Kathy Rowings (JD ’12)
Justice Program Manager at the National Association of Counties

Q: Can you tell us a little more about the work you do in your current position? What do you find most interesting? Challenging?
A: The National Association of Counties (NACo) represents the interests of county governments at the federal level and also provides education and training around best practices for local governments. We work on issues including health, transportation, economic development, and justice—which is my area of focus. I work to educate county officials and their staffs about important issues relating to county justice systems, and ways in which they can improve their justice systems. In particular, I focus on pretrial justice, the impact of the Affordable Care Act on jails, and juvenile justice.

The most interesting, and challenging, part of my job is that every county is different. There are 3,069 counties in the United States, so there are a lot of differences. There are certainly common issues—jail overcrowding, the high percentages of jail inmates with behavioral health issues, a shortage of public defender services, and racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system, to name a few—but each county has different leadership, budgets, resources, specific trouble spots, etc. So while we generally know what the problems are, we’re constantly working to help county officials come up with unique solutions that fit their community’s particular needs.

Q: You participated in the juvenile justice clinic for two years while at Northwestern. Have you been able to pursue your interest in juvenile justice since graduating?
A: I have! One of the major issue areas that I work on at NACo is juvenile justice. Specifically, I get to educate county officials and their staffs about why juvenile justice is important to counties, and work with them on ways they can improve their communities’ juvenile justice systems. I spend a lot of time talking with people who are doing juvenile justice work “on the ground” in counties around the country, to find out what’s working, what’s not working so well, and what resources would help them do better. Then I take that information and share it with the rest of our NACo members, through publications that I write, webinars and meetings with experts that I organize, and lots of one-on-one conversations with people. I definitely wouldn’t have predicted I’d be in this kind of job out of law school, but it’s been a great fit. It’s a really nice mix of high-level policy research and helping people who are putting those policies into action.

Q: What do you bring from your clinical experience as a student lawyer and an advocate to your current work?
A: My experience at the CFJC allowed me to work directly with juveniles who were impacted by local justice systems—the same systems that I now advise on. I’ve been inside a juvenile detention center; I’ve seen a youth with mental health issues and her family try to navigate the juvenile justice system; I’ve seen how a good defense attorney can make all the difference in a child’s outcome. I think those perspectives have been absolutely invaluable in my current work, both in my understanding of what’s at stake and in keeping me motivated when promising programs sometimes stall (as often happens in government). I’m able to think of specific faces and consider how they’d be affected by a program or policy that a county is implementing, and share that viewpoint with county officials who are making decisions that greatly impact youth.

Q: What would you say to incoming law students about why the clinical experience is important?
A: I would unequivocally tell every single law student to participate in a clinic. It was unquestionably the best thing I did in law school—both in terms of how much I learned, and how much I enjoyed it. Clinic gives you an opportunity to work with real clients and learn practical skills you’ll never get in a classroom (or at a law firm for the first several years).

Q: What would you say to soon-to-be graduates who are looking to pursue a career in public interest law?
A: Do it! And try your best not to be freaked out when all your classmates have jobs way earlier than you. In all seriousness, working in public interest is, I think, the best type of lawyering you can do. It’s rewarding, interesting, and constantly challenging. I’d also recommend thinking outside the box when looking for a public interest job. What I loved about my work at the CFJC was the personal interaction with clients while also looking at larger policy issues (like juvenile sex offender registries). By widening my search from just juvenile criminal defense jobs, I was able to find something that allows the personal interaction and high-level policy work I was looking for.
Annie Buth (JD '07)
M.R. Bauer Foundation Clinical Fellow at the Center on Negotiation and Mediation, Northwestern University School of Law

Q: First, tell us about what you are doing now.
A: I am thrilled to be back at Northwestern! This summer I began a Clinical Fellowship with the Bluhm Legal Clinic’s Center on Negation and Mediation (“the Center”). I am focusing on the Center’s restorative justice initiatives, which recognize the deep need for healing processes to address marginalization and inequality. We are exploring ways to incorporate restorative justice in law school programming, and we will offer a restorative justice practicum in the spring. For the practicum, students will have a field placement where they will work with organizations and facilitators who are implementing restorative justice programs. I am also teaching a negotiation course and supporting the Center’s other alternative dispute resolution work.

Q: What is Restorative Justice?
A: Restorative justice is an approach to conflict that focuses on the harm that results from an offense rather than the rule or law that has been broken. Instead of concentrating on punishment, it emphasizes restoring relationships and recognizing the needs and obligations of those affected by the harm. Restorative justice promotes engagement of people with an interest in the conflict and its resolution. There is a wide spectrum of restorative practices and programs – examples include peacemaking circles and victim and offender conferencing.

