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May 20, 2019

Bringing refugee families back together through the Refugee Family Reunification Project

Jenn Power was interviewed for a Schulich School of Law news article on her involvement the Refugee Family Reunification Project.

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The student-volunteer team lead is Jennifer Power, a 28-year-old former Canadian naval lieutenant who saw a lot of pain and suffering when she was deployed in the Middle East. Last September when she started law school, she began volunteering at ISANS through Pro Bono Dalhousie. “After my experience in the military, I wanted to help people who were coming to Canada to make a better life for themselves and their families,” she says.

Power plans to volunteer with the Refugee Family Reunification Project until she graduates in 2018. She wants to be a corporate lawyer and calls this her passion project. “This issue isn’t going to go away,” she says. “There’s no question that we’ll have more clients in the queue who will need students to help them.” In addition to reuniting families, Power believes the student volunteers have a responsibility to lobby the government to improve refugee and immigration policy and legislation.

Using student teams to support clients – and each other

The students work with each refugee in teams of two, which allows them to support each other while they listen to what are often upsetting stories. Sometimes they have to tell a refugee that they can’t help them because they don’t fit the application criteria.

“It can be completely heart-wrenching,” says Power. “I try to convey compassion through the translator, but I also use body language and I’ll reach across the table to hold a hand. ISANS has great supports if a situation gets too emotional, but we know that we have a job to do – to tell the clients’ story in the best, most honest way we can. You have to try to set your emotion aside.”

The initial training provided by MacIntosh, Evans, and ISANS is invaluable. “We know what we’re getting into,” says Power. “We’re very careful with our wording, and we try not to oversell what we can do for the clients because we don’t want them to be even more disappointed. But they’re so appreciative – they

often hug us, and they look at us like we're a beacon of hope. You think, I'm just a first-year law student! But then you realize that you do have some power to help them."

Continue reading:

https://www.dal.ca/faculty/law/news-events/news/2016/05/20/bringing_refugee_families_back_together.html