FEERICK CENTER
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A decade of building partnerships to
fight poverty and social injustice
The Feerick Center for Social Justice promotes the rights of and addresses the problems facing marginalized and low-income New Yorkers.

The center works with nonprofit, legal services, and public sector organizations and individuals to respond to the challenges of those in need.

Through education and collaboration, the center engages with Fordham students, alumni, and faculty to create and implement long-term innovative solutions critical to lasting change.

The Feerick Center’s work of providing direct assistance and working in collaboration with others reflects the motto of Fordham Law School—“In the service of others”—as well as Fordham University’s expansive Jesuit mission and vision.
The Feerick Center for Social Justice occupies a unique position within the community of social change organizations in New York City. As part of Fordham Law School, with its commitment to increasing access to justice, the center is dedicated to the following goals:

- Nurture new generations of social justice lawyers and instill in Fordham Law graduates a lifelong commitment to do justice, right wrongs, and serve disenfranchised communities.
- Work on social and economic problems affecting New York City’s marginalized communities and identify creative ways to address the problems of urban poverty.

At the heart of the Feerick Center’s work is creative problem-solving, which begins with listening and giving voice to those affected and proceeds to identifying issues and developing approaches that will effectively advance social justice. The center’s fact-finding process draws on the perspectives of all parties involved in the problem in order to craft viable solutions. For example, the center may make recommendations to the courts and government agencies, or center staff, students, and volunteers may provide a range of assistance to individuals in need.

Since its founding the Feerick Center has sought to create projects in collaboration with legal service, public interest, social service and other advocacy organizations in New York City. Through these partnerships, the center offers a wide range of resources allowing these organizations to expand their capacity to serve and to advocate. All center projects benefit from these partnerships, and they enable the center to strengthen access to justice and re-shape government policies and institutional practices.

The center was established at the end of the Law School’s 100th anniversary in 2006 to recognize and honor John D. Feerick, the school’s longtime dean (1982–2002), who saw in his work the human faces of poverty and became a champion of those who most need justice. His 34-year tenure at Fordham Law School epitomizes the School’s motto, “In the service of others,” and his life’s work inspires the work of the center that bears his family name.

Catherine Shugrue Dos Santos
Director of Client Services, New York City Anti-Violence Project
Issues We Care About

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Consumer Debt

In New York State, tens of thousands of people are sued every year in state courts over debts that may or may not be owed. Most consumers come to court unrepresented by lawyers, without a clear understanding of their rights or the validity of the alleged debt, or the risks they run should they lose.

In New York, as in the rest of the country, significant numbers of cases that come to court are brought by debt buyers—companies that buy portfolios of defaulted debt, primarily delinquent credit cards, from lenders that have written off the losses. Although these companies pay pennies on the dollar, they can sue for the full value of the debt as well as interest and penalties.

Though each debt may seem to be relatively small—often in New York City Civil Court actions are well under $5,000—it can overwhelm and devastate working poor families. An adverse judgment can destabilize the efforts of struggling families to make ends meet and push them deeper into poverty and financial instability. For many of these households, the debt at issue arose out of unemployment, loss of medical insurance, or an uninsured or underinsured illness.

In 2008, the Feerick Center helped establish the Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office program (CLARO) in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island to create a more level playing field for defendants. CLARO is a limited-legal advice clinic in which volunteer attorneys assist unrepresented individuals in consumer debt collection cases filed primarily in New York City Civil Court. The CLARO programs operate under the auspices of the New York State Unified Court System’s Access to Justice Program. CLARO volunteers help defendants prepare answers, motions, orders to show cause, and discovery demands and then explain the steps necessary to defend themselves in court. In addition to assistance with specific cases, volunteer attorneys help CLARO visitors write dispute letters to credit reporting agencies, obtain credit reports and challenge disputed charges, and recognize identity theft and debt relief scams.

Through CLARO, low-income New Yorkers have a better chance to avoid default judgments, exercise their rights in civil court, and avoid increased financial instability.

The Feerick Center has been responsible for the growth of CLARO throughout New York City—in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island—and instrumental to ensuring that thousands of unrepresented low-income New Yorkers receive much-needed quality assistance in consumer debt cases.

