice as an attorney-advocate, and as a person. My time at TAP has been characterized by continuous growth. I look forward to the new lessons it will teach me this year.
I came to Harvard Law School because I wanted to make a difference. As an international student from Thailand, however, I wasn’t originally sure how that would manifest. Should I make a lot of money in corporate law to help my family? Should I become part of legal academia, thinking of new philosophical frameworks that could change the way we think about the world? Or should I be an activist for my people back home in an effort to finally establish a permanent constitution and democratic Thailand?

These are all big dreams. And they are all valid in their own ways. As I’ve come to learn through working with Student Practice Organizations and the clinical programs, however, our dreams can be difficult to put into practice. But therein also lies the magic: that no one’s dream can stand alone. What ultimately inspires me to pursue the dream of becoming a human rights lawyer is not so much the size of my dream or the grandeur of my narrative, but the people, the events, and the projects — the fact that we’re all doing it together as part of something larger, fighting for a seemingly impossible and ever-changing set of ideals that is human rights. And I learned all this by being part of the Harvard Law Student Advocates for Human Rights.

The day-to-day work of an individual Advocates member (and any lawyer, really) borders more or less on the mundane. While it was exciting to see my own project draw fruition with our letter to the UN special rapporteurs on a human rights violation connected to a gold mine in Thailand, I think focusing on the victories misses the point. In order to get the UN letter drafted, my individual team members had to first learn about UN systems, read up on the many violations connected with the mine, and research individual special rapporteurs and the best ways to approach them. Then we had to come together and compile all this information in an accessible form for our partner organization Fortify Rights. It was all very time-consuming, and, at times, it felt like we had to trust our client to know what best to do with the information we provided them. The fact of the matter, however, was that we did trust them — this non-governmental organization more than 8000 miles away. We trusted that their work would eventually help local villagers who suffered from cyanide poisoning and violent attacks because we trusted them as part of the human rights movement, fighting together for a better world.

For this Fall term, Advocates leaves the same kinds of trust to organizations fighting for land rights in Liberia, advocating for waste pickers in Latin America, documenting human rights violations of asylum-seeking children in Israel, empowering mining-affected communities in Guinea, countering violent extremism in Tanzania, and holding people accountable for War crimes in Iraq. Our project leaders and members similarly know that it’s not about each of us making individual difference but all of us making differences as a team, and beyond. And it’s not just the project people who are cognizant of this fact. Our events team, for instance, has created a Human Rights Training Series, knowing that many students lack understanding about the fundamental building blocks of a different facet of international human rights. Our directors of organizing and direct action constantly seek out opportunities with other organizations on campus to make an impact on the ground.

As for me, as co-President, I’m little more than a facilitator, making sure things go along and confidentiality forms are filled out. It’s a good job. At the very least, I get to write and talk about all the wonderful things Advocates is doing as part of something larger that is human rights.
My participation in the Recording Artists Project (RAP) has been my most important experience at Harvard Law School. In fact, it was one of the reasons I came here in the first place. I had a fledgling interest in the music industry and RAP offered a hands-on opportunity to explore that interest while helping real industry clients. I have always felt music is a foundation of our culture and artists are accordingly vital stewards to protect. Moreover, it’s one of the only Student Practice Organizations at HLS with a practical focus on transactional legal training – hard to find in a law school classroom.

My first client was a musician seeking to release a multi-artist album on his newly founded label. My team and I drafted a form agreement that our client used to license the works from each of the album artists. My second semester at HLS we represented a band that was breaking up. Based on a pre-existing band agreement, we drafted a memo advising the members of their various rights with regards to their discography. Both semesters, I was a Team Leader where I acted as liaison between my team, the client and our supervising attorney. My responsibilities also included setting deadlines and discussing progress with our supervisor – it was a wonderful opportunity to practice client communication.

Through RAP I’ve gained skills and knowledge in three major areas: 1) entertainment/music industry norms; 2) transactional legal practice; and 3) project management. First, RAP trains its students in the complex business structures that make up the music industry and its key actors. Working with my clients showed me firsthand how different industry actors work together and how important their roles are; and furthermore how actors might take advantage of each other. Second, I learned how to read a contract and understand the relevance of “boiler plate terms” to real transactions – something which proved valuable in my 1L and 2L summers. Last, I gained practical skills related to project management including setting timelines, managing group dynamics, and client communication.

I expected RAP to be a fun way to learn about the music industry, get some transactional experience, and fulfill my pro bono hours. I was surprised that instead it became the foundation of my success at HLS. My second year I became the President of RAP – an invaluable lesson in leadership. RAP is the reason I secured my dream internship at Sony Music my 1L summer in New York City, and gave me the confidence to accept an offer to practice transactional entertainment law in Los Angeles after graduation.