Q: What is the connection between juvenile justice and restorative justice?
A: Restorative justice is beginning to play a more significant role in the juvenile justice system and education law. There is a lot of momentum in these areas because people are realizing that a punitive justice model is ineffective and costly. There are many amazing restorative justice advocates in Chicago who are helping transform juvenile justice. In fact CFJC’s very own Emmanuel Andre is the co-founder of Circles & Ciphers, a youth development leadership organization, which is collaborating with other organizations that use community-based restorative approaches to crime and conflict.

Q: How did your experience at CFJC help prepare you for your legal career?
A: Since law school, I have worked in a number of different areas - civil legal services, international human rights, government, a firm, and now at Northwestern. CFJC helped me improve my general litigation, advocacy, research, and analytical skills. Also, in working on real cases with clients, witnesses, state's attorneys, judges, and fellow students, I further developed social and emotional skills. After graduation, I definitely felt more comfortable managing my own case load as a legal aid attorney because of
my CFJC experience. I was better prepared to address complicated legal and social issues.

**Q: What would you say to incoming law students about why clinical experience is important?**

**A:** My CFJC experience not only helped me develop my advocacy skills, but it also shaped my understanding of justice and systemic inequality. I had the opportunity to interview witnesses, argue motions, and give an opening statement in an attempted murder case. It was a privilege to work with young clients who trusted students with their cases. CFJC challenged me to think critically about client relationships and my role as an advocate within the legal system.

**Q: Do you have any career advice?**

**A:** My career has taken a number of turns that I could not have predicted when I was in law school. I have learned a lot from each of my positions. If you are passionate about an issue, find a way to get involved – even if it means volunteering outside of your job. Don’t be afraid to reach out to people. Meet with them and learn more about their work because establishing relationships can help open doors even if it is much later down the road.
Heather Renwick (JD '10)

Litigation Counsel at the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth

Q: What was your clinical experience like?
A: Clinic defined law school for me. I loved Northwestern because I loved its clinics. I spent all of my time on the eighth floor; I felt fully invested in, and fully supported by, the clinic community.

I was in the Human Rights Advocacy clinic my second year of law school and the CFJC clinic my third year. In fact, I was waitlisted for the CFJC clinic and more or less staged a sit-in in Julie Biehl’s office to show her how much I wanted to be in her clinic. And my persistence paid off! By my last semester of law school, in addition to clinic itself, I also conducted independent research with Julie, so a majority of my time was spent on juvenile justice-related academic and clinical work. I then stayed at the CFJC for another year after I graduated, working on a youth parole reentry study.

Q: Which of the skills you developed as a student lawyer and advocate were most applicable after graduation?
A: Clinic taught me how to think creatively about litigation, how to represent a client zealously, and about the nuts and bolts of criminal defense. I enjoyed the intellectual engagement of traditional law school classes, but clinic taught me that trial work is grounded in facts, not theory. These lessons were foundational to my law firm practice and remain vital to my current job as Litigation Counsel at the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth.

Q: Do you think your law firm appreciated the fact that you had clinical experience?
A: I think my clinical experience made me a better lawyer from the get-go. I had a better sense of case management, fact development, and legal writing than I would have had otherwise. And as a result, I was more confident in my work at the firm from the first day.

Q: What drew you to the work you're now doing?
A: Honestly, my clinical experiences at Northwestern set me on my current course. Before law school, I had worked abroad for a few years on human rights issues, so I went into law school certain I would continue working in the international human rights field. But then I worked on death penalty cases in my second year of law school and
juvenile cases my third year of law school. And that was that. Now I can't imagine doing anything else.

Q: What do you find most interesting about your job?
A: The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth focuses exclusively on abolishing extreme sentences for kids and advocating for age-appropriate sentencing alternatives to life in prison. The best part of my job is that I get to be creative every day, working with impacted communities, attorneys, and a whole spectrum of partners -- including the wonderful people at the CFJC!

Q: Do you have any career advice you’d be willing to pass along?
A: The best career advice I've ever received is from a law firm partner I worked with named Jay Urwitz. He said: "to be a good lawyer, you have to have intelligence, judgment, and confidence." Although I would add passion to that list, I think Jay is right. When I keep those three qualities in balance, I am most effective as an advocate. And I think that's true for any young lawyer.