Carolyn E. Coffey, Director of Litigation for Economic Justice, MFY Legal Services, Inc.
**PARTNERS**

**Bronx CLARO**
Bronx County Bar Association, Legal Services
NYC – Bronx, New York City Bar Association, and NYU Law School’s Debtors’ Rights Project

**Manhattan CLARO**
New York County Lawyers’ Association, Manhattan Legal Services, Lincoln Square Legal Services, Fordham Law School Consumer Law Advocates

**Staten Island CLARO**
Richmond County Bar Association, Staten Island Women’s Bar Association, and Wagner College

**Legal Services Partners**
Bronx Legal Services
CAMBA Legal Services
Legal Aid Society
Manhattan Legal Services
Municipal Employees Legal Services/DC 37
MFY Legal Services, Inc.
National Center for Economic Justice
New Economy Project
New York Legal Assistance Group
The Law Office of Ahmad Keshavarz
Urban Justice Center

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**CLARO DATA**

**Number of CLARO Visitors Served through August 2016**

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**Number of Volunteer Hours**

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As a law student volunteering through CLARO, I felt that the experience was critical in determining what kind of lawyer I wanted to be and in showing me the challenges faced by low-income New Yorkers. I am now a legal services attorney representing domestic violence survivors and others in consumer actions. I continue to volunteer at CLARO as an attorney. I am glad to be able to continue to serve clients who are not able to secure full representation. Every time I go to CLARO I feel rejuvenated in doing this work because I see the best that the law profession can provide.

Diane Johnston, Bronx and Manhattan CLARO Student Volunteer 2012-2015, Bronx CLARO Volunteer and Legal Aid Society Staff Attorney

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I am a 40-year-old immigrant from the Dominican Republic and have lived in the Bronx for 20 years. I am a home-health aide, and I earned $10,000 last year. I live with my partner and an 11-year-old son. My partner is a livery cab driver and thus has a highly variable income. I do not speak much English. I came to CLARO because I found out that there was a judgment against me from a 2008 debt collection case. I never got notice of the lawsuit in 2008. I did, however, get a notice of wage garnishment; if the garnishment had gone through it would have been a tremendous hardship on my family and me. CLARO helped me prepare an order to show cause to vacate the default judgment. I really needed the help because I did not understand the court process. The attorneys for the plaintiff fought me every step of the way and opposed my application. I had to go to court four times, and I had to take time off of work. Before each court hearing, I went to CLARO, and the CLARO volunteer prepared me and explained to me what was happening in the case. In July 2016, I had my last court date. The court issued a decision setting aside the default judgment and dismissing the case without prejudice. I felt such relief! I know I could not have reached this outcome without the help of CLARO.

Bronx CLARO Visitor (translated from Spanish)
Consumer Debt and Domestic Violence

In recent years, advocates for survivors of domestic violence have identified economic abuse as another harmful tool that abusers use to exercise control over the lives of survivors. Economic abuse is a powerful expression of domestic violence. Among its most common expressions are obtaining credit cards in a survivor’s name; racking up debt on those cards; obtaining loans and mortgages in her name; stealing money and personal documents; preventing her from working; ruining her credit score; forcing her to file fraudulent tax claims; withholding information about joint finances; sabotaging school or employment; selling her personal information to identity thieves; and illegally obtaining access to credit reporting information.

Abusers will often act in secret so that a survivor may not learn of the economic abuse until she tries to get a credit card or rent an apartment and discovers that her credit is ruined or that she has significant debt in her name. Because strong credit is necessary to get rental housing, a mortgage, loans, credit cards, health insurance, and some employment, economic abuse can create lasting barriers to a secure financial future and a new life for survivors.

Intakes at domestic violence shelters have shown that survivors confront a range of unique consumer law issues. While social service agencies and domestic abuse programs can successfully marshal benefits and services such as temporary housing, public assistance and child care, they are often less successful in addressing credit reporting issues, providing bankruptcy assistance, and resolving debt problems.
Drawing on its experience with the CLARO program, the Feerick Center convened a working group of attorneys and advocates in 2012 to expand and enhance services for domestic violence survivors who are victims of economic abuse. DV CLARO clinics providing limited-legal advice now occur on a regular basis at three shelters in the Bronx and in Manhattan. These programs expand the capacity of service providers to address the financial issues affecting survivors including economic abuse, consumer debt, identity theft, and credit report problems. The Feerick Center and its partners in the working group train both legal advocates and front-line staff at domestic violence organizations to better enable them to advise survivors on how to represent themselves in court and, as necessary, refer them to legal services offices for full-scope representation.

In addition to helping survivors to fight economic abuse, the Feerick Center undertakes research and policy advocacy on systemic problems that can cause serious harm to survivors. Actions such as filing a police report of identity theft or requesting a credit report can be very difficult for survivors and in some circumstances can result in the abuser finding out the new address of the survivor. The Feerick Center, through the working group, does outreach to federal, state, and local consumer protection agencies to make them aware of these dangers and to help develop policies and practices to address them.

Since 2007, the Feerick Center, through its Domestic Violence and Consumer Debt Law Project, has trained over 500 service providers from over 70 nonprofit organizations and agencies on issues related to the intersection of consumer law and domestic violence.