When my research paper on music copyright law won a UC Berkeley writing award this past Spring, I owed all my thanks to my RAP supervisor. More importantly, I have been surprised by the breadth of individuals RAP has helped, both directly through its clinical work and indirectly through its community work. Through activities like hosting the Boys and Girls Club of America on campus to organizing the Entertainment Law Symposium, I have had the privilege of making important lifelong connections. RAP is proof of the depth that work in entertainment law can offer.
The plaintiff, PLAP client Richard Crowell, is a septuagenarian prisoner who, in 1987, suffered a disabling traumatic brain injury. He was originally arrested in 1962 as a teenager for a convenience store robbery in East Boston. He was recruited by several older men to drive a getaway car. During the robbery, one of the older co-defendants shot and killed the storekeeper and as a result, Crowell and his co-defendants were charged with first degree murder under the felony murder theory of culpability. To avoid the death penalty, Crowell pled guilty to second degree murder and received a life sentence. In 1974, his sentence was commuted from life to 36 years to life. He was then paroled and spent several years successfully living in the community, with the exception of some minor parole violations that were not serious enough to prevent re-parole. However, after he was attacked and suffered his brain injury in 1987, his behavior worsened and he returned to prison. Since 1990, he has been repeatedly denied parole.

PRISON LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

PLAP court victory helps disabled parolees

Via Harvard Law Today

In May, Massachusetts’ highest court extended the American with Disabilities Act to mentally and physically disabled prisoners seeking parole, ruling that the state must help them get support systems in place in the community. The Harvard Prison Legal Assistance Project filed the lawsuit, Crowell v. Massachusetts Parole Board, and Tabitha Cohen ’18 argued the appeal.

The suit was originally brought in state Superior Court but was dismissed on the motion of the defendant, the state Parole Board. PLAP’s Mike Horrell ’14 represented the plaintiff in the 2012 parole hearing that led to PLAP’s later lawsuit. Tucker DeVoe ’15 briefed and argued the case in the Superior Court. Erin DeGrand ’16 worked on PLAP’s appeal to the state Appeals Court, including coordinating the drafting of the appellate and reply briefs with Keke Wu ’18, Beini Chen ’18, and Ethan Stevenson ’17.

The plaintiff, PLAP client Richard Crowell, is a septuagenarian prisoner who, in 1987, suffered a disabling traumatic brain injury. He was originally arrested in 1962 as a teenager for a convenience store robbery in East Boston. He was recruited by several older men to drive a getaway car. During the robbery, one of the older co-defendants shot and killed the storekeeper and as a result, Crowell and his co-defendants were charged with first degree murder under the felony murder theory of culpability. To avoid the death penalty, Crowell pled guilty to second degree murder and received a life sentence. In 1974, his sentence was commuted from life to 36 years to life. He was then paroled and spent several years successfully living in the community, with the exception of some minor parole violations that were not serious enough to prevent re-parole. However, after he was attacked and suffered his brain injury in 1987, his behavior worsened and he returned to prison. Since 1990, he has been repeatedly denied parole.

PLAP’s Mike Horrell ’14 represented the plaintiff in his 2012 parole hearing. During that hearing the Board strongly suggested it considered the plaintiff impossible to parole because of his disability, a decision which would effectively consign Crowell to prison for the remainder of his life. After the client was again denied parole, Horrell helped to draft a complaint filed in the Superior Court seeking to reverse the Board’s decision and obtain a new hearing for Crowell. The central claim in PLAP’s complaint was that the Parole Board had discriminated against the plaintiff because of his disability. In addition, PLAP argued the plaintiff was entitled to annual parole reviews, rather than reviews every five years as contended by the Parole Board.

After the briefing was concluded in the Appeals Court but before the case was scheduled for oral argument, the SJC took the case for direct review and solicited amicus briefing on the disability rights issue raised by PLAP. In response, civil rights and advocacy rights groups including the Massachusetts chapter of the ACLU, Massachusetts Prisoners’ Legal Services, the Center for Public Representation and the National Disability Rights Network filed a consolidated amicus brief in support of PLAP.

After DeGrand’s graduation in June 2016, Tabitha Cohen ’18 continued PLAP’s representation and argued the case before the Supreme Judicial Court on Jan. 6, 2017.

“Tabitha was superb.” said John Fitzpatrick ’87, one of PLAP’s two supervising attorneys in attendance that day along with Joel Thompson ’97. Fitzpatrick added that, “Her poise and the content of her argument, along with her ability to comprehensively answer every of the many questions put to her by the SJC justices, was equal to or even better than many experienced appellate attorneys arguing before the court.”

