

Faculty Biographies

CLE: Hidden in Plain Sight: Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking in Your Work

Mary Armistead, Esq., is an Equal Justice Works Crime Victims Justice Corps Fellow at the Legal Project. She works with victims of human trafficking, both labor and sex, by providing direct representation in a variety of civil legal proceedings, including immigration and family court. She also works on capacity-building, education, and policy issues regarding human trafficking. Mary graduated summa cum laude from Queens University of Charlotte, earning a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and from Albany Law School, where she developed her passion for helping vulnerable immigrant populations through multiple internships in legal service organizations. Mary held a clerkship at the New York State Court of Appeals for one year before working as the Staff Attorney of the Immigration Law Clinic at Albany Law School for three years. As Staff Attorney, Mary both supervised students and maintained a personal docket in providing legal advocacy services and direct representation to detained and non-detained immigrants eligible for humanitarian immigration relief. Her expertise played a critical role in developing law students' ability to provide legal advocacy services and direct representation to clients seeking U.S. immigration status. She also developed the Special Immigrant Juvenile Pro Bono Attorney panel, wherein she connects clients to and supervises attorneys in providing pro bono representation to vulnerable immigrant children.

Carl J. Boykin, Esq., is currently the Director of Human Trafficking Prevention with the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. In this position, he is responsible for trafficking victim confirmation process, as well as collaboration and training regarding issues of human trafficking. In 2018, he received training in immigration law and previously held an antiviolence partnership with Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees. Prior to his current position, Mr. Boykin served in the following positions: New York State Special Deputy Attorney General for Guns and Gangs (2007-2011); Northern District of New York Assistant United States Attorney assigned to illegal reentry prosecutions, immigration appeals, and asset forfeiture matters (2004-2007); Chief of Appeals – Oneida County, New York District Attorney's Office (1999-2004); Law Clerk to New York State Court of Appeals Associate Judges the Late Fritz W. Alexander, II and George Bundy Smith (1990-91 & 1993-95); Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Inc. (1991-93); Law Assistant, New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Third Department (1995). Mr. Boykin received his Bachelor's degree from Colgate University, his Ed.M. from SUNY at Buffalo Amherst and his JD from Cornell Law School.

Azin Ahmadi, Esq. - Azin Ahmadi is an immigration staff attorney at The Legal Project in Albany, NY, where she provides legal representation in most aspects of immigration law, including asylum and humanitarian relief and family-based petitions. Azin previously served as an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Fellow providing legal representation to refugees and immigrants in NY. Azin received her J.D. from UCLA School of Law, where she specialized in Public Interest Law and Policy. She graduated summa cum laude in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Melanie Puerto Conte, MS is a professor at the Sage Colleges Graduate School of Health Sciences. She teaches in the Forensic Mental Health Master's program and designed and teaches the curriculum for the Human Trafficking masters level classes. She has done many presentations regionally, statewide, and locally on working with and identifying survivors of human trafficking. In the Capital Region, she has presented to Albany Medical College and St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam on working with survivors of human trafficking, and she is currently consulting with Ellis Medicine to provide training in the upcoming months. From 2006 to 2014, Ms. Puerto Conte was the Director of the Suicide Prevention Initiative with the New York State Office of Mental Health.

John Kelly retired from the Saratoga Springs Police Department in 2012 after serving 23 years as a police investigator. That same year, he was picked to lead the first Capital Region office of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children located in Saratoga Springs. John is currently a forensic interviewer of children at the Harriet M. West Child Advocacy Center in Saratoga Springs, which serves children and families throughout the county. He is also the Board Chair for the New York State Children's Alliance, which provides support to over 40 child advocacy centers across the state. In addition, John is the Safe Harbour Coordinator for Saratoga County, helping to raise awareness around the issues of Human Trafficking, specifically regarding how to identify victims and respond to their needs. An avid skier, John volunteers at Mount Snow VT for the Adaptive Sports program. He also holds a private pilot's license for Hot Air Balloons.

Brianna Phillips began working in the field of human services in 2016 at the Charlton School. There she developed her crisis management skills, while serving young women living in a therapeutic learning community. In May of 2017, she graduated from Empire State College with a Bachelor's in Community and Human Services. Since October of 2017, Brianna has been serving in different outreach capacities at CAPTAIN Community Human Services. In these roles she worked to connect homeless youth to services, while providing intensive case management, advocacy, and support. Beginning in February of 2018, Brianna has served as a Safe Harbour Case Manager within Saratoga County. She outreaches and connects survivors of human trafficking to a multitude of community services, including CAPTAIN grant partners, such as Saratoga Center for the Family.

Salka Valerio is currently a case worker at the Crime Victims Assistance Center (CVAC) in Binghamton, New York. CVAC works with Broome County and federal programs to provide services to survivors of sex trafficking, including offering coping mechanisms and tools, counseling, and court accompaniment. As a survivor of sex trafficking herself, Ms. Valerio uses her experiences as a child to reach out to teens that have been or are at high risk for exploitation or abuse. She educates teens about red flags for trafficking to equip them to protect themselves from exploitation. She received her associate's degree from Broome County Community College.