

## LISTENING WITH PURPOSE:

# Samantha Sepulveda '25 and the Power of Service

Samantha Sepulveda '25 sits across from her client at the Community Law Project's Friday morning clinic at a local elementary school. Samantha's client, a woman in her 40s with two children, speaks in Spanish about the housing issues threatening to uproot her family's life. She's frantic and afraid. Samantha leans in, listens intently, and searches for the right words to comfort her client — and to convey a clear legal answer to the compounding challenges of the systems her client is caught up in. Though Samantha speaks Spanish fluently, the legal terms are hard to explain. But over the course of half an hour, she and her client work together, a song and dance of understanding, until finally, there's clarity — a path forward for her client's family to find some stability. As they wrap up, the client reaches out to hold Samantha's hand, shedding tears of relief and gratitude. In that moment, Samantha knew she was exactly where she was meant to be.

This is what drew her to the Community Law Project (CLP) in the first place— real people, real problems, and the ability to help in concrete ways. While interning with CLP, she spent every Friday at the clinic sitting with clients from the surrounding East San Diego community, offering free legal guidance — and the solace that comes from speaking with someone who empathizes with your struggle. "I really care that people feel listened to — that's most important," Samantha says. "Seeing the relief on clients' faces when we give them tangible information is the highlight of every interaction."



Born in Pasadena and raised in Alhambra, Samantha's pursuit of justice began in a human rights class early on in high school. "My teacher was always challenging us: 'What could you do to prevent atrocities and create change?' Those questions stuck to me like glue," Samantha says. Wanting to be someone who could effect change led her to Loyola Marymount University, where she studied international relations and worked in campus ministry. She then chose California Western because it was one of the few law schools she found that offered an international law concentration.

Samantha remains passionate about international law, but a 1L internship with the Legal Aid Society and her experience in CLP have helped her find purpose in pursuing a career in employment and labor law. With Legal Aid, she worked in the restraining-order

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clinic, helping victims of elder abuse, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. “What amazed me was how much compassion they had for us as young interns,” she says. “They were going through such a horrible time and still they cared for us.” Falling in love with these one-on-one interactions with clients is what brought her to the Community Law Project, and knowing that she would learn a wide range of topics, with CLP addressing 11 different legal areas from family law to personal injury to immigration.

Samantha has also taken full advantage of opportunities to learn and grow on campus. She revitalized the Employment and Labor Society as President. She serves as Vice President of the Public Interest Law Foundation and as Senior Treasurer of the International Law Society. Last year, she was an avid member of the Competitive Advocacy Program’s mock trial team; she and her teammates came in

fourth place at UCLA’s Premiere Competition. Samantha says the rigorous training and support she received from her coaches was life altering. “I felt like a changed person after that. My coaches gave me such a strong sense of confidence,” she says. “And it confirmed my desire to become a trial attorney.”

With graduation on the horizon, Samantha is confident about her direction in the law and her ability to make a tangible difference. After she passes the bar, she plans to return to her hometown of Los Angeles, where she draws inspiration from her family’s love and sacrifice. Her grandparents immigrated from Mexico, and her parents, who didn’t attend college, have been her unwavering supporters. “Being the first attorney in my family is beyond anything I could have dreamed of,” she reflects. “My little brother, Luca, is 9, and he is my biggest inspiration. Knowing that when he goes to college he’ll have confidence



because he’s seen his big sister do it — that means everything to me.”

When she leaves California Western, Samantha will be taking all that she’s learned with her and the question “What could you do to create change?” now has a clear answer: “I want to have something I can offer people that will have ripple effects. If it’s one person being harassed or discriminated against, one employee standing up for others — those small ripple effects will get bigger and bigger through my work.”