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**Emily Schools**

**Legal Aid of  
NorthWest Texas  
Abilene, TX**

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**Texas Access to  
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## **SIX-MONTH FELLOWSHIP UPDATE**

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Emily is creating a juvenile division in LANWT's Abilene office that provides education and advocacy for youth struggling with homelessness and the barriers created by their prior involvement with the justice system.

### **NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT**

There are over 100,000 runaway and homeless youth in Texas each year, hundreds from Abilene. A relatively small town of 117,000, Abilene is often overlooked by state and national actors. Their youth receive charges for truancy, violating curfew, or substance-abuse-related crimes like all other big-city youth, but there are no free legal services, other than on an ad hoc basis, available to assist with these civil or class C matters in Northwest Texas. When they reach adulthood these youth are commonly unaware of the confidentiality of their records or the possibility of expunction. Furthermore, those who would likely benefit the most from sealed or expunged records cannot afford private counsel. The purpose of a separate juvenile system is thereby lost because they cannot afford to take advantage of a system that was specifically designed to protect their future interests in meaningful employment, higher education, and freedom from the transgressions of youth.

### **HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE**

In the first six months, Emily has:

- Created the first, regular clinic for the LANWT-Abilene office which is held at a local center that provides services to teens and young adults who are struggling to transition into independent adulthood
- Written and published LANWT's first Youth's Rights Handbook which provides general legal information about the rights of homeless and unaccompanied minors
- Provided full representation to three clients, and brief services or advice to ten others
- Established a Legal Aid presence in nine local Community Resource Coordination Groups
- Served in a leadership role on LANWT's new Youth Rights Team, a team of attorneys who devote at least part of their time to working on youth rights cases

### **WHAT'S NEXT**

In the next six months, Emily plans to:

- Provide more representation to homeless and/or unaccompanied youth in matters that are preventing their successful transition into adulthood
- Write and publish a second Youth Rights Handbook that contains information about what every person should know after having contact with the juvenile justice system in Texas
- Create a YouTube channel with short videos describing common legal issues and rights of minors in Texas
- Make educational presentations to student and parent groups about the struggles often faced by homeless or unaccompanied teens and avenues to overcome those obstacles