Moving Toward Wholeness: Clinic and NYS Family Court Pay Tribute to Ripple Effect of Their Work Against Domestic Violence

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Recommended Citation
two landmark anniversaries will be marked Oct. 19 as SUNY Buffalo Law School pays tribute to the "ripple effect" of its work against domestic violence.

It was 20 years ago that clinical professor Suzanne Tomkins and Catherine Cerulli, J.D., Ph.D., established the school’s Domestic Violence Clinic, now known as the Women, Children, and Social Justice Clinic. And it has been a half-century since the establishment of the New York State Family Court, whose caseload includes helping move families toward wholeness after abuse.

The morning session of the conference, called Intimate Partner Violence: The Ripple Effect of Education, Research and Advocacy, will bring together scholars, advocates and members of the judiciary and bar; professionals in the fields of law enforcement, mental health, education and social services; and students from throughout the university.

“We wanted to think about the impact that individual students’ projects and the clinic overall have had over the years,” says Professor Susan Vivian Mangold, an organizer of the conference. “It’s important to see that this work on a local level has had these ripple effects over time not only nationally but internationally. The conference is also an opportunity for judges and other advocates to come together and hear from colleagues about the challenges they are facing.”

The problem of domestic violence remains widespread. It is estimated nationally and internationally that one out of four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.

Professor Kim Diana Connolly, director of clinical legal education and vice dean for legal skills at the Law School, states, “This conference will allow us to highlight the important, cutting-edge work that the Women, Children, and Social Justice Clinic has been doing for two decades as part of a strong clinical program.”

Clinical instructor Remla Parthasarathy adds, “Over the past two decades, community members, coalitions and task forces in our area have consistently turned to the Women, Children, and Social Justice Clinic for guidance, materials and assistance. They rely on us to provide quality, state-of-the-art information that directs our community’s response to intimate partner violence. We are proud that many of the clinic’s graduates have gone on to pursue highly successful careers in domestic violence-related areas.”

Keynote speakers for the event include Leigh Goodmark, professor at the University of Baltimore Law School and president of the Clinical Legal Education Association, the nation’s largest membership organization of law faculty. Goodmark, an expert in domestic violence and author of the recently published book A Troubled Marriage: Domestic Violence and the Legal System, will offer both a retrospective and a look ahead at clinical legal education in the domestic violence arena.

Another speaker, Aruna Papp, is a Canada-based advocate and expert on the challenges of global diversity in addressing domestic violence. Author of the recent book Unworthy Creature: A Punjabi Daughter’s Memoir, she’ll discuss the emerging area of how to provide effective help to North American women whose immigrant cultural traditions, such as honor-related crimes, put them in unique danger.

A lunchtime address by Catherine Cerulli ’92, former director of research for the Women, Children, and Social Justice Clinic, will survey the research that has been done on domestic violence and how legal responders have used that research to develop best practices. Cerulli is well-positioned to provide this research overview since her own work has earned numerous awards, including a recent multimillion-dollar grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She currently serves as director of the Susan B. Anthony Center, a research institute at the University of Rochester.

The conference will continue with an afternoon symposium organized by Hon. Lisa Bloch Rodwin ’85, a Family Court judge, and other members of the New York State judiciary to celebrate the 50th anniversary of New York State Family Court. Family Court: Past, Present and Future highlights the evolving work of the court, looking back over 50 years and ahead to new challenges.

A reception will follow.

The conference, lunch presentation and afternoon symposium are free. Registration, which is required, is available at www.law.buffalo.edu/AlumniEvent.asp