**Champions for Justice Client Story Library**

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**Client Story 1: Empowering mothers in the workforce**

In August 2020, Shivonne returned to her job at a DC mental health treatment facility after being laid off because of the pandemic. She learned about a DC Bar Foundation grantee from her medical provider and called them for legal assistance a few weeks before giving birth.

Shivonne had talked to her employer about taking time off after giving birth. While her employer agreed, she found it increasingly difficult to communicate about leave as her due date grew nearer. Shivonne wanted information about her legal rights to time off so that, when she continued discussions with her boss, she could be informed and assured that her job would be waiting for her when her maternity leave ended.

An attorney from the grantee explained her rights to leave under the DC Family Medical Leave Act and informed her that she could get paid leave benefits under the new DC Paid Family Leave program. When the attorney followed up with Shivonne a few weeks after the baby was born, she helped Shivonne navigate the application process for paid family leave benefits. Ultimately, thanks to the grantee's support, Shivonne was approved for paid family leave benefits and returned to work after her period of recovery from childbirth.

**Client Story 2: The importance of supporting transgender communities**

Tanya, a transgender woman, living with HIV and Ward 8 resident, is a medical patient and long-time legal client of a DC Bar Foundation grantee.

In the fall of 2021, she asked for assistance with preparing a healthcare power of attorney (HCPOA) document. Tanya knew her medical team would likely need these instructions and wanted to protect her gender identity, privacy, and autonomy. The grantee's legal staff conducted a thorough intake interview with Tanya and placed her case with one of their trained Federal Government volunteer pro bono attorneys. Their's legal team made accommodations to bring Tanya and her volunteer attorney in for their first counseling session.

Tanya and her attorney are working together to complete Tanya's HCPOA and other future planning documents, including a general power of attorney, disposition of bodily remains, and a will. These documents will ultimately help Tanya and her designated agent preserve her transgender identity – which is vital if she is hospitalized or needs long-term care.

**Client Story 3: Civil legal aid makes advocating for loved ones possible**

Ms. K's mother is in the early stages of Alzheimer's and is on an extremely limited income. Due to COVID restrictions, Ms. K could not accompany her mother to her many medical appointments and ask questions to ensure she got the care she needed.

As an only child, it was already difficult to care for her mother, and Ms. K kept running into barriers. Then, she went to a DC Bar Foundation grantee for help. With the legal assistance to create a Power of Attorney, Ms. K and her mother can work together and plan for future challenges. Most importantly, with this Power of Attorney, Ms. K can now accompany her mother to all her medical appointments and advocate for her health and wellbeing as her Alzheimer's progresses. Without the grantee's legal services, Ms. K would have faced challenges supporting her mother's medical needs.

**Client Story 4: Empowering individuals with disabilities**

A vibrant seventeen-year-old with Down syndrome, Francisco struggled to process his grief after his grandmother passed away. As a result, he experienced language regression and difficulty communicating with his family.

Francisco's school incorrectly told his mother that, when he turned 18, the only way she could remain involved in his educational decisions was to become Francisco's court-appointed guardian. Eager to preserve his decision-making rights, Francisco's mother reached out to a DC Bar Foundation grantee for help in exploring less-restrictive options that would not cause him to lose his autonomy and potential for independence.

When the grantee's staff attorney met with Francisco, it was unclear whether he could knowingly and voluntarily execute legal documents. However, their staff is committed to putting the time and effort into effectively accommodating people with disabilities. Francisco was a visual learner, so they created an individually tailored PowerPoint presentation for him, complete with personalized photographs and video clips. They then connected these personal images to key concepts associated with powers of attorney and statutory supported decision-making agreements (SSDMA). They illustrated what it means to be supported, trust someone, voluntarily pick someone to help, and decide what kind of authority to give them.

The staff attorney met virtually with Francisco several times, and his mother reviewed and practiced the PowerPoint with him at home. But, Francisco needed more time to get to a point where he could knowingly and voluntarily sign an SSDMA or power of attorney. Since he was fast approaching 18, the attorney assisted him in accessing two other less restrictive alternatives to guardianship that could help meet his decision-making needs in the short term: getting his mother to be recognized as his Educational Representative and as his Substitute Health Care Decision-Maker. She now can zealously and confidently advocate on behalf of Francisco at medical appointments and school meetings while he further builds his decision-making skills over time.

**Client Story 5: Helping workers assert their rights**

Rosa is a mother living in Ward 4 with her spouse and four children. She called a DC Bar Foundation grantee for help with pregnancy discrimination after learning about them from her healthcare provider at Mary's Center. Rosa works as a cook and line worker at a DC restaurant, but she was having problems with the kitchen manager, who reduced her shifts by half: from 4 days a week to 2 days a week. When Rosa asked him why he was reducing her hours, he said he did not want her to get hurt at work while pregnant and worried about liability if she did get hurt on the job. Even though Rosa explained that she understood her body and knew she would be able to work her regular hours for four days a week, the kitchen manager ignored her and continued reducing her hours.

When Rosa came to the grantee, she spoke to an attorney, who explained that although it was her right to request a workplace accommodation during pregnancy, such as a reduced schedule, the manager could not legally force her to accept a pregnancy accommodation when she had not asked for one. After hearing that, Rosa asked for help in advocating for her old shifts back—she explained that she wanted to contact the restaurant owners for help but was worried about the language barrier, as the owners speak English and Rosa speaks Spanish.

The grantee's attorney helped Rosa draft a note to the owners to request her previous shift schedule in Spanish and English. When they followed up with Rosa a couple of days later, Rosa happily shared that she had sent the English note to the owners and that it was successful. The owners spoke to the kitchen manager, and Rosa had her past shift hours back. Because her hours were restored, Rosa was able to take her normal paycheck amount back to her family.

**Client Story 6: Sealing records means a second chance**

Tom is an army veteran who served in the US military for twelve years. He has only one arrest and subsequent court case on his record, but this has held him back from many opportunities in life.

Following military service, Tom earned a Ph.D. in social work, aiming to continue to give back to the community at every turn. After being arrested and involved in the criminal justice system for the first time, he immediately took responsibility for the offense and completed a diversion program, which disposed of the case. However, the negative consequences of this arrest, which include the continuation of public access to his arrest record, have persisted to this day.

Tom's stigma and shame with his record led him to forego renewing his clinical social work license. Further, despite winning awards for outstanding job performance before the arrest, he has been overlooked for promotions since then. He is terrified of the prospect of applying for a new job because of his record.

When Tom came to a DC Bar Foundation grantee for help, the pro bono attorney assigned to Tom's case filed a well-analyzed and beautifully-written motion to seal his criminal record. The grantee is confident that the motion will be granted, allowing Tom to pursue employment opportunities once again with confidence and dignity.