

## From Clinic to Courtroom: A Full-Circle Journey in Service

You don't always realize when you're stepping into a defining moment, but for Robert Prine '16 his first CLP clinic helped everything click.

When he walked into his first Community Law Project (CLP) clinic in 2014, he had no idea it would become one of the most formative moments of his legal education. He was a second-year student at California Western School of Law (CWSL), juggling coursework and the all-too-familiar uncertainty of trying to figure out what kind of lawyer he wanted to be. CLP changed that.

"It was kind of like being thrown into the deep end," he says with a laugh, recalling some of his first sessions at the First Lutheran Church clinic site. "I didn't know housing law. I didn't know immigration law. But I learned how to ask questions and, more importantly, how to listen." CLP taught him how to ask smart questions, stay composed in unfamiliar territory, and learn by doing, skills he carried with him long after graduation.

That early exposure to real clients with real problems, often from underrepresented communities, sparked something deeper than just skill building. It helped shape Robert's legal compass. "You get comfortable being uncomfortable," he says. "And that's where growth happens."

After graduating from CWSL in 2016, Robert's path took a few turns. He began on the transactional side of law, eventually moving into litigation, and now practices employment law at Dinsmore & Shohl LLP. He credits those early, hands-on clinic interactions with sharpening his ability to think on his feet, stay grounded, and connect with people, no matter how complex the issue at hand.

And now he's found his lane. "I don't hate Mondays," he said. "That's one of my markers of success." It's a light comment, but it reflects something deeper: a sense of purpose, balance, and a career he's actively shaping on his own terms. He's found a rhythm now. "I really enjoy employment work," he says.



Robert's relationship with CWSL hasn't faded in the years since he left campus. In fact, it's only deepened. He volunteers with CLP, mentors students, and continues to show up for the community that helped launch his career. "Being an active alum isn't just about giving back. It's a symbiotic relationship," he says. "The school gave me tools and perspective. If I can play even a small part in helping someone else get their footing, I'll always say yes to that."

Speaking of saying yes, for current students his message is exactly that. Say yes. Try everything. Figure out what you like and what you don't. He truly believes that the only way to know is by doing. Because sometimes the path to becoming the lawyer you're meant to be doesn't start in a courtroom or even a classroom. Sometimes, it starts by sitting across from someone who has no one else to turn to, realizing you can help, and the first step is simply listening.

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