Since 2012, DV CLARO has provided legal screening, limited-scope legal assistance, and referral to over 75 domestic violence survivors.

**PARTNERS**

- Anti-Violence Project
- Brooklyn Volunteer Lawyers Project
- CAMBA Legal Services, Inc.
- Legal Aid Society
- MFY Legal Services, Inc.
- New Destiny Housing
- Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation
- New York Legal Assistance Group
- Sanctuary for Families
- Urban Justice Center
- Urban Resource Institute

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The Feerick Center is the leading force behind the New York City Domestic Violence and Consumer Law Project. Domestic violence survivors frequently experience a wide range of economic abuse such as abusers taking out credit cards in the survivor’s name without her permission, forcing survivors to use existing credit for the abuser’s benefit, and abusers hiding financial information from survivors. These abuses have a long-lasting effect, often ruining the survivor’s credit and, in turn, preventing her from obtaining housing or credit in the future and, in some cases, forcing her back to her abuser. Recognizing the seriousness of this issue and the lack of services available to survivors, the center gathered consumer providers to discuss creating a way for domestic violence survivors to more easily access consumer law legal services. The DV CLARO pilot project was created out of this effort, providing a model for shelter residents to more easily link with consumer legal services. Since the first DV CLARO session almost six years ago, the project has expanded to clinics in both the Bronx and Manhattan. The center’s work has expanded too. In addition to overseeing the DV CLARO clinics the center co-chairs the New York DV and Consumer Working Group, a broad coalition of domestic violence and consumer law providers who work together on advocacy, identify issues, and expand consumer law services for survivors. The work of the center has created services where none existed and provided potentially lifesaving assistance to survivors.

Matthew Schedler, Supervising Attorney, CAMBA Legal Services, Inc.

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I fled my apartment due to domestic violence and entered a shelter with my infant son. Both my abusive husband and I were named on the apartment lease. My husband stayed but stopped paying the rent and was eventually evicted. The landlord then brought a separate action for the outstanding rent against my abusive husband and me. I never received notice of the lawsuit and a judgment was entered against me. This caused a domestic violence–housing provider to deny me housing. DV CLARO connected me with a consumer law advocate who had domestic violence expertise and helped me figure out my options to address the judgment. Today, I have been approved for an apartment and live on my own in safe housing.

DV CLARO Client
Educational Equity

Despite the diversity of New York City’s residents and culture, its school system is the third most segregated in the country. Not surprisingly, this situation has created achievement gaps that strongly disadvantage low-income students and students of color. While housing patterns in the city have played a role, the causes of school segregation are complex.

For many students, demography is destiny. According to a 2012 study by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, while close to 75% of high school students from advantaged Manhattan neighborhoods graduate college-ready from high school, only 13% of African-American and Latino students are similarly prepared.

During his tenure as New York City mayor, Michael Bloomberg sought to address this racial achievement gap by focusing on expanding high school choice. His administration created 500 new, smaller high schools along with 100 charter schools and advanced a policy of universal high school choice to enable students to escape from low-performing neighborhood schools. The lynchpin of the new policy was the development of a computer algorithm similar to the one used to match medical students with hospital internships, which would match students’ school choice with schools’ selection criteria.

Unfortunately, universal high school choice has not brought about the hoped-for improvements in the academic outcomes of African-American, Latino, and other low-income students, due in large measure to the complexity of the process, the insufficient supply of “good seats,” and the stress it places on lower-income families, particularly those with language barriers, those new to New York, and those with children with disabilities.

Students and their families have three months to choose from over 700 programs located in over 400 schools described in a 600-page directory issued at the end of the seventh-grade year. Families with the time and resources to master the process or who belong to social networks monitoring the schools will generally do well in the selection process. Parents who do not speak English, who lack Internet access, or who do not have flexible work hours or time to attend open houses are at an enormous disadvantage.

Left unchecked, the high school application process will continue to perpetuate the high levels of segregation in the high schools. Resources are needed to provide hands-on advice to families in order to enable them to make the right choices so that their children can get into schools that will prepare them for the future.

Through the Legal Economic and Educational Advancement Project (LEEAP), the Feerick Center trains dozens of volunteers every school year to ensure that parents and students have the necessary information to make informed choices and navigate the application process. LEEAP partners with 12 community-based social service organizations that share our commitment to improving educational equity in the city.

I decided to bring my younger sister to the LEEAP Educational Program to get help with the high school application process. My parents are immigrants and are not familiar with the process or how to find resources to help better understand it. When I went through the process, I had zero help and went to my local, zoned school. I want better for my sister and understand the incredible impact that a more positive high school environment will have on her life. I was grateful for the opportunity to work with a knowledgeable LEEAP volunteer to learn about potential high schools for my younger sister and help her take advantage of the process.

