Changes in the Juvenile Court: Judge Michael Nash
By: Natasha Court

Throughout the academic year, the Center for Children’s Rights hosts colloquiums on various issues related to children’s rights. The colloquium gives CCR fellows as well as other students and faculty the opportunity to hear from professionals working in various fields of child advocacy.

On October 22, the Center for Children’s Rights was privileged to hear Judge Michael Nash speak to the students and faculty about his experience as the Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court. Judge Nash has served on the Juvenile Court since 1990 and has been a prominent advocate for children’s rights. In describing his line of work, Judge Nash quoted renowned Judge Leonard Edwards in saying, “We are the legal equivalent to the emergency room in the legal profession.” This point conveyed the serious nature of Judge Nash’s job and the level of commitment and dedication he puts forth every day.

Judge Nash is motivated by his satisfaction when children receive the treatment and resources they need to stop abuse and become productive citizens.

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We’re Listening: Aiding Juvenile’s in Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall

By: Kristen Boyert

A golfer drives on the bucolic green of Los Amigos Country Club in Downey. The autumn sun warms his back while the breeze washes across the Bermuda grass. Sitting behind this oasis in a concrete desert on the western edge of Downey is an innocuous white and grey building: Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

Los Padrinos, or LP, opened its doors in 1957, making it the second oldest detention facility in Los Angeles County. It is one of only three juvenile detention centers in Los Angeles County. The detention center houses children while they wait to be transferred to another facility or for court action. Some are housed for hours, others for months. LP has the highest volume of youth offenders out of the three detention centers.

Whittier Law School students, many in the Center for Children’s Rights, attend the Los Padrinos Juvenile Detention Facility Advocacy Program. LP was known for years to be dilapidated and overpopulated.

CCR Alum Discusses IEP Process with Students

By: Lauren Martin

Edwin Egelsee, a former fellow with Whittier Law School’s Center for Children’s Rights, presented an informative colloquium regarding his special education practice to current students at the Center’s September 10th colloquium. As a partner at Augustin & Egelsee, LLP, Egelsee is dedicated to children’s advocacy, and he provides representation in all areas of special education, including Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, resolution sessions, mediations, and due process hearings. In addition, he handles disciplinary matters involving involuntary transfers, suspensions, and expulsions.

Egelsee’s remarks at the colloquium focused on the complexities of IEPs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public schools to create an IEP for every student with a disability who meets the federal and state requirements for special education. Throughout his talk, Egelsee explained the various ways these plans help parents and educators develop reasonable goals and objectives for the optimum development of the individual student. He also told numerous heart-warming stories that exemplified how an attentive attorney can help parents fight for an IEP that provides a free and appropriate public education for their child in the least restrictive environment, as required by law.

As the presentation progressed, students had the opportunity to ask Egelsee questions about the mediation process and the demands of special education law on lawyers. These inquiries were answered with invaluable advice about both the personal and material benefits of a legal career dedicated to advocacy for children.

Egelsee’s insight into the educational struggles faced by families puts him in a unique position to advocate zealously for appropriate schooling for children. Even so, Egelsee emphasizes that many more advocates, like CCR fellows, are needed in his line of work.

The US Department of Justice brought a lawsuit against Los Angeles Probation Department for civil rights violations in the juvenile hall system, and now Public Council in Los Angeles monitors the halls. Students randomly visit units asking the juveniles what services they are receiving and if there is a discrepancy or complaint. Matthew O’Neill is a 3L CCR fellow who goes to LP almost every Saturday. Fernando Acuna, a 1L in the CCR program, said, “The juveniles just want to talk to you, and they aren’t as bad

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Often, children grow up in the juvenile court system without adequate or proper care, and then they are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior.

A serious problem of foster care is that many children “age-out” of the system. This means that children reach an age when their foster families are no longer required to give them assistance. Sadly, too many children grow up in the juvenile court system without finding permanent homes. As adults, they are more likely to suffer from substance abuse, domestic violence, and poverty. According to Judge Nash, these unfortunate statistics simply mean that the system has failed.

Judge Nash is working hard to create real change in the system, and he is responsible for implementing a number of excellent programs, such as Adoption Saturdays. Through this program, approximately 10,000 foster children in Los Angeles have been adopted in Saturday court hearings. The program has grown into an annual National Adoption Day. Judge Nash described the day as “rivaling Disneyland” as the happiest day on earth. This year will be the 10th anniversary of National Adoption Day and will take place on November 21st.

Judge Nash also spoke about the importance of collaboration and partnerships between the court and programs such as The Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers. These lawyers provide support services for parents and children. Many children are neglected in the foster care system, and these lawyers provide legal assistance to families with the goal of family reunification.

Another improvement in the juvenile system is the push to keep siblings together. Studies have shown the importance of maintaining family relationships and nurturing the bonds between siblings. Approximately 45% of children are not placed in foster care with their siblings. Judge Nash said that the juvenile court and social workers need to do a better job in keeping families together. Fortunately, a pilot project is in the works to locate and unite relatives. This will help preserve family bonds and find children permanent homes, because “all children should have something permanent in their life.”

