

# **HARVARD LAW SCHOOL CLASS OF 2018**



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**COMMENCEMENT NEWSLETTER**

## CHILD ADVOCACY CLINIC

### Finding purpose at the Child Advocacy Clinic

By Charlotte Robinson, J.D. '18

I came to HLS knowing that I wanted to work with children and young people – I just wasn't exactly sure what that would look like - whether it would be in education, child welfare, juvenile justice, or something else entirely. The Child Advocacy Program (CAP), through its Child Advocacy Clinic, provided opportunities in a whole range of areas related to young people so it felt like a great place for me to try and explore my different interests. The Child Advocacy Clinic exposes students to both substantive legal issues affecting children and the myriad ways that lawyers can work for social change, by matching students with fieldwork placements located in the Boston area and throughout the U.S.

Before the Clinic was due to start, I was still torn as to which substantive area and organization I should select as my top choice. But after meeting with CAP's Assistant Director Crisanne Hazen and discussing the experiences I had had thus far along with my current interests, I found myself heading to the Youth Advocacy Division (YAD) of the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS). YAD is the arm of the Massachusetts public defender office that represents minors in juvenile justice proceedings.

While at YAD I got to work closely with several attorneys, both observing them in court and helping them to prepare for cases. My work involved a lot of research and writing, including, for example, general research into how to authenticate social media posts and whether we could argue that the police had not had probable cause to arrest our minor client for drug distribution based on an invalid "stop and search."

My favorite project was writing a motion to dismiss in a case where a boy had been charged with possession of a knife. He had not hurt anyone. He had not tried to hurt anyone. He had not threatened anyone. He simply had a knife to protect himself from the pervasive violence in his neighborhood. For him, a \$10 knife was an affordable option for self-defense, whereas a firearm was not. I wrote the motion to dismiss on grounds including that interpreting the second amendment not to include knives would discriminate against people living in poverty for whom a firearm and registration are not affordable. This argument surprised and persuaded both my supervisor and the judge in the case, who ruled in my client's favor!



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My CAP placement was my first experience working at a public defender office and I had an almost immediate realization that this was the kind of work I had come to law school to learn to do. The Child Advocacy Clinic was therefore a real turning point for me. It offered something that my black letter classes simply hadn't been able to, by giving me the opportunity to get direct and hands-on experience in an area of law that I was passionate about. My Clinic experience gave me the chance to meet and affect the lives of actual clients, and to see the pros

and cons of working within a system that serves to give young people a chance at getting the due process that the U.S. Constitution provides to them. I am incredibly excited to be pursuing this work after my graduation this spring, and my Child Advocacy Clinic experience played a role in giving me a foundation of knowledge and skills to embark on this next phase of my professional career.