Cohen said: “It was a tremendous honor and privilege to represent Mr. Richard Crowell in his prisoners’ rights and disability rights appeal before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Thanks to the tireless work of my amazing supervising attorney, John Fitzpatrick, and all of my predecessors at the Harvard Prison Legal Assistance Project who worked so diligently on Mr. Crowell’s case, Mr. Crowell was able to make his voice heard in the state’s highest court. Arguing before the justices as a 2L has unquestionably been the highlight of my law school experience, and I cannot thank PLAP and everyone who worked so hard on this case, especially John, enough for this opportunity, and for entrusting me with this profound responsibility.”
The only way I’ve gotten to know Boston over the past three years is with my feet. I spent much of the fall of my 1L year protesting the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, and the subsequent state failure to hold their killers accountable. It was through those protests that I learned Boston: by walking through the Boston Commons, holding signs in front of the State House, marching past TD Garden and over the Tobin Bridge. Through civic action, I felt in community with Boston in a way that was impossible poring over my casebooks in Langdell.

In the spring of my 1L year, I was determined to find another way to be in community with Boston. That’s when I found the Project No One Leaves (PNOL), a student-run organization, whose mission is to empower citizens to protect their homes and communities through grassroots organizing, legal education, and civic engagement. Every Saturday, HLS students, public health students, alumni, and community members go door-to-door in Boston neighborhoods experiencing a high rate of foreclosures and evictions, and inform people of their legal rights. Throughout most of my time here at HLS, we’ve focused on bringing the news of people’s housing rights directly to them. Often times people don’t know that only a judge can order an eviction, that they don’t have to accept cash for the keys to their home, or even that their home has been in foreclosure. As PNOL foot soldiers, we sought to dismantle knowledge barriers so that people had the tools to fight for their homes; so that they did not leave. We connected people with the community organization City Life/ Vida Urbana, which has expanded from doing anti-foreclosure work in Jamaica Plain to anti-gentrification and mass displacement work in East Boston. In other words, PNOL connects people with organizing movements dedicated to protecting their community.

Through the hours that I’ve spent Saturday mornings over the past three years driving to Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston, and countless other places, I’ve not only been able to feel Boston’s pulse, but I’ve also found my community at HLS. With our ragtag team of canvassers bundled up in cars brimming with people, we’d talk about everything from how the lack of dental care in low-income communities is a public health crisis to whether Bagelsaurus’ bagels are bagel-y enough (the jury is still out on this one, but no one can debate that they fix a fine sandwich). I met regular canvassers and board members who became my co-counsel in City Life cases that we took at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, close friends, and even my fiancé. We’d share in excitement when we’d talk to people who were starting to pack up all of their belongings to get out of their homes because they got a “cash for keys” letter and didn’t know they had an option to stay; we held each other in silence when we walked down deserted blocks of East Boston as cranes towered over the buildings they were poised to raze and gentrify. PNOL became a home for me, as I worked in community to help keep Boston’s inhabitants in their homes.

This year, I served as co-president of PNOL, though that label means little to me because our board is so egalitarian. In January, in response to the executive orders that prioritized deportation, our board decided to expand the meaning of No One Leaves to include no one leaving this country. We quickly mobilized to adapt our canvasses to include Know Your Rights components, and handed out fliers at the Maverick train stop in 20-degree weather. What I’m most proud of as part of my work with PNOL is that I’m surrounded by a community of people, lawyers and non-lawyers alike, who are dedicated to keeping this community that we have right here in Boston; who are dedicated to making sure that no one leaves.
This past spring break, 41 students chose to spend their spring break traveling across the U.S. and Mexico to provide legal services to communities in need. Within the U.S. students worked with the Community Activism Law Alliance (CALA) in Chicago, IL, assisting with the operations of CALA’s intakes clinics; with American Gateways in San Antonio, TX, assisting pro se clients at the Pearsall Detention Center; and with the Promise of Justice Initiative in New Orleans, LA, assisting with hands-on trial preparation work, including researching and writing time-sensitive motions. This year, a group of students also traveled to Mexico, to help migrant workers file their required federal tax returns. Locally, students also worked at the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association, the Greater Boston Legal Services, and at the law school’s own Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program.

2017 SPRING BREAK PRO BONO TRIPS

Helping asylum seekers

By Pamela Yaacoub J.D. ’17

“I’ve been talking about this for so long. Every time we go somewhere, questions, talking, talking. I hope that one day, I never have to talk about this again.”

My client said this to me while I was visiting him at the South Texas Detention Complex. I spent my spring break with 7 other HLS students, helping detainees complete asylum applications under the supervision of American Gateways in San Antonio. That Wednesday, I was focused on finishing my client’s “declaration,” a statement by an asylee telling the immigration judge their story, and why they are afraid to return to their home country. In my overzealous pursuit of detail, I forgot that my client was tired, that he has been trying to prove his family’s humanity for months, traveling through 10 different countries only to arrive to the United States and be imprisoned, without family, without friends, without comfort, without liberty.