Family Member, LEEAP Educational Component
Through the Feerick Center, I have volunteered at the Cypress Hills Local Development Center assisting seventh- and eighth-grade students with their high school applications for the past three years. The students and their families are in dire need of advice and guidance regarding a process that is cumbersome and confusing. For many students, the opportunity to select a high school is the first chance they have to escape inadequate, zoned schools that are frequently located in extremely challenged neighborhoods. Through my volunteer work, I hope to render support to these students and their families, who desperately want to achieve a place in the American Dream through education, just as my family did when they came here from Ireland many years ago.

Jeanne Bolger ’81, LEEAP Educational Component Volunteer

The Feerick Center has been such an amazing advocate for us. The center always connects us to resources and brings our work and our team to the table time and time again. The Feerick Center’s input and support have been invaluable to helping our own center and model grow in ways that we could not imagine years ago. The LEEAP volunteers have been such an incredible asset to our work. Each has provided critical insight and feedback in how we can improve our work and better serve our youth and families. We greatly appreciate all the time they take to serve our students so thoughtfully and with such grace and kindness. We really could not have achieved the results we did for our students in the New York City high school application process without the volunteers.

Parastoo Massoumi, Former LEEAP Educational Component Partner and Director, Middle School Student Success Center, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

In keeping with its problem-solving approach through fact-finding, direct assistance, and policy analysis, the Feerick Center has also created the New York City High School Application Advisory Committee, a group of representatives from social service organizations and the city’s Department of Education, along with educational experts and advocates. The Committee reviews various approaches to assisting families with the high school application process, identifying best practices, and sharing these with educational advocates throughout the city.

To help mark its 10th anniversary, the Feerick Center will issue a report documenting lessons learned from the LEEAP project—making recommendations for improving the selection process and narrowing the racial achievement gap. In addition, along with the Fordham Center on Race, Law and Justice and the Fordham University Graduate School of Education’s Center for Educational Partnerships, in November 2016 the Feerick Center will hold a day-long convening focused on educational equity and the New York City high school application process.

LeeaP Education Component Partners

- Asphalt Green
- CAMBA Beacon
- Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
- Exam Schools Partnership Initiative (ESPI)
- The Go Project
- Goddard Riverside Community Center
- Grand Street Settlement SONYC Program
- Harlem Commonwealth Council SONYC Program
- Henry Street Settlement
- Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center
- Queens Community House All Stars Program
- Ravenswood Community Center (Riis Neighborhood Settlement)
- Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Center SONYC Program
- The Equity Project (TEP) Charter School

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Immigrant Rights

During the course of 2013 and 2014, over 100,000 children traveling without an adult crossed the border from Mexico into the United States and were apprehended by federal immigration enforcement authorities. Coming from Central America, primarily El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, these children were fleeing from gangs and other criminal organizations that preyed on vulnerable people in countries where there has been a breakdown in the rule of law. Since 2014, migration levels from Central America, while decreasing, have nonetheless remained at historically high levels. The population seeking safety also includes families, overwhelmingly women with young children.

Although the initial impact of this forced migration of refugees was felt largely in Texas, California, and Arizona, many of these families and young people eventually have found their way to New York and other communities in the hope of reuniting with family members.

The Feerick Center was one of the first organizations to recognize this migration to New York. Using its established problem-solving and partnering approach, the Feerick Center studied the situation, both nationally and locally, and began to identify the supportive services that would be necessary. In 2012, it brought together social and legal service providers at a first-of-its-kind convening to draw attention to the situation and discuss the needs of the arriving children.

I came to law school because I was inspired by the way that the law is used as a vehicle for social change. Yet first semester, I found myself drowning in work and blind to the bigger picture about how theory and rules that I learned in the classroom were relevant to my goals as a public servant. So I was excited by the idea of getting some real, on-the-ground experience in Dilley when I first learned about the opportunity. As a worried 1L, I thought that maybe it wasn’t the right time to miss a week’s worth of studying. With the trusted advice of many, I decided to go and I am so glad I did because Dilley changed everything for me.

As a student, a person, and an aspiring lawyer, I believe that nothing in my life so far has taught me as much as a week at Dilley did. I have begun to notice how every new topic we learn in the classroom in New York relates to our work in Texas and is a necessary tool to effect the change that we wish to see in family detention and beyond. I have more motivation than ever and have gained perspective that was absolutely essential to my growth as a student of the law.

