

2011-2012, ISSUE III

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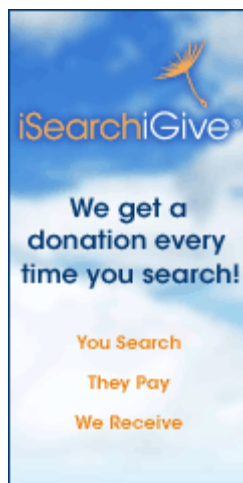
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## Events

Wednesday, January 4, 2012

5:30 - 8:00 PM

[Persuading with Passion - Tips From the Top](#)

Wednesday, January 11, 2012

12:00 - 1:30 PM

[Solo and Small Practice Monthly Luncheon](#)

Friday, January 13, 2012

8:30 - 9:30 AM



## WBA Foundation President's Letter



By Tracy-Gene G. Durkin

*Leveraging the generosity of lawyers and friends to support nonprofits that serve the legal and related needs of women and girls in the DC metropolitan community.*

This is what the WBAF is today: It is a powerful statement and it reflects 30 years of experience and introspection on how the WBAF can have the greatest impact on the community we serve.

Our new mission statement is the result of a two-day long-range planning retreat held by the WBAF Board this past August. During the retreat, the Board, with input from past WBAF leadership and stakeholders from donor and grantee communities, looked at our past and our present, and created a roadmap for our future. Our new mission statement will guide us along the way.

Some of you may recall that in its early years, the WBAF had a primarily internal focus. Many of our grants were given to our sister organization, the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia (WBA) to support programs that furthered what was then the WBAF mission. Today, the WBA and WBAF enjoy a very strong relationship: we share a history and an identity built over three decades. Several years ago, the WBA and WBAF restructured their fundraising and grant making relationship. While the WBAF still generously supports the many good works of the WBA, the WBA no longer regularly looks to the WBAF for grant support. As a result, the WBAF is now focused externally; in particular on the legal and related needs of women and girls in the community in which we work and live.

We hope our new mission statement continues to speak to our donor and grantee constituents. As importantly, we hope it speaks to you, a member of the WBA, who shares our proud 30 year history of women helping women.

Tracy-Gene G. Durkin  
2010-2012 WBA Foundation President

**Professional Development Book Club Series - "What's Your Career Game Plan?"**

Friday, January 27, 2012  
12:00 - 1:30 PM

**How Does She Do It? Succeeding in the Legal Profession While Raising a Family**

Thursday, February 9, 2012  
5:00 - 7:00 PM

**Changing Realities for Women in the Law: Strategies for Navigating the Post-Recession Legal Field**

Thursday, February 23, 2012  
5:00 - 7:00 PM

**WBAF Wine Tasting and Silent Auction: Old World vs. New World Wines**

Tuesday, February 28, 2012  
5:00 - 7:00 PM

**Second Evening of Mentoring for Communications Lawyers**

SAVE THE DATE  
Tuesday, May 22, 2012  
**WBA/WBAF Annual Dinner**

## About Us

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WBA Foundation congratulates **Nancy Newkirk** for winning the WBAF drawing at this year's Stars of the Bar reception. Nancy received a copy of *The Road to Independence: 101 Women's Journeys to Starting Their Own Law Firms*, which was edited by WBAF Board member Karen Lockwood. You can purchase the book at [americanbar.org](http://americanbar.org)

## 2011 Founders Fellow Provides Legal Assistance and Advocacy for Immigrant Women and Girls

Margot Dankner, the recipient of the 2011 Women's Bar Association Foundation Founder's Fellowship, is a third year law student at Georgetown University Law Center. She spent her summer as an immigration law intern for the Tahirih Justice Center, an organization dedicated to protecting immigrant women and girls seeking justice in the United States. While there, she helped women and girls fleeing gender-based violence, discrimination, and abuse to be able to access the legal relief and status to become permanent residents and rebuild their lives in safety. In this capacity, Margot assisted staff attorneys in the representation of 10 clients, working on all aspects of petitions for asylum, withholding of removal, U visas, Battered Spouse Waivers under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and T visas. She drafted briefs, researched conditions, prepared clients for hearings, and coordinated with law enforcement to obtain U visa certifications<sup>(1)</sup>. Margot also helped clients who had already obtained legal status to further improve and stabilize their once tumultuous lives by filing work visa applications and petitions to reunite them with their children and spouses.



Margot Dankner

In addition to doing direct legal work and advocacy on behalf of clients, Margot spent part of the summer creating an internal memorandum on representing clients in Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases in Virginia. SIJS is a form of immigration relief reserved for children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by one or both parents, and this memorandum will be utilized this fall as Tahirih expands its services to more SIJS clients.

In recalling the highlights of the summer, Margot stated, "Women and children fleeing violence and abuse are some of the most vulnerable individuals that come to the U.S. seeking refuge, and I am grateful to the Women's Bar Association Foundation for the opportunity to help the clients that I worked with over the course of the summer. The Women's Bar Association Foundation Founder's Fellowship not only enabled me to do challenging, interesting, and satisfying work with a population that I am very passionate about, but it also helped me to confirm that this is the work I want to do as an attorney."