We made our way to the detention center every day, driving an hour from San Antonio to Pearsall. We were each assigned 3-4 detainees to assist throughout the week, and we tried to meet with them every day. We scrambled to answer all the questions on the asylum application, explaining that one mistake or one omission could lead to a fatal (and irrational, and cruel) perception of inconsistency. We did our best to help our clients produce detailed declarations (which had to be in English) that conveyed their story and their pain. One of the most difficult obstacles was the lack of adequate language services. My clients spoke Arabic, Fulani, and Wolof; others spoke Haitian Creole, Somali, French, Spanish, Garifuna, and Portuguese. Most days, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and GEO, the private corporation that runs the detention center, only allow American Gateways to use one phone, two at the most, in order to access a language interpretation line. Between bad service, dropped calls, limited time, and limited phone access, I sometimes had only 20 minutes to talk to a client before time was up. How can they answer questions requesting every possible detail of their lives in 20 minutes? How can they access justice like this?

So often, we talk about immigration in numbers and hypotheticals. But it’s important to remember that immigrants are people with lives and loved ones, values and dreams. They are vendors and engineers, managers and construction workers, political activists and salespeople, doctors and farmers, ministers and students. They are unfathomably brave women from Haiti fleeing years of domestic violence, they are a gay Senegalese man who was beaten by an entire village, they are a Sudanese woman who stood up for the rights of rape victims from Darfur. They are a Salvadorian baker and father of four who was tortured by both the Barrio 18 gang and the police. And here we are, forcing them to fit their suffering into narrow legal categories. But they are human beings, and they have every right to be treated as such, everywhere they go.

It was my privilege to listen to the stories of my clients, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to play an infinitesimal role in their legal empowerment. I am also outraged at the inherently corrupt power structure that diminishes and dehumanizes them, that requires a national quota of 34,000 beds filled, that benefits from their chained bodies. But then I remember that there are heroes at American Gateways and elsewhere who have dedicated their lives to immigrant justice, and we can join them. We can channel our rage into action. If this story resonates with you at all, please take the time to support local immigration advocacy and community organizing, volunteer whenever you can, and actively engage others on issues of social justice.

HLS Students on their Spring Break Pro Bono Trip to San Antonio, TX
HLS students travel to Mexico to provide free tax services for migrant workers

Written by the team of students who traveled to Mexico

Our enthusiastic team of eight HLS students and one supervising attorney ventured into the state of Queretaro, Mexico to provide free tax services for migrant workers in coordination with Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM). One week, many tacos, and $6,799 in refunds later, we are headed back to Boston with new perspectives on the challenges that migrant workers face in the US.

About 1,200 workers settled a class action against an employer in the US following poor working conditions and missing back pay. Some workers had federal taxes withheld from the settlement amount, which we were able to reclaim. We also helped migrant workers claim back year taxes for 2014, 2015, and 2016. For other migrant workers who did not have federal taxes withheld from the settlement amount, we helped them fill W-7 forms for individual taxpayer identification numbers (ITIN) in order to claim their dependents and file tax returns in the future.

While preparing tax returns, many migrant workers recalled cramped bunk houses, illegal and non-reimbursed recruiting fees, withheld W-2 forms from their employers, and paid tax preparation fees by the employer, often claiming fraudulent tax credits. On each of these issues, we tried our best to inform them of their rights remedies should they encounter these problems again.

None of this success would have been possible without the fantastic people at CDM. The CDM team organized workshops for community members in tandem with our tax clinics to discuss the resources available to prevent labor abuses, to navigate the immigration system, and to understand the American political climate. CDM’s history, expertise, and passion for advocacy on behalf of migrant workers have earned them the trust and respect of local communities. We learned so much from them and would urge other law students to work with them in the future. CDM is on the front lines of migrant worker labor rights, which have become more critical since the recent election. The anxiety among the population was palpable, especially in terms of their visa status and heightened racism. For many migrant workers, their US wages earned within a few months each year is their only income.

Outside of our work, we found time to soak up the culture and explore all that Mexico has to offer. We hiked La Pena, the world’s third largest monolith, which watches over the officially designated Pueblo Magico and is rumored to have mystical energy. Many of our group can now attest to its power. We sampled many delicious local dishes and indulged moderately in local liquors such as mescal and aguardiente. We even had a piñata to celebrate the birthday of Joanna Cornell (JD/MBA ’19)!

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to learn about direct client services while providing tangible assistance to an underserved community. We were able to save the migrant workers $6,799 through tax returns and $1,000 through saved tax preparation fees. We learned so much about the lives and challenges of migrant workers and had an unforgettable experience along the way.