Anna Mintz ’18

Funding from the New York City Council and the Robin Hood Foundation have created the means to provide significant access to free legal assistance for the children, leaving the Feerick Center to identify problems that were not being addressed and voices that were not being heard. We identified the specific needs for an improved educational and mental health services as well as support systems to integrate children and families into their new communities.

To address shortcomings in addressing legal needs, the Feerick Center created working groups that

- examined the problems that lawyers face in advocating on behalf of unaccompanied immigrant children for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status relief, resulting in a report with recommendations for improvements;
- drafted a model statute to address the lack of uniformity in state court proceedings nationally; and
- developed training programs for court-appointed lawyers representing immigrant children to strengthen the quality of representation.

The trip to Dilley displayed the best and worst of our world. The dedication of the volunteers, the courage of the people crossing the borders and their hopes and dreams, were unbelievably inspiring. The mistreatment they suffered, the brutality of their lives, and the cruelty inflicted by the males of their home countries are so troubling that they invoke fear and dread and even a loss of faith in humanity. I am so proud of the efforts of the Feerick Center and thankful for the opportunity to make even a small contribution to improving our world.

Joel Davidson ’75
To develop programs and policies that effectively addressed the needs of immigrant children and families, the Feerick Center also undertook a fact-finding initiative to enable the children to give voice to their experiences. In collaboration with the Vera Institute, and using peer leaders who were once themselves unaccompanied immigrants, individual interviews and focus group discussions were held, resulting in a 2015 report documenting the need for expanded social and legal services and making recommendations to local and state policy makers.

As more children and families continue to arrive in New York, the Feerick Center is focusing on strengthening their integration into the community: advocating for the children’s right to go to school, addressing housing instability of asylum-seeking women with children, and working to improve coordination among service providers.

Many of the adults with children who are released from federal family immigration detention facilities outside New York will have their hearings for asylum status here. The center is working with partners to raise awareness about federal family immigration detention policies and to enhance and expand the capacity of local service providers to serve this vulnerable population. The Feerick Center is also part of a coalition convened by the Fund for Modern Courts to examine immigration issues in the family court; as part of this work, the center is working to address language access shortcomings in the courts.

As of the fall 2016, thousands of women and children continue to be held in detention facilities as they pursue asylum claims. In 2016, the center started organizing service trips of volunteers to provide limited legal assistance to these families through the CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project. Feerick Center staff, Fordham Law students, and Fordham Law School alumni are going to Dilley, Texas to prepare women detained at the South Texas Family Residential Center for hearings before asylum officers and immigration judges. In addition to providing much needed legal support for detained immigrants, this initiative gives experienced alumni an opportunity to utilize their legal skills and provides law students with exposure to immigration law and a transformative, hands-on experience.

The opportunity to use my 40 years of litigation experience in preparing these vulnerable and brave women to testify in their government-mandated “credible fear interviews” and to represent a few of them in these interviews and bond hearings was rewarding to say the least. It was intensive and exhausting, but one of the most powerful and significant professional weeks of my life.

Jeremiah Quinlan ’75
The Attorney Emeritus Program eases the way for retired attorneys, like me, to provide legal representation to the indigent. I retired in January 2009 as a partner at Sidley Austin. Since then, I have worked 2-3 days a week at the Brooklyn Office for the Aging of the Legal Aid Society litigating cases in Brooklyn Supreme Court.

My clients, the elderly and indigent, have all been abused and taken advantage of in some fashion. Without free legal representation they would have had no recourse. The work I have done is far afield from the kind of litigation I handled at Sidley Austin. If I had been required to continue with CLE and other requirements, I probably would have still done pro bono work—but the AEP eased the way for me and, I am sure, for other retired attorneys who do or would like to do pro bono work.

My experience has been satisfying, rewarding, and challenging. The AEP has helped make available to indigent New Yorkers a largely untapped resource and has thereby contributed greatly to the administration of justice.

Roger J. Hawke, AEP Volunteer

**ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

Approximately 1.8 million litigants go through the New York State Court system each year unrepresented by a lawyer. In a complex society in which many important life situations are resolved through the legal system, this level of unmet legal need undermines the public’s belief in the capability of that system to render justice for many people. Left unaddressed, the state’s justice gap will, over time, erode the credibility of the legal system. The crisis in access to justice has been devastating to poor and marginalized communities, who are all too often forced into courts and administrative agencies to obtain basic life necessities and to hold their families and lives together.

