

## Legal Pathways: Children's Rights

A career in Children's Rights offers a dynamic and diverse legal practice. Follow the strategic steps below to prepare for a career in Children's Rights, and remember that the Office of Career and Professional Development (OCPD) is here to assist you.

**What is Children's Rights Law?** Children's Rights laws exist to safeguard children, ensure their wellbeing, and protect and promote their rights. It encompasses a wide array of legal issues, as displayed below. Attorneys practicing in this field may engage in policy advocacy (e.g., legislative and regulatory advocacy at the local, state, or federal levels, impact litigation, and public education), or they may engage in direct representation (e.g., providing legal advocacy for abused and neglected children in dependency proceedings, representing children in juvenile delinquency matters, and advocating on behalf of children with special needs in administrative hearings to obtain appropriate educational or other services and resources). Some aspects of Children's Rights crossover into the field of Family law (for more information on career opportunities in Family law, please see OCPD's *Legal Pathways: Family Law*).

### **Children's Rights Career Paths**

Children's Rights attorneys work in a variety of settings, including solo practice, law firms, governmental entities, and nonprofit organizations. The legal issues involved in the representation of children are complex and challenging, as they deal with every facet of a child's life.

Sample Areas of Law:

- ✓ Abuse and Neglect
- ✓ Adoption
- ✓ Child Care
- ✓ Child Poverty
- ✓ Child Protection
- ✓ Child Support
- ✓ Child Welfare
- ✓ Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
- ✓ Constitutional Rights
- ✓ Custody
- ✓ Disability Law
- ✓ Dual Status Youth
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Emancipation
- ✓ Environmental Impacts on Children
- ✓ Foster Care
- ✓ Guardianship
- ✓ Health and Safety
- ✓ Housing / Homelessness
- ✓ Immigration
- ✓ International Laws (Adoption, Parental Kidnapping, Custody)
- ✓ Juvenile Delinquency
- ✓ Mental Health
- ✓ Nutrition
- ✓ Parent Education
- ✓ Paternity
- ✓ Public Benefits
- ✓ Public Health Issues
- ✓ Privacy Rights
- ✓ Reproductive Rights/Responsibilities
- ✓ Sexual Exploitation of Children
- ✓ Special Education
- ✓ Special Needs
- ✓ Tort Liability and Recovery
- ✓ Transition Age Youth Rights
- ✓ Victims' Rights

## **Your Job Search Strategy: Where to Start**

### **Step 1: Make an Appointment with the Office of Career and Professional Development:**

We will help you create a personalized job search strategy and draft a Children's Rights law resume and cover letter. We will also assist you in developing yourself professionally by perfecting your elevator pitch and networking skills and by preparing you for interviews. Imagine how much easier it will be to apply for jobs when you have your materials ready and you can present yourself as an aspiring Children's Rights lawyer. **TIP:** *Sign up for a counseling appointment in #HireUSDLaw.*

In addition to the OCPD, check out <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/> and <https://www.psjd.org/> and review them regularly. In addition to #HireUSDLaw, they should be your primary sources for public interest law related questions, externships tips, grant funding sources, post-graduate opportunities, fellowships, and public service loan forgiveness.

### **Step 2: Take Relevant Coursework:**

The University of San Diego School of Law recognizes the growing need for attorneys in children's rights. USD Law therefore offers the following courses, which may meet the Children's Rights Concentration requirements: Child Rights & Remedies, Family Law, Administrative Law, Child Advocacy Clinic: Delinquency I and II, Child Advocacy Clinic: Dependency I and II, Child Advocacy Clinic: Policy I and II, Education and Disability Clinic I and II, Education Law, Health Law and Reproduction, Human Trafficking, Juvenile Law, Legislation, Law and Politics of Educational Policy Development, Public Interest Law and Practice, Remedies, Special Education and The Law, Topics in Family Law, Transitional Justice and Responding to Mass Atrocities. Course descriptions can be found at: <http://www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/llm-programs/curriculum/course-descriptions.php>.

