

## COMMUNITY LAW PROJECT



Since its inception in 2004, California Western's Community Law Project (CLP) has advanced the legal profession by instilling a commitment to public service in CWSL students. CLP is a student-run project that provides pro bono legal services, including legal advice, consultations, and referral services to low-income people in the greater San Diego community.

Following its motto — “we meet people where they are” — throughout the year, students along with volunteer attorneys organize pro bono legal clinics at five sites throughout San Diego County, bringing services directly to clients’ doorsteps. During the clinic, students meet with clients to discuss their particular legal issue and then consult with onsite supervising attorneys to discuss any potential solutions. In real time, CLP interns learn how to help clients navigate the complexities of criminal, housing, employment, family, and immigration law, among others. CLP

interns also provide workshops and presentations on topics of interest to community organizations and schools.

By providing assistance, direction, and connections to resources, CLP promotes self-sufficiency for community members, resulting in more affordable services for the individual and a reduction in overall costs to the community as a whole.

In the last year, CWSL law students, community volunteers, and volunteer attorneys provided over 3,000 hours of service through 145 clinics and community education programs.

This summer, CLP was fortunate enough to once again work with long-term partners, including the Karen Organization of San Diego, Mary and Gary West Senior Center, and Goodwill Industries, and to



have cemented new partnerships. One of those new and exciting partnerships involved cohosting legal clinics with the office of Assemblymember David Alvarez (80th District) at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Logan Heights and the Chicano Federation in City Heights.

Michelle Valania 3L, who volunteered at the pop-up in Logan Heights and works with CLP as a Student Fellow, said, “working with vulnerable populations in the San Diego area is an incredibly rewarding experience. No matter where my legal career takes me, this experience has instilled in me the desire to contribute to the efforts of making legal resources accessible to the most vulnerable in our community.”

In its 20 years of service, CLP has been recognized both locally and nationally. In February 2010, the State Bar of California awarded California Western the President’s Pro Bono Service Award, the State Bar’s top recognition for pro bono service and the first award ever given to a law school. CWSL was also named to the National President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction every year from 2009 to 2014. CLP was chosen as a 2022 California Nonprofit of the Year for California Assembly District 78 and, in 2023, CLP Executive Director and California Western Professor Dana Sisitsky, was named to the Faculty Pro Bono Honor Roll for the Association of American Law Schools.

Thanks to the support of local volunteer attorneys—approximately 60 per year—and generous donors, CLP has provided legal counsel to 7,913 clients to date, not including those who have attended its community education programs. Each year, the 36 student interns who participate in CLP receive life-changing training and experience. As Heather Hunter ’25 attests, “Interacting with the clients and seeing firsthand the injustices they face helped me feel motivated and refocused on the reasons why I entered law school. I now feel even more passionate about graduating and getting to work to continue to support vulnerable communities.”



**COMMUNITY LAW PROJECT  
BY THE NUMBERS:**

**7,913** CLIENTS SERVED  
TO DATE\*

**36** STUDENT INTERNS  
ANNUALLY

**60** LOCAL ATTORNEY  
VOLUNTEERS  
APPROXIMATELY TO DATE

\*Not including those who have attended its community education programs.