With the founding of the Feerick Center, Fordham Law School sought not only to introduce students to new approaches to social justice work, but also to engage its alumni, particularly senior lawyers, in the effort to expand access to justice through pro bono work. In 2010, then Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman invited the Feerick Center to support a new initiative to utilize the skills of senior lawyers to address the need for legal assistance for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers: the Attorney Emeritus Program (AEP).
Having a pool of experienced lawyers will not of itself remedy the justice gap. In creating the AEP the Feerick Center undertook to solve a two-fold problem: 1) how to draw experienced attorneys into new areas of law where great need exists and 2) how to enable them to work effectively with client groups with whom they might be unfamiliar.

Through a two-pronged strategy, the center has developed training methods to assist Emeritus lawyers to explore high-need practice areas such as housing, family, immigration, and consumer law. First, working with a variety of partners, we have created webinars, training manuals, and a cross-cultural training curriculum specifically designed for AEP volunteers and host legal service organizations.

Second, and complementing this training, the Feerick Center organizes information sessions to enable potential AEP volunteers to meet attorneys from legal services offices to learn more about the problems facing their client communities and to talk with AEP volunteers about the work they have been doing. These sessions help Emeritus volunteers to better understand the importance of the work and the rewards of doing it.

Since its inception, over 1,500 lawyers have enrolled in the Attorney Emeritus Program. Emeritus volunteers have provided between 4,000 to 7,500 hours of pro bono service annually to reduce the justice gap.

Unmet legal needs are not confined to New York City. Both rural areas and upstate urban centers suffer from insufficient civil legal services, yet more than sixty percent of AEP volunteers are located in the greater New York metropolitan area. The Feerick Center has worked with legal services organizations and bar associations outside of New York City to introduce the program and promote its value in expanding access to justice throughout the state.

To date, AEP has

- involved over 60 host organizations
- placed over 175 volunteer emeritus attorneys with AEP host organizations
- enrolled over 650 emeritus attorneys from 2014–2016

The Attorney Emeritus Program has been a wonderful source in recruiting seasoned attorneys who are eager to take on substantial pro bono matters. The AEP participants we have recruited are fantastic to our clients and have the time to assist them, even in the more involved types of cases. These attorneys are a wealth of knowledge and experience—a potent combination from which our clients have benefited greatly. In the years to come, we anticipate that the Attorney Emeritus Program will continue to gain steam. We look forward to AEP’s future.

AEP Host Organization

In 2009, I retired from Exxon Mobil Corporation after 37 years of service as in-house tax counsel. Initially, my wife and I were kept quite busy with relocation from Texas to our new abode here in New York City. Shortly after getting settled, I felt a need to provide pro-bono services to the community. Being a Fordham Law grad, I noticed a brochure from the Feerick Center and contacted Dora Galacatos regarding opportunities that might be available and qualify for the Attorney Emeritus Program offered by New York State. She suggested the CLARO program and set me up for training in mid-February of 2011. Since that training, I have volunteered at Bronx CLARO every Thursday afternoon that I have been in town. CLARO provides a structured environment in which to contribute my services to the New York community. More importantly, it has opened my eyes to the circumstances of those less fortunate. I believe CLARO provides these folks the necessary tools to help empower them to rectify injustices brought about in many cases by uncontrollable conditions. While very different than my career in tax law, my CLARO experience has been exactly what I was looking for in my retirement years!

C. Patrick Castellan ’77

Working with the Nassau Suffolk Law Services Committee as part of the AEP has allowed me to continue practicing law in a completely new area. I have greatly enjoyed being part of the program as it allows me to use my almost 29 years of legal experience to help those in need of free legal services while gaining valuable new knowledge.

Diane Mirabito, AEP Volunteer
DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LAWYERS

Every year Fordham Law School graduates around 500 students. These new lawyers leave the School with a range of interests and opportunities for their professional lives. Many will go into private practice; others to government and its various agencies and institutions; some into public interest work. While they are at Fordham, the Feerick Center seeks to create opportunities for students to partake in discussions of pressing social and public interest problems facing New York City, the state, and the nation. Through this engagement, the Feerick Center nurtures a spirit of social responsibility in the Law School’s students regardless of their future career paths. All lawyers will at some point in their lives be confronted with the opportunity to do justice. The Feerick Center works to prepare them to meet this responsibility.

Speakers Series

One approach to expanding student engagement with societal problems and the role that lawyers can play to alleviate them has been the center’s Speakers Series. The series brings innovative advocates to the Law School to discuss their work and various cutting-edge initiatives to advance social justice. Over the past decade, the series has focused on issues such as poverty lawyering in practice, living wage and minimum wage, implicit bias and racial anxiety, and housing discrimination. Students have had the opportunity to engage with leaders in these fields, gaining an understanding of the complexity of these problems and the challenge of crafting legal approaches to address them. The speakers stimulate unconventional thinking in tackling poverty and the conditions that promote it.