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## Personal Essay of Margot Dankner, 2011

## Women's Bar Association Foundation Founders Fellowship Recipient

Women around the world still face incredible barriers to equality. The United Nations Development Fund for Women reports that one out of every three women worldwide has been coerced into sex, beaten, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with rates of domestic violence reaching 70% in some countries<sup>(2)</sup>. This statistic is staggering, and the Tahirih Justice Center faces this challenge head on by representing women and girls seeking refuge in the United States in immigration and family law proceedings, advocating for policies and laws that protect women from falling victim to forced marriage and other forms of gender-based abuse, and reaching out to community partners to ensure that women and girls receive the services and legal representation they need. With the generous support of the Women's Bar Association Foundation Founders Fellowship, I was able to assist Tahirih in this mission as an intern in immigration law.

The legal services department of Tahirih's Virginia office is comprised of six dedicated and passionate attorneys who approach their work with constant compassion and creativity. Over the course of the summer, I observed Tahirih cases develop novel areas of law, navigate complex federal, state, and local processes in order to secure needed relief for clients, and zealously advocate for clients in court. Regardless of how busy they were, they were always willing to share their knowledge and serve as sources of support for interns and each other. Often they dealt with complicated legal problems and demanding client relationships. This incredible dedication to achieving justice for clients and a supportive environment provided an ideal setting to build and hone my skills as an advocate for women and girl survivors of gender-based abuse and discrimination seeking relief in the United States.

Under the close mentorship of immigration staff attorney Morgan Weibel, I was able to work in this rich milieu with projects that ranged from filing documents with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), to screening potential service seekers, to drafting legal arguments on complex areas of the law. In order to assist attorneys in securing asylum or withholding of removal for women and girls who had suffered from domestic violence, rape, and other gender-related persecution, I translated documents from Spanish to English, researched evolving areas of the law, drafted an emergency stay of removal, and helped prepare clients for court. I worked with attorneys to aid survivors of human trafficking and other crimes here in the U.S. in applying for U and T visas by conducting client intakes, coordinating with law enforcement to obtain certifying documents, and researching country conditions. In support of VAWA Battered Spouse waivers, I submitted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and conducted research on specific areas of federal law in order to help clients continue to pursue the legal status they were seeking without the interference of their abusive U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident husbands.

This work was both fascinating and fulfilling. The ability to have a significant amount of responsibility while also knowing that Morgan and the other attorneys were available for support and guidance, gave me confidence as I embarked on tasks, to advocate for clients. While many of the responsibilities and client interactions that I had over the course of the summer stayed with me, it was my work with C\* that was the most rewarding and helped me develop the most as an advocate.

C's case had been complicated. After sustaining years of abuse in Latin America, she was brutally attacked by her ex-partner while they were both living in the United States. C initially cooperated with police, but lost touch with the authorities when she fled the area in an attempt to distance herself from the event. Years later, C was placed in deportation proceedings, and her attorney attempted to get the police department to sign a certification stating that she had cooperated and was thus eligible for a U visa. The police department refused due to the fact that the case had been permanently sealed, which prevented them from verifying the extent of her cooperation.

By the time I began working on C's case, other attorneys and interns had already tried to work with the police department, but were unable to find anyone willing to proceed with a rarely used provision in the state's penal code that permitted a law enforcement agency to unseal a case "in the interest of justice." Jumping in to what seemed like a cold trail, I hoped that there were options left unturned. I conducted additional research on the law and called and emailed the local bar association, immigration lawyers, the police department, and the local district attorney's office, trying to find a way to unseal the case and move forward with a certification.

There were a number of setbacks. An immigration attorney who had been touted as being familiar with this situation was unaware of how to proceed. A friendly Assistant District Attorney (ADA) at first went forward with a motion to unseal before discovering that her office did not have the authority to do so. Finally, after weeks of additional phone calls and emails, I was able to get in touch with the detective who had been involved in C's case, connect him with the ADA who had pledged to help, and together they were able to unseal the records and initiate the certification process. C ultimately received the certification, and her U visa petition remains pending before USCIS. If her U visa is approved, C will not only be able to remain in the safety of the U.S., but she will also be able to extend that protection to her minor daughter who remains in danger in Latin America. The U certification was the key to unlocking safety for C and her family.

Working with clients like C showed me the dire need for persistent advocates familiar with the law to help immigrant women and girls fleeing violence and abuse. While C, and many others like her, are eligible for various forms of immigration relief, it is often impossible to obtain that relief without an advocate who knows the system and can work within it to reach a favorable outcome. To be able to fill that role for C was hugely satisfying for me and helped confirm my desire to perform this kind of work when I finish law school next year. I am grateful to the Women's Bar Association Foundation for the opportunity to have worked with the Tahirih Justice Center in helping clients like C remain in the U.S., safe from their abusers, so that they can recover and create new futures for themselves and their families.

1. *For more information on these forms of protection, which are provided under federal law to vulnerable victims of crime, torture, abuse and trafficking, please see:* [www.tahirih.org/services/#ImmLawServ](http://www.tahirih.org/services/#ImmLawServ).
2. *UNITED NATIONS DEP'T PUBLIC INFORMATION, U.N. SECRETARY-GENERAL'S CAMPAIGN, UNITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, FACTSHEET, DPI/2498 (Feb. 2008), available at* [www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf).

\* Name omitted to protect privacy.

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## WBAF Donors

Many thanks to our supporters! The following donors made a gift to the WBA Foundation between September 1 and November 30, 2011. These gifts will be used to support women and girls in our community. For a list of all fiscal year donors and recognition of giving levels, visit [www.wbadcfoundation.org](http://www.wbadcfoundation.org).

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