[The Children's Rights Concentration](#) requires completion of 18 credits with a grade point average in concentration courses of 2.2 or higher. An application must be submitted by April 1 of graduation year to receive the certification and transcript notation. **TIP:** *Plan ahead. Review the available classes (they may not be offered each semester or year). Meet with your academic advisor in Law Student Affairs to ensure you make room in your schedule for children's rights courses.* Course descriptions can be found at: <https://www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/jd-programs/curriculum/course-descriptions.php>

### **Step 3: Join Clubs and Organizations On-Campus and Off-Campus:**

Joining USD Law's [Advocates for Children & Education](#) (ACE) as well as off-campus community education law and related organizations, is both productive and enriching. You will meet other students with similar interests as well as USD Law alumni and other lawyers who are currently working in the field. You will gain exposure to the latest legal issues and happenings. You will meet a network of potential mentors who can share their wisdom and possible job openings with you. Volunteering at club meetings, receptions, conferences, and events is also a way to take a break from your studies, enjoy a little social time, and build your professional relationships. **TIPS:** *For a list of relevant law organizations, see **Appendix A**. Memberships are often free or discounted for students. Many organizations maintain a job listing for members as well as an upcoming events calendar.*

### **Step 4: Get to Know your Children's Rights Law Faculty:**

Identify and make an appointment to speak with USD Law professors who teach Children's Rights Law. They have practiced in the general field and are very knowledgeable about the industry. Because Children's Rights encompasses a variety of different industries and legal issues, your

professors can help you narrow down your interest and guide you in the right direction. **TIP:** For a list of professors, see **Appendix A**. If you have a genuine passion and demonstrated interest for Children's Rights, let your professor know. Professors are happy to mentor students, and have in the past recommended mentees for job opportunities.

### **Step 5: Gain Practical, Hands-On Experience in Children's Rights Law:**

Law clerk positions, internships, clinical opportunities and externships for academic credit allow you to gain real world legal experience as a student. Take the opportunity after your first year to obtain hands-on skills and practice, while demonstrating to future employers your proactive dedication and qualifications for summer and post-graduate work. Doing so will also boost your confidence, having professional experience that will be of value to employers. In addition to paid or academic credit positions found on #HireUSDLaw and through our [Field Placement Program](#), the following are other hands-on opportunities at USD related to Children's Rights work:

[Children's Advocacy Institute](#): The Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) is one of the nation's premiere academic, research, and advocacy organizations seeking to improve the lives of children and youth, with special emphasis on improving the child protection and foster care systems and enhancing resources that are available to youth aging out of foster care. In CAI's academic component, students who have completed or are taking [Child Rights and Remedies](#) are eligible to participate in the [Child Advocacy Clinic](#), a unique program that gives law students experience in representing children and/or working on policy issues vital to children's interests. The Child Advocacy Clinic offers three different clinical opportunities: Dependency Clinic, Delinquency/At-Risk Youth Clinic, and Policy Clinic:

**(1) Dependency Clinic:** USD Law students are placed with attorneys from Children's Legal Services of San Diego, Dependency Legal Services of San Diego, or the County Counsel Office's Juvenile Unit, where they assist attorneys in the representation of abused and neglected children, parents, or the County in Dependency Court proceedings.

**(2) Delinquency/At-Risk Youth Clinic:** Working under the supervision of attorneys and staff from the San Diego County Public Defender's Juvenile Unit, interns advocate on behalf of delinquent youth in order to ensure the youth receive the appropriate educational, mental health, physical health, and other services they need while they are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court.

**(3) Policy Clinic:** USD Law students work with CAI professional staff on state and federal legislative or regulatory advocacy, impact litigation, research or public education projects.

[Education and Disability Clinic](#): Students receive practical training and experience in client intake, interviewing and counseling, and representation of clients at meetings with school district personnel and Regional Center staff. Students also represent parents seeking limited conservatorships in Probate Court. Matters include school discipline (suspensions and expulsions), special education placement and services, Regional Center and Early Start services, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students may draft complaints with the Office of Civil Rights or other agencies. Some cases proceed to formal mediation and hearing where students argue the case with support from the supervising attorney. Weekly group meetings are combined with individual case conferences to provide intensive personal training in case management. The classroom component also includes an overview of statutes and cases in these growing areas of civil law.

