

ALUMNI PROFILE



Ms. Cecilia Levin, a 2005 J.D. Washington College of Law (WCL) graduate, is an immigration staff attorney at Ayuda Inc., a nonprofit, community-based legal and social service agency serving the low-income Latino and foreign-born community in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. In its 33-year history, Ayuda has assisted over 200,000 immigrants and continues to be one of the leading sources for multi-lingual legal representation. As an immigration staff attorney Ms. Levin is responsible for managing a caseload of various immigration related cases including asylum, Violence Against Women Act petitions, U visas for victims of violent crimes, and human trafficking cases. She represents immigrant clients in administrative and judicial proceedings and coordinates with other area organizations and governmental services on immigration issues.

Ms. Levin also participates in Ayuda's bi-weekly public intake, in which the organization provides consultations to the public on a variety of

immigration issues. During public intake, Ms. Levin is likely to conduct initial interviews of potential clients, inform clients of their rights and options, advise individuals about their upcoming days in immigration court, or connect them with social services.

According to Ms. Levin, one of the amazing areas of her work is the field of human trafficking. "I am constantly surprised at how widespread the problem appears to be in the Washington D.C. area." Additionally, she says it is fascinating to see a number of different actors involved in one single case. For example, one human trafficking client may involve FBI officials conducting an investigation, Department of Justice attorneys prosecuting the case, civil attorneys helping with a wage-hour claim, social workers, therapists, and immigration attorneys. Ms. Levin says that part of what she has learned at Ayuda has been how to navigate and understand this complicated system.

Prior to attending WCL as an evening student, Ms. Levin

was a Fulbright Research Scholar in Santiago, Chile. She researched domestic violence resources in La Florida, a city in eastern Chile, and coordinated with government agencies, law enforcement officials, health care providers, and community organizers. As an evening law student at WCL, and while working full-time, Ms. Levin worked for the Domestic Violence, Women and the Law, and Criminal Law clinical programs, and as a Deans Fellow.

Ms. Levin has been involved with Ayuda in a variety of ways for the past six years. As an undergraduate student at American University, Ms. Levin volunteered with Ayuda as an English as a Second Language teacher. During her time at WCL, she interned in Ayuda's Clinical Legal Latina program and their Immigration Unit. Upon her graduation from WCL, Ms. Levin applied to be a law clerk at Ayuda, a job that led to her staff attorney position.

Ms. Levin says that it was WCL's institutional commitment to advancing human rights and encouraging students in areas of public interest law and human rights that led her to work at Ayuda. As a law student, she was drawn to professors with an interest in human rights issues and work experiences that allowed her to advance those causes.

Although Ms. Levin sees her work at Ayuda as a natural progression from her studies at WCL, Ayuda has also shown a contrast between the actual field of human rights and law school. When asked the difference between law school and

her work at Ayuda, she responds, "Working at Ayuda has helped me to understand that human rights are about human beings. One by one. Case by case." According to Ms. Levin, in law school it is easy to see things in terms of general categories and to think of human rights in terms of covenants, treaties, and resolutions.

Working at Ayuda, has helped Ms. Levin to see human rights in terms of individual people's lives. As an example, Ms. Levin points to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibition on involuntary servitude. That is a big general concept until you run across a woman being held and forced against her will to work. As direct service providers, the staff at Ayuda are in a position, at least to try, to help that woman gain her right to pursue her own life as she chooses to live it. Ms. Levin is exceptional, not only for the important work that she does, but also because of the quick and smooth transition she has made from law school to a fulfilling legal career in human rights. **HRB**

Jerald Hess, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the Alumni Profile for the Human Rights Brief.