

Students in Civil Justice and Family Protection clinics provide legal information and consultations to veterans at-risk or experiencing homelessness

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by Naomi Thurston

Students at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law recently helped veterans needing legal assistance during the Arizona StandDown, the state's largest outreach program for veterans at-risk or experiencing homelessness. More than 1,200 veterans facing difficulties in civilian life were given emergency shelter and other services, including health care, housing, motor vehicle, court, social security, veterinary and legal, during the event, Feb. 3-5 at Arizona Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

A portion of the 2012 StandDown specifically focused on female veterans experiencing homelessness with a safe area for women needing shelter, clothing and medical attention. It also housed a collaborative effort of the Civil Justice Clinic and the Ruth V. McGregor Family Protection Clinic at the College of Law to engage veterans needing legal assistance.

"We were honored to be a part of this event, and grateful to our community partners for the invitation to help focus on the civil legal needs of women experiencing homelessness after military service," said [Marcy Karin](#), Director of the Civil Justice Clinic and an Associate Clinical Professor at the College of Law. "The scope of problems related to female veterans experiencing homelessness is hard to quantify because women often find transitional housing with friends or family, and therefore do not always make it into the system or receive needed services."

The StandDown was well designed to draw in veterans with a variety of needs, Karin said.

"Women often experience military service and reintegration into civilian life differently," she said. "Offering legal and other assistance that acknowledges these realities is critical and keeps Arizona's innovative efforts in this area on the forefront of a national movement to support our veterans."

Students in the Civil Justice Clinic advised veterans on matters related to unemployment insurance benefits, discrimination claims and other civil disputes. The event provided critical services for veterans facing the challenges of coping with physical injuries and psychological trauma from past military service while attempting to secure housing and employment opportunities.

Second-year law student Michael Malin said the students enjoyed the chance to work with people one-on-one. "It was a rare opportunity to get out of the classroom and see how the law can help people who really need it," Malin said.

Students also offered information and consultations to veterans experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse. [Jaime Dahlstedt](#), Director of the Ruth V. McGregor Family Protection Clinic and an Associate Clinical Professor at the College of Law, said the StandDown's focus on supporting female veterans was important due to the high rate of sexual assault against women in the military. Dahlstedt's students provided advice regarding safety planning, dissolution of marriage, child custody and obtaining Orders of Protection and Injunctions Against Harassment.

Third-year law student Elizabeth Cujéwas particularly moved by her consultation with a veteran who suffered a traumatic brain injury in Afghanistan, and upon returning home, discovered that his girlfriend had fled the state with their children.

"Just a year ago he was a member of the Navy's elite," Cujé said. "Now he has difficulty speaking and walking."

Despite this, she said, the veteran appeared to walk away from the consultation, cane in hand, with a glimmer of hope.

The event's namesake, "stand down," is a military term referring to a brief period during active combat when a service member retreats to a safe place to rest and recuperate. StandDown volunteers wore signature red shirts with white lettering: "Home of the Free, Because of the Brave."

Said Karin, "Some veterans who sacrificed their own lives now struggle in a different kind of battlefield in the challenges of civilian life. At the StandDown, the service members rest, and the civilians fight for them. Our law clinics were proud to be a part of the StandDown's collaborative fight."

For more information about the Civil Justice and Family Protection Clinics at visit law.asu.edu/justiceclinic and law.asu.edu/mcgregorclinic.



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