[Consumer Protection Policy Center](#): Students take a one-semester class entitled [California Regulatory Law and Public Interest](#). In the class, students learn the substantive law governing the operation and decision making of state regulatory agencies. They study the "sunshine statutes" which require most agency decisions to be made in public, and constitutional and other limitations on the regulatory authority of administrative agencies. Students are also encouraged to take the [California Regulatory Law Clinic](#), in which they monitor state agencies and periodically report on their actions, which are published. As a follow-up in their third year, students may enroll in [Public Interest Law Clinic](#), and engage in advanced advocacy projects involving active participation in rulemaking, litigation, legislation, and/or writing.

#### **Step 6: Build Relationships (Network!) with Alumni and other Children's Rights Lawyers:**

Search for and connect with USD Law alumni currently working in Children's Rights. Sign up for a complimentary student membership in the National Association of Counsel for Children, a multidisciplinary membership organization working to strengthen legal advocacy for children and families (contact [Membership@NACCchildlaw.org](mailto:Membership@NACCchildlaw.org)). Check the Alumni Network Directory in #HireUSDLaw and conduct an attorney search on Google, Martindale Hubbell, Lexis, and Westlaw. Attend Children's Rights organizations events to meet many other lawyers practicing in the field. Introduce yourself as an aspiring Children's Rights lawyer and start building professional relationships. Reach out and arrange informational interviews to learn about their work and journey to a career in Children's Rights. *TIP: Get organized and keep a spreadsheet of each person in your network, making future follow-up easier. Make a goal to contact several people a week for informational interviews or to attend networking events. Set reminders to stay on track.*

#### **Step 7: Be a Strategic Job Searcher:**

If you followed Steps 1-6, then hopefully this final step will be much easier for you. You are more likely to discover unique job opportunities through your knowledge, experience, and network of Children's Rights law professionals. We recommend, however, that you also conduct your own independent job search.

1. **Online job search:** View job postings on #HireUSDLaw and other Children's Rights resources. Search online for Children's Rights nonprofit organizations, law firms, agencies, and government entities. Review the ABA's Directory of Children's Law Programs. Many employers offer internship and employment opportunities on their career websites. If they do not list jobs, contact their human resources department and ask about possible openings. You would be surprised at how many employers simply do not list their positions online.
2. **Leverage your personal background:** Your interest in Children's Rights may come from personal/professional experiences in your past. Use them to your advantage as you network, connect with colleagues, and draft cover letters.
3. **Be prepared to move geographically:** Some cities are better job markets for Children's Rights legal jobs than others. For example, state capitals and Washington DC are great for policy-oriented positions in Children's Rights. It is best to keep an open mind about possibly having to move for that dream job.
4. **Be patient with yourself and diligent with your search:** Searching for a summer job or post-graduation position is a lot of work and requires patience. Don't lose your momentum in reaching out to new contacts and those with whom you have already created a relationship. Keep looking, cast a wider net for different, yet relevant, jobs and stay diligent in your search. If you feel you have hit a wall or need new ideas, OCPD is always available to meet with you to brainstorm new strategies.

5. **Search also for “stepping stone” opportunities:** Remember that Children’s Rights is a niche legal area, but it encompasses a wide variety of legal practice. Accordingly, keep an eye out for positions that may not be specifically in the field of Children’s Rights, but will still teach you the relevant skills and knowledge for a successful career in the field. Also, look for an employer that encourage attorneys to engage in pro bono work, as that is one way to engage in this field of practice while you wait for the right position to open up.

You should now have a good idea of how to begin exploring and researching your career path to Children’s Rights. There are plenty of opportunities, at USD Law and beyond, to pursue professional development and skills training in this interesting area of the law.

**APPENDIX A:** USD School of Law’s Children’s Rights Organizations and Opportunities

[Children’s Advocacy Institute](#)

[Education and Disability Clinic](#)

[Centers for Public Interest Law](#)

[Consumer Protection Policy Center](#)

[Children’s Rights Concentration](#)

[Advocates for Children and Education \(ACE\)](#)

**USD Law Opportunities and Professors**

**Professors** – All USD professor profiles may be found [HERE](#). Notable professors and their relevant academic areas include:

- **Robert C. Fellmeth** (Children’s Rights, Regulation): [Biography](#)
- [Jessica K. Heldman \(Children’s Rights, Juvenile Law\): Biography](#)
- **Margaret A. Dalton** (Education and Disability Law): [Biography](#)
- **Mimi Adams** (Education and Disability Clinic): [Biography](#)