Fellows

Each year, the Law School has generously supported one or more recent graduates to serve as dean’s fellows at the center. These alumni have demonstrated an established commitment to social justice lawyering and are prepared to advance the center’s goals, including on issues of economic inequality, educational equity,
and immigration, and to experience the center’s brand of creative problem solving. This exposure has been of benefit to the fellows, enabling many of them to use their experience at the center to launch their transition to their fields of interest.

In addition, from 2000 to 2016, the New York Women’s Bar Association Foundation (NYWBAF) provided extraordinary support to the center by funding two students to work at the center as NYWBAF fellows. Like dean’s fellows, the NYWBAF fellows have been an integral part of the center, working on issues as diverse as custody and visitation for domestic violence survivors and victims, the needs of unaccompanied immigrant children, and examining the predatory and abusive practices of the consumer debt relief industry. They have gone on to private sector opportunities and, especially, a broad range of public interest positions—including at Catholic Charities Legal Services, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Immigrant Justice Corps, the Legal Aid Society, and the New York City Council.

**Pathways-to-Practice**

To support those law students who want to work at public interest and social justice organizations, the center has worked with Law School partners to organize the Pathways-to-Practice program. This series brings public interest practitioners to the Law School to discuss the practicalities and challenges of obtaining employment in this sector. The speakers give the students a clearer idea of what the work is like and information about the skills they will need, as well as describing the satisfaction that comes from doing it.

**Social Justice Seminars and Clinics**

Integral to the mission of the Feerick Center are social justice seminars and clinics through which Law School faculty and center staff work together with students to address systemic problems that substantially affect people living in poverty. The center’s Social Justice Clinic, which was offered until 2013, put into practice our creative problem-solving approach to changing policies and practices that disproportionally affect poor and marginalized communities. The clinic focused on burdens affecting the poor which have received less attention and for which practical solutions exist.

One clinic project addressed the re-entry problems faced by formerly incarcerated individuals resulting from fines, court costs and surcharges imposed upon conviction, probation fees, and child support. These fees can be significant, leading to civil judgments and bad credit, which negatively affect a successful re-integration to society.

In addition to the social justice clinic, the Feerick Center has offered clinical offerings in connection with some of our problem-solving projects. One clinic helped develop an alternative dispute resolution center in Ghana. Two other clinics assisted the Archdiocese of New York with its consolidation of parochial schools and mergers of parishes. All of these clinics engaged students with seasoned ADR practitioners and stakeholders in creating and carrying out facilitated processes to address conflictual situations and promote conflict resolution.

Finally, since 2014, the center has offered a course on Children and Immigration Law.

As a hungry 1L, in search of free pizza, I wandered into a Feerick Center Speaker Series featuring JoAnne Page, president and CEO of the Fortune Society. While I ate, Ms. Page talked about what the Fortune Society has done to help people return to their communities following incarceration. It was, unexpectedly, an incredibly important 45 minutes for me. I forgot about exams, I forgot about outlining, and I remembered why I wanted to be a lawyer. I remembered the work that I wanted to do. Her talk got me through finals.

Many inspiring Speaker Series later, I joined the Feerick Center’s Social Justice Clinic, where professors Elizabeth Cooper and Gaylynn Burroughs immersed us in the child welfare system, which is particularly in need of creative, problem-solving techniques. We organized a conference to bring system-involved parents and various other stakeholders, including Judge Ronald E. Richter, the then-Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services, into the same room, to talk about creating a mechanism for collecting parent feedback about their experiences of the child welfare system. I believe that we were truly able to add value by refusing to view the system as a zero sum game and bringing stakeholders together for an open conversation.

After graduating from law school, I had the wonderful opportunity to work as the Feerick Center’s 2013-2014 dean’s fellow. Through this work, I found the true love of my legal life: consumer advocacy. I knew it was important work, but I was shocked by how much I loved working for the CLARO program, which focuses on helping New Yorkers being sued on consumer issues in civil court. I loved getting to work on Thursdays, knowing that I would get to spend a few hours in the basement of the Bronx Civil Court, reading summons and complaints, explaining how to serve and file answers, and listening to people tell their stories.

Today, I work for the Legal Aid Society as a staff attorney in their program, which focuses on helping New Yorkers being sued on consumer issues in civil court. I loved getting to work on Thursdays, knowing that I would get to spend a few hours in the basement of the Bronx Civil Court, reading summons and complaints, explaining how to serve and file answers, and listening to people tell their stories.

