

## NYWBA FOUNDATION FELLOW INTERNEED AT SANCTUARY FOR FAMILIES, CENTER FOR BATTERED WOMEN

*By Marina Ivulgina*

"Now I'm a believer" - these words from a song describe nearly perfectly my experiences at Sanctuary for Families, Center for Battered Women ("Sanctuary"). Finally, I know that it is possible to find the kind of internship environment that every law student hopes to find when she enters law school. I interned at Sanctuary for one year, thanks to a NYWBA Foundation grant, as well as a Fordham Domestic Violence Advocacy Fellowship.

Sanctuary is an organization that uses a multi-faceted approach to help women from diverse backgrounds with problems stemming from domestic violence and abuse. Sanctuary's primary purpose is to provide legal assistance to women in a variety of areas, such as Family Court proceedings, immigration, child custody and visitation, orders of protection, and divorce. The attorneys from Sanctuary work in Family Courts in all five boroughs, assisting women as their assigned counsel and acting as referral sources. In addition to legal assistance, Sanctuary provides a variety of social services such as counseling, support groups, child care, and permanent and temporary housing placements to women seeking help to escape abuse.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that although Sanctuary is a vast organization with a wide variety of services and many departments, I was allowed direct involvement in every stage of some clients' cases. During my year at Sanctuary, I did everything from conducting intakes and interviews to collecting evidence, drafting court documents, attending trials, and even arguing in court and in front of social service agencies for my clients. For instance, I worked with one woman to file a self-petition with the Immigration Service, and I assisted her in obtaining childcare, cash benefits, Medicaid for her and her children, long-term shelter placement, a Social Security card, and Section 8 housing placement. This woman originally had been referred to Sanctuary for assistance with an order of protection, but she ultimately needed a wide range of services. Before coming to Sanctuary, she had been on the verge of returning to her abusive husband, who had starved, beaten, raped and threatened to kill her on numerous occasions. My client initially felt that she had to return to her abusive husband because she spoke little English, was afraid of being deported, and had overstayed her allotted time at a homeless shelter.

The highly supportive environment at Sanctuary allowed me to help women in desperate situations. The staff attorneys are expert and were willing to guide me through the nuances of the law, to answer my questions at any time of night or day, and to tirelessly edit draft upon draft of any document. I had unrestricted access to every person in the legal and social services departments, so I was able to consult a housing expert, a divorce attorney, or a counselor as soon as any problem arose. Whenever I felt overpowered by the many stories of horrific abuse, I could talk to my supervising attorney or even to the director of legal services. More significantly, assisting victims of domestic violence gave me the opportunity to do meaningful work and to directly observe its consequences. Instead of working exclusively with documents, I was given the opportunity to work with clients face to face, to hear about their progress in securing employment or enrolling in school to continue their education, to attend immigration status hearings with them, or to tell them the good

news about their divorce or child custody cases. In addition to doing meaningful work in a superb environment, I was also able to participate in the "Trafficking, Domestic Violence and Prostitution Conference," organized by Sanctuary in Winter 2004, and to meet many fascinating people who gave lectures and taught training seminars at Sanctuary.

Looking back on the past year, I am grateful to the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation for their support, and I feel exceptionally lucky to have been given the fellowship at Sanctuary. I can only hope that the tradition of sending students to intern at this great organization continues far into the future, until the day that no one needs the help of a place like Sanctuary.

## Florence Perlow Shientag Award Doubled in Value and Presented to Jennifer Weiers

This has been a banner year for the Florence Perlow Shientag Award, which was created by the Hon. Florence Perlow Shientag and is awarded in an annual contest for the best constitutional law essay submitted by a law student. Judge Shientag generously doubled the award this year to \$10,000. Jennifer L. Weiers, a third-year law student at New York University School of Law (NYU) wrote the winning essay.

Judge Shientag presented the award to Ms. Weiers at the NYWBA Annual Dinner on May 26 at the Grand Hyatt. Ms. Weiers, NYWBA President Elizabeth A. Bryson, and Foundation board member and past NYWBA President Barbara Ryan all publicly thanked Judge Shientag, acknowledging her tremendous contributions to the Women's Bar as a founding member of the Association. Ms. Weiers charmed the crowd by donning a WBASNY cap. She also joined the Association that evening as a student member.

Ms. Weiers wrote an exceptional essay entitled, "Enforcing the Constitution within AEDPA's Limits: Issues Facing the U.S. Supreme Court in *Yarborough v. Alvarado*." The essay examined the way federal courts decide habeas corpus claims of state prisoners under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.

The New York Women's Bar Association Foundation administers the essay contest. Ms. Ryan and fellow Foundation board member Marian Burnbaum coordinated the efforts of a group of essay readers from across the Association. The essay contest attracted entries of students from law schools throughout the metropolitan area, including NYU, Hofstra University School of Law, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Pace Law School, and Fordham University School of Law.

Congratulations to Ms. Weiers and many thanks to Judge Shientag!



*Past President Barbara A. Ryan, Award Recipient Jennifer L. Weiers, and Hon. Florence Perlow Shientag, Founder, Past President and Award Sponsor (l-r)*