

# EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS®

*Helping Lawyers Help Community*



## Emily Schools

### Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas Abilene, TX

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### Texas Access to Justice Foundation

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## FELLOWSHIP SUMMARY

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Emily developed a juvenile division in Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas's Abilene office that provided education and advocacy for youth struggling with homelessness and opportunity barriers created by their prior involvement with the justice system.

### NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

There are more than 100,000 runaway and homeless youth in Texas each year, hundreds from Abilene. Abilene is a relatively small town of 117,000, but its youth population struggles with many of the same issues as youth in much larger metropolitan areas: homelessness, unstable home life, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Even minor offenses can impede securing future meaningful employment, higher education, and freedom from the transgressions of youth. Most of these youth are unaware of the possibility of sealing or expunging their juvenile records. Northwest Texas, however, has lacked free legal services specifically dedicated to serving its youth, and helping them get on the right track as they approach adulthood.

### FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

During her Fellowship, Emily has:

- Directly assisted more than 315 clients in overcoming legal barriers impeding independent and successful adulthood, 155 of whom received full representation
- Published two Youth Rights Handbooks discussing the rights of unaccompanied minors and the effects of juvenile referrals
- Led 26 workshops, continuing legal education courses, and presentations regarding juvenile matters throughout the state. Emily led two seminars at the 2015 Texas Poverty Law Conference and taught six additional legal education courses. She was invited to address and educate all of the Homeless Student Liaisons in the Region 14 Educational Service Center district about the rights of homeless and unaccompanied public school students
- Developed relationships with countless community organizations, spreading the word about legal aid services available to juveniles, such as juvenile probation departments, local courts, community resource coordination groups, the West Texas Homeless Network and more

### POST-FELLOWSHIP PLANS

Now that the Fellowship is complete, Emily plans to:

- Continue her juvenile-focused work with Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas and train additional attorneys to handle juvenile specific matters
- Update the Youth Rights Handbooks published during her Fellowship with the laws promulgated in the most recent legislative session
- Develop a resource and pleadings bank available to all legal aid attorneys