Anna R. Stallmann ’13
The Feerick Center's mission charges its staff to promote social justice and combat poverty through problem solving. From its founding, the Feerick Center began establishing partnerships with legal service, social justice, social service, and other advocacy organizations in New York City, both to help them expand the services that they could provide to their clients and to provide opportunities to explore new needs and best practices in their areas of work. The center also began partnering with government agencies and the courts. Through conferences, seminars, and convenings, the center has created a tradition of bringing together both audiences and presenters with experience and commitment, resulting in events that are enriching and engaging.

Domestic Violence

In 2007, the center established the Domestic Violence and Consumer Law Project. The project focused on the consumer debt and credit reporting needs of domestic violence survivors. As part of a city-wide working group, we strive to bring together social service providers to enhance and expand capacity to serve survivors of economic abuse and to advocate for policies to protect the consumer rights of survivors.

From 2009 to 2016, working with a number of co-sponsors, the center assumed responsibility for the Law School's annual domestic violence conference. These conferences bring together frontline staff at legal and social service providers, law enforcement, government agencies, the judiciary, and policy makers to exchange information and perspectives, and highlight changes in the legal landscape, new treatment approaches and greater awareness of the challenges facing survivors of domestic violence. The conferences have explored:

- evidentiary challenges in domestic violence litigation
- the needs of diverse families
- new developments in prosecuting sex traffickers and addressing the needs of victims
- the benefits and problems of introducing mental health issues into the courts
- the effect of national laws and policies on addressing domestic violence in New York
- surviving re-victimization
- interdisciplinary collaboration to address under-recognized harms

Access to Justice

Access to justice is integral to the mission of the Feerick Center. In addition to the volunteer lawyers who are recruited and trained through the CLARO, LEEAP, and the Attorney Emeritus programs, the center has also actively sought to promote innovative approaches to providing legal help to unrepresented litigants. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Gideon v. Wainwright, which provided a right to counsel to indigent defendants in criminal proceedings, the center convened leading scholars as well as national and local leaders in the access-to-justice movement to explore emerging issues and innovations to expand legal assistance in civil proceedings in the absence of a right to counsel. The convening provided a platform for reflection and shared insights about how to continue to make strides in expanding access to justice in the absence of a “civil Gideon” during challenging fiscal times.
Immigrant Children

Complementing its work to address the needs of immigrant children and families, the Feerick Center has organized a series of convenings to examine the impact of the arrival of unaccompanied immigrant children to New York State and what is needed to enable them to integrate into their new communities. The first of these, in 2012, brought the issue of unaccompanied immigrant children in New York to the attention of a broader array of stakeholders.

As the numbers of children and families arriving in New York continued to grow, the center secured funding to hire a full-time staff member to develop our Unaccompanied Immigrant Children Project. In 2014, the project collaborated with Fordham University’s Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs to educate New Yorkers about the “push factors” in countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador that have led to the surge of border crossings by asylum-seeking youth and mothers with children. The project also worked to focus greater attention on the need for social service and government agencies to provide services to help the children and their families obtain the support they needed and to integrate them into the community. In 2015, the center held a convening to share the results of its research work with immigrant teens to give them a voice and an opportunity to express their problems and what they need to move ahead with their lives.

Fordham University Consortium on Social Justice

The Feerick Center approaches problem solving through a wider lens than just the law. We draw on the work of social scientists, ethnographers, economists, sociologists, mental health professionals, physicians, social workers, and policy analysts to develop solutions to problems facing poor and marginalized people. To facilitate this approach, in 2007, the center proposed the Fordham University Consortium on Social Justice as a forum to increase communication among members of the University community who are teaching and undertaking research in various fields affecting social and economic justice. Not only does the consortium enhance the work of the participants, but it also expands the resources available to the Feerick Center.
The Feerick Center staff are deeply honored and privileged to have the opportunity to carry out the mission of the center during its first 10 years. The center already has engaged with hundreds of students and alumni on an array of social justice initiatives. We have collaborated with a broad network of partners—including community-based and advocacy organizations, legal services providers, government agencies, and the courts—to promote access to justice and advance social change efforts. During this time, the center has left its mark on issues as diverse as consumer debt and workers’ rights, unaccompanied immigrant children, and educational equity—with a special focus on access to justice initiatives.

Looking forward, the center plans on building on the accomplishments of its first 10 years to broaden its role with law students and the wider Fordham Law School and Fordham University communities. The center will develop additional academic and service opportunities for students and work to involve even more alumni in pro bono and social justice efforts. Further, the center will continue to serve as a convener in collaboration with its partners, to right the wrongs of society and advance the rights of New Yorkers in need.
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Opposite page, left to right: Founder and Senior Counsel John D. Feerick ’61, Executive Director Dora Galacatos ’96, Advisory Board Chair Fern Schair, Center Faculty Director Elizabeth B. Cooper, and Assistant Dean Robert J. Reilly ’75

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