Overall, the juvenile court system has made tremendous improvements and continues to make great strides in child advocacy and protection. Since the 1990s the number of children under the Los Angeles Juvenile Court jurisdiction has gone down from 60,000 to 24,564. Although this is still a staggering number, every year the number goes down, and efforts toward further progress continue.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

ADOPTION DAY: This month, CCR Fellows and pro bono attorneys from firms across California will spend the day in Los Angeles County assisting with over 100 adoptions for National Adoption Day.

SPRING FLING AT ORANGEWOOD: We continue our annual tradition of bringing a spring celebration to the children at Orangewood Children’s Home on February 6, 2010.
The United Nations estimates there are over one million orphans in this area alone, caused by war, poverty, and AIDS.

Camille’s first journey was to Swaziland, a small kingdom only slightly bigger than the State of Connecticut, where nearly 600,000 orphans live. She says, “Most of these children live without the benefit of strong, protective family members, and they are routinely abused by predators.”

During her stay, Camille was one of sixteen people who fed and cared for over 600 orphans living at two “carepoints” (areas adopted by Hopechest), from sun up to sun down. In their “spare” time, the group built a playground, complete with swings, monkey bars, and slides. While the children were ecstatic to receive such a gift, Camille found them grateful for even smaller things. “They never complain and rarely cry. They love each other so much and appreciate hugs in a way I had never seen before.”

From there, she traveled to South Africa, the southernmost country on the continent, where nearly 420,000 children are orphaned by AIDS alone. In addition to feeding and caring for children at a South African carepoint, her group built a home for two orphans who lost their mother to AIDS and were subsequently abused by their uncle. Such abuse is not uncommon in the region where over half the population lives in poverty and some children are forced into sexual slavery to survive.

I asked Camille if she could recall her most memorable moment. “Rather than a specific moment,” she replied, “the most memorable lesson is these children were the most joyful children I have ever met. They are amongst a crisis, living on practically nothing, and yet they sing, dance, play, and smile.”

While changing lives through litigation is essential, the energy, time, and sacrifice involved in implementing world change in a practical manner is equally commendable. This trip is an example of how to embody social justice goals and share a face of compassion to children in need. When asked if she would return, Camille responded emphatically, “Absolutely!”

Book Drive:

Fellows for the Center for Children’s Rights have been busy collecting children’s books for the community court in Santa Ana. To date we have collected over 200 books from Whittier students, faculty, and members of the community.

The books will benefit children and their siblings involved in court proceedings.
A New Beginning,  
14th Annual Conference  
By: Lani Baron

Each year, the Center for Children’s Rights fellows have the great privilege of attending the conference “A New Beginning for Partnerships for Children & Families.” The conference is sponsored by the Los Angeles County Superior Court and California State University of Los Angeles and held at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The professionals who speak at the conference and host the workshops are dedicated to the education and training of legal and other professionals on issues concerning the welfare of children and families.

This year, the conference held on November 3rd offered numerous informative workshops for our fellows to attend. Among these workshops was “Raising the Educational Achievement of DCFS Youth through Implementation of the First Supervisorial Education Pilot Project,” which highlighted an education project aimed toward assisting troubled high school students in Pomona and Montebello School Districts. The program focused on enhancing the educational achievements of these youths by hands on, individualized planning and intervention. Additionally, the “Tackling Illiteracy in Secondary Special Education” workshop addressed the pervasiveness of illiteracy among teens in Los Angeles County. The workshop provided participants with an opportunity to become informed about the problem of illiteracy and discuss strategies to tackle it. These comprehensive workshops are only a couple of examples among dozens offered at the conference.

Our CCR fellows highly value the opportunity for hands-on education. The New Beginning conference provides nothing short of an eye opening experience, which works to enhance the education of our fellows on current and very real problems facing children today. Through education, our fellows will blossom and grow into professionals who can emerge from Whittier Law School and make a tangible difference in the arena of Children’s Rights. Our fellows are grateful for this enriching opportunity.
We’re listening: Aiding Juveniles in Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall
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as people think.” He continued, “The reason we do what we do is to make sure the juveniles are treated fairly and also to make sure they know what their rights are.”

What we tend to forget is that they are not just offenders but also children who cover their fear and anxiety of being lost in a system they do not understand. For a few brief moments they are able to ease their burden and worries by talking to someone outside the facility. Acuna says his most memorable experience is connecting a story to a face, and then hearing the story of how these juveniles arrived at LP. Far too often do we see a face or hear a case of a child “gone wrong” without considering the entire scope of that child’s life. The program allows law students to humanize the cases and bring awareness that the offenders are children who want to be heard.

In addition to the value CCR fellows have for the children they ultimately serve, the CCR program is one of the best ambassadors we have for Whittier Law School. The activities in the program reflect well on the law school and provide a sense of pride in our service to the legal community.

Other Whittier law students are always welcome to participate in CCR activities. This summer CCR fellows will have a special opportunity to further their studies in the Study Abroad Program in Spain, which will have a family law emphasis this year. We hope other students interested in this field will join us in Spain.

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