

# Building Community, One Client at a Time

Mariza Lockhart '16 didn't start her legal career working for a big firm or chasing courtroom drama. Her first client? Her mom.

"I think my first client was my mom," she said. Her mother had been a homeowner for years and needed help resolving an issue with a mortgage lender. Mariza stepped in, newly graduated and ready to put her training to use. That early case sparked something. She realized how many people like her mom, independent landlords navigating complex systems, needed accessible, compassionate legal support.

It was the beginning of what would become Lockhart Legal, her San Diego-based firm focused on real estate, housing, and empowering community members through clear, human-first legal guidance.

To be clear, Mariza didn't always know this was where her career

would lead. Like many students entering law school, she was open to exploring different areas of the profession. That openness is what led her to the Community Law Project (CLP), California Western's pro bono clinic serving underserved populations across San Diego.

Her time with CLP gave her an early taste of what it was like to work directly with clients. She recalled how eye-opening it was to sit across from someone in need of legal help and be the one tasked with guiding them. The experience gave her not only practical skills but a sense of confidence, proof that she could take what she was learning in the classroom and actually apply it in the real world.

"They just need someone to talk to," she said. That kind of direct interaction helped shape her approach to law, one grounded in human connection, real-world problem solving, and an instinct to make people feel heard and

supported.

After graduating from California Western, she opened her own firm with a focus on real estate, housing, and community-centered legal support. Today, she blends litigation with preventative counseling, guiding clients through complex issues with clarity and care. She's proud to work at the intersection of legal advocacy and human understanding, a value that started back in law school and continues to guide her every day.

Her path into law may have started close to home, but Mariza's built a practice that's all her own. Every case still taps into that same instinct she had from the start: listen closely, show up, and help people feel seen. Not a bad takeaway from a first official client meeting that just so happened to take place under her mom's roof.



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