**Sample of USD Law Alumni Working in Children’s Rights**

Hala Alskaf, Children’s Law Center

Melanie Delgado, Children’s Advocacy Institute

Matt Felder, Children’s Law Center

Georgia Gebhardt, San Diego County Office of County Counsel, Juvenile Division

Kristy Gill, San Diego County Office of County Counsel, Juvenile Division

Jazmine Gregory Gelfand, Jazmine Gregory, Attorney at Law

Jessica Heldman, Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights

Anna Howard, AC Howard Law

Kris Jacobs, Legal Aid Society of San Diego

Christina Riehl, Deputy Attorney General, Bureau of Children’s Justice, California Dep’t of Justice

Silvia Romero, Children’s Law Center

Summer Stech, Law Offices of Summer Stech

Eddie Tsang, Children’s Law Center

Elisa Weichel, Children’s Advocacy Institute

### **Affiliate Organizations**

ABA Center on Children and the Law  
Alliance for Children's Rights  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children Now  
Children's Advocacy Institute  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Legal Services of San Diego  
Children's Law Center of California  
Children's Rights  
Dependency Legal Services of San Diego  
Dependency Legal Group  
National Association of Counsel for Children

National Center for Youth Law  
National Juvenile Defender Center  
Pacific Juvenile Defender Center  
Partnership for America's Children  
RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice  
San Diego County Bar Association, Juvenile Youth Law Center

### **Examples of Children's Rights Jobs and Externships**

#### **CASA CORNELIA**

Address: 315 Laurel Street, San Diego, CA 92101  
Phone: (619) 231-7788  
Website: [www.casacornelia.org](http://www.casacornelia.org)

Casa Cornelia is a non-profit immigration law firm that focuses on battered immigrant women and children, unaccompanied detained children and asylum applications. Law clerks may conduct legal research, prepare pleadings, participate in client outreach and assist attorneys in case preparation including trial work.

#### **CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE**

Address: 5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110  
Phone: (619) 260-4806  
Website: [www.caichildlaw.org](http://www.caichildlaw.org)

The Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) is one of the nation's premiere academic, research, and advocacy organizations seeking to improve the lives of children and youth, with special emphasis on improving the child protection and foster care systems and enhancing resources that are available to youth aging out of foster care. In addition to the opportunities provided through its academic program, CAI offers internship opportunities for law students seeking to engage in state and federal policy advocacy, engaging in research, analysis, outreach, writing, and public education on a variety of child-related issues.

#### **CHILDREN'S LEGAL SERVICES OF SAN DIEGO**

Address: 4801 Viewridge Ave., San Diego, CA 92123  
Phone: (858) 221-0404  
Website: [www.clssandiego.org/](http://www.clssandiego.org/)

Children's Legal Services of San Diego, Inc. (CLSSD) is a nonprofit public benefit corporation, which advocates for children and youth who are the subject of abuse and neglect proceedings in the San Diego County juvenile dependency court system. CLSSD is dedicated to high quality, comprehensive legal representation that advocates for children and their voices to be heard in court room. CLSSD is court-appointed to represent both minors and non-minor dependents in Juvenile Dependency Court within and out San Diego County.

**IMMIGRATION CENTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN (ICWC)**

Address: 427 "C" Street, Suite 208, San Diego, CA 92101

Phone: (619) 515-2200

Website: [www.icwclaw.org](http://www.icwclaw.org)

The Immigration Center for Women and Children is a non-profit legal organization providing immigration services to low-income populations. ICWC works on Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases for immigrant foster children, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) cases and visas for victims of trafficking and violence T and U visas. Law clerks assist in preparing forms, declarations and other legal documents. Bilingual skills, especially Spanish, helpful but not necessary.

**INVISIBLE CHILDREN**

Address: 961 S. 16th Street, San Diego, CA 92113

Phone: (619) 660-0689

Website: [www.invisiblechildren.com](http://www.invisiblechildren.com)

Invisible Children works to inform the public about the Lord's Resistance Army's kidnapping of children in Central Africa. This company has a substantial web presence and also makes films about the issue. Law students research corporate legal issues, tax issues, and IP issues within the organization. Students also draft memoranda and legal correspondence.

**LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO**

Address: 110 S. Euclid Avenue, San Diego, CA 92114

Phone: (877) 534- 2524

Website: [www.lassd.org](http://www.lassd.org)

The Legal Aid Society of San Diego is a public interest agency that assists low-income and disadvantaged populations with legal services in the San Diego area. They provide these services through a variety of programs and clinics. The Family Law division of Legal Aid Society of San Diego assists low-income individuals who have children with divorces, legal separations, establishing paternity, child custody matters and child and spousal support matters. Legal interns interview clients, assist in completing petitions to be filed pro per and refer clients to community resources. The Guardianship Division of SDVLP involves several clinics where foster parents, grandparents and responsible adults can attend weekly clinics for assistance in obtaining legal guardianship of children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents. SDVLP conducts these clinics in cooperation with the Probate Court and the Probate Examiner's Office. Legal interns interview individuals and families seeking temporary and permanent guardianship, assist clients in completing pro per petitions for the Probate Court, and familiarize clients with the filing process.

**VOICES FOR CHILDREN- COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (CASA)**

Address: 2851 Meadowlark Drive, San Diego, CA 92123

Phone: (858) 569-2019

Website: <https://www.speakupnow.org/>

Court Appointed Special Advocates (also known as CASAs) are appointed to abused and neglected children within the Juvenile Court system. Each child or sibling set is provided with a CASA during their time in the foster care system or juvenile justice system. Law students who serve as CASAs advocate for and mentor abused and neglected children. A volunteer coordinates communication with a child's public defender, court officers, and social workers. CASAs attend court hearings, report to the court regarding the child's status, and follow the child's case through dependency or delinquency courts. CASA volunteers are required to make an 18-24 month commitment.

## **Funding Sources/Financial Assistance for Public Interest Positions**

There are numerous ways in which a student can secure funding for public interest and public sector positions; below are a few. For additional information on funding sources, please contact the Office of Career and Professional Development.

### **Summer Internships (San Diego and Nationwide)**

- **Nonprofit Work Opportunity.** Grants are awarded to students who will be working at non-governmental public interest agencies during the summer. The grant amount varies from year to year (in past years, students received \$5,000). To apply for the funding, the student must obtain a commitment for summer employment from an organization or agency and then complete the application form, which will be available in the Financial Aid Office during the spring semester. Please note that this grant funding is limited, and therefore, not all eligible students can be funded.
- **USD Off-Campus Federal Work Study.** Work study awards may be available to eligible students who will work for non-profit or government (including judicial) agencies. Applicants must file a FAFSA application, demonstrate financial need, and be Federal Work Study eligible. Funding is dependent on availability of federal funds.
- **Dan Bradley Summer Fellowship.** This grant is available to students who have secured a placement at qualified legal services agencies (visit [www.laaonline.org](http://www.laaonline.org) to learn more). Past students received a \$3,500 award.
- **Equal Justice Works (EJW) Summer Corp.** This is a program through EJW where students who spent the summer working for a public interest agency receive funding (\$1,230 in past years). For more information, go to <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org>.
- There are also numerous Summer Grant or Fellowship Programs sponsored by various organizations, bar associations, companies, and agencies. For more information on such programs, please visit [www.psjd.org](http://www.psjd.org) and the Resources Library of *#HireUSDLaw*, or contact the OCPD.

### **Attorney Positions**

- **Fellowship Information.** There are numerous fellowships available to fund work in the public interest sector. These fellowships may fund one or more years of work in public interest organization, which often leads to a full-time staff position with the organization. These fellowships are competitive and students should discuss the process with the OCPD during their 2L year or very early in their 3L year. More information can be found at [www.psjd.org](http://www.psjd.org) and in the Resources Library of *#HireUSDLaw*, or speak to the OCPD.
- **Loan Repayment and Assistance Program (LRAP).** Available to graduates who meet funding criteria. Visit <http://www.sandiego.edu/law/financial-aid/loan-repay-debt-management/lrap/>.
- **Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program.** Forgives the remaining balance on your Direct Loans after you have made 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working for qualifying employers. <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>