

Katten Legal Clinic Featured by PLI's 'Pursuing Justice' Podcast

November 3, 2023

PLI's "Pursuing Justice: The Pro Bono Files" podcast host took a field trip to the Katten Legal Clinic at Jose de Diego Community Academy to see first-hand how the clinic operates, what clients ask about and how attorneys respond.

The nearly hour-long episode follows host Alicia Aiken as she speaks with more than a dozen legal professionals from Katten, Northwestern Law School and Legal Aid Chicago, which partners with Katten to operate the clinic housed within the elementary school.

Aiken observed that the clinic has three things that have made it work and work effectively for its 10 years of operations: Katten attorneys devoted to the clinic, Legal Aid Chicago attorneys who are pros in a clinic setting and support from a community where the services are needed. Legal issues that are most often handled include family law, public benefits, landlord-tenant issues, immigration, consumer matters and expungement.

About the clinic, Aiken said the model is "impressive" and also "eminently doable" elsewhere.

"This is a kind of pro bono that actually can build stronger communities that really smart people in legal aid and in law firms can make a huge difference, one case at a time," Aiken said. "They just have to turn their attention to it, and when they do, they can have an amazing outcome like this one."

Throughout the podcast, Aiken spoke with several Katten volunteers, including Litigation paralegal Matthew Doran, who has been working at the clinic for nine years, and Litigation associate Allison Clark, who started at the clinic as a 1L and never stopped going. Aiken also spoke with Litigation associate Brett Wilson, Financial Markets Litigation Enforcement associate Zachary Schmitz and Litigation counsel Adrian Jonak.

Motivations for volunteering vary, from the rewarding nature of the work and a desire to fill a systems gap to varying one's professional diet.

Clinic founder Jonathan Baum, senior counsel and director of pro bono services, said the biggest hurdle to jump is getting attorney volunteers to overcome the "fear factor."

Attorneys, Jonathan said, "don't like going into an environment in which they might not feel competent. In which they might have to say, 'I don't know' or 'I'll have to look that up.'" However, what Jonathan is proudest of is that, "As difficult as it is sometimes to get attorneys to come for the first time, we have never had an attorney come to our clinic and not come back."

["A Pro Bono Clinic in Action," Pursuing Justice: The Pro Bono Files](#)

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