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Equal Justice Works Fellowships Serve Appetite for Public Service

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As a second-year law student, **Coco Culhane**, a newly minted Equal Justice Works fellow, was shocked to learn that veterans were committing suicide at the rate of 18 a day nationwide.

"The statistics just blew me away, so I started looking for places where I could volunteer or intern," Ms. Culhane said in an interview.

Unable to find an organization that focused on low-income mentally ill veterans, Ms. Culhane ended up building her own program. After graduation from Brooklyn Law School in 2010, she teamed up with the Mental Health Project at the Urban Justice Center to create a "Veterans Advocacy Project" that assists veterans with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression by providing the legal representation they need to prevent evictions or ensure access to healthcare, food stamps, Social Security and other benefits.

"While I cannot provide the health care to veterans, I can assist them in achieving the stability needed to get treatment and rebuild their lives," she said.

The \$50,000 she raised was enough to finance the initiative for six months and help about 30 veterans. But the program was expected to run out of money next month. Now, the fellowship will allow her to continue for two years.

"I've been juggling between trying to do direct client work and fund raise, so this provides the stability that the project can go on for the next two years and more time can be directed toward

client work," Ms. Culhane said. "Without the two-year fellowship this project would be in question."

Launched in 1992, the Equal Justice Works fellowship program this fall will start supporting 44 new young lawyers, seven in New York, working at public interest organizations, with assistance from 50 law firms, corporations and individuals that sponsor individual fellows. ALM, the parent company of the New York Law Journal, is sponsoring a fellow in North Carolina.

The new fellows are in addition to 41 fellows appointed in 2010, eight in New York, entering the second year of their projects.

Each receives a salary of up to \$39,000 a year and up to \$16,000 in loan repayment assistance.

"There is this appetite from people who go to law school and want to do good, but there are so few jobs and the students often have educational debt," said David Stern, the executive director of Equal Justice Works, in an interview. "We saw how many really outstanding people wanted to work in the non-profit sector and were in the position to help."

Two of the latest crop of New York fellows are co-sponsored by a law firm and corporation, a cooperative arrangement Mr. Stern said is becoming increasingly common.

"There is a growing trend of law firms and their corporate clients coming together [to sponsor fellows] to do good in the world, share costs and reinforce the relationship that already exists," Mr. Stern said.

CIGNA and Cravath, Swaine & Moore have teamed up to sponsor Ms. Culhane, while Simpson Thacher & Bartlett and Morgan Stanley will co-sponsor fellow **Emily Amick**. Ms. Amick, who graduates this month from Columbia Law School, will be working with Sanctuary for Families to assist the victims of sex trafficking.

Opportunities for Firms

One incentive for law firms to become involved is that the fellow-sponsor relationship provides a unique way for firms to find pro bono opportunities.

"If a law firm doesn't have an expertise in a particular matter, they are often reluctant to take on those matters [pro bono,]" said Mr. Stern. "Having a fellow to hold your hand gets rid of so many of the normal bugaboos that stop lawyers from handling pro bono matters."

Incoming fellow **Michael Mastrangelo**, who will graduate from Brooklyn Law School in June, said his sponsor, Greenberg Traurig, has already voiced its interest in helping his project succeed.

"They are really excited to be involved in this project and provide pro bono attorneys," said Mr. Mastrangelo, who will be working with The Children's Law Center to secure educational assistance for learning disabled children involved in Family Court proceedings.

Greenberg Traurig, which has sponsored more than 100 Equal Justice Works fellows since 1999, is also supporting 2010 CUNY School of Law graduate **Laura Matthews-Jolly**, who will be working with the City Bar Justice Center to assist young victims