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The William & Mary Law School Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic and HMVHE News (Vol. 1, Issue 1)

Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic

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The Puller Clinic
Mission:
We are dedicated to helping our wounded military heroes navigate the legal system to obtain the benefits they earned, and training tomorrow’s attorneys to advocate beyond the legal issues by collaborating with other professionals to meet the full spectrum of a veteran’s needs.

Inside this Issue:
- The Client’s Perspective
- Meet the newest member of our team!
- How you can help
...and more!

The Puller Clinic Supports the Ride to Recovery
By: Diana J. Cooper

On June 2, 2012, students from the Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic, led by recent Walter L. Williams, Jr., Memorial Teaching Award Recipient, Professor Stacey-Rae Simcox, and the clinic’s administrator, Laurie Ciccone, cheered for over 150 cyclists on their continuing journey at the Ride to Recovery 2012 Memorial Challenge.

The cyclists included active duty military members, veterans, and even civilians. They were on Day 5 of a 6 day bike ride from Washington DC to Virginia Beach, Virginia. Professor Simcox believes it is important to build her students’ knowledge base- not just through the classroom and the clinical atmosphere at the school, but also by getting out into the field and learning more about the actual people that the clinic has helped, and may help in the future.

The students spoke about their experience at the ride, and how thankful they were to have the experience. Scott Dranoff ('14) said, “It was great to get out and support our veterans. It was nice to meet people in person that we are working to help.” His fellow classmates and Puller Clinic co-workers...

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I am a Special Forces Soldier. I have deployed in numerous combat theaters and have performed many functions over the span of my career. I have a traumatic brain injury.

A couple of weeks ago I was traveling for work when I woke up in the middle of the night in a hotel room with absolutely no idea where I was. After several minutes of confusion, I was finally able to orient myself to my surroundings. This was a first. I have had other firsts since my injury, like struggling to remember my daughter's name for the first year after she was born, or when I realized that I was lost going someplace that I have been to many times over.

One of the biggest post-injury challenges I have had is coming to grips with the fact that I am not the same person that I was before my injury. Recently, I watched a video of President Bush on a ride with wounded warriors and I actually felt a certain type of jealousy for those whose wounds resulted in the loss of a limb. That injury needs no explanation. We expect someone with a lost leg to limp. But I have no scars, no visible wounds, so it requires explanation to clarify why I am now the way I am.

The military is built on a rigorous system of reward and punishment. In this environment, the hidden wounds of brain trauma are still poorly understood or dealt with. The medical process to determine if I should be medically retired from service was difficult and often humiliating, compounding emotional impairment with incredible stress.

My case was difficult and complex, even for the experts. It is difficult to imagine the emotional despair that my wife and I felt when I was told that all was well, the Army had no responsibility for my injury, and I should return to work.

We were drained and really did not know how to correct this decision, but returning to the status quo was no option. Many of my doctors felt the same way, but collectively we were powerless to change the decisions that had been made in my case.

I will never forget the day that I was told, "I know someone and I am going to send them your packet and see if they can help." When I was told that the Puller Clinic at William & Mary Law School would take my case, consult experts, and manage my appeal, it was as if the heavens had opened and the angels were singing.

To say that this moment changed our lives is not an exaggeration. With the help of the Puller Clinic I was confident that competent, expert...

"I am a Special Forces Soldier. I have deployed in numerous combat theaters and have performed many functions over the span of my career. I have a traumatic brain injury."

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by Jaime Welch-Donahue

At the Law School’s graduation ceremony on May 13, 2012 Professor Stacey-Rae Simcox received the Walter L. Williams, Jr., Memorial Teaching Award, an award given by each graduating class to a member of the faculty in recognition of outstanding teaching. Simcox has taught a variety of courses at the Law School, including Legal Skills, and currently serves as Managing Attorney of the Lewis B. Puller, Jr., Veterans Benefits Clinic.

Ryen C. Rasmus ’12 and Kristen M. Byers ’12 spoke about Simcox’s passion for teaching and her dedication to students. Rasmus said he and others of Simcox’s former Legal Skills students appreciated her expertise in teaching her students “how to think, write, and act like professionals.” “We all admired her,” he added. “She was the lawyer/gumshoe that we all wanted to be when we grew up: Atticus Finch, Jessica Fletcher, and Hang-‘em-High McCoy all rolled into one — and we loved her for it.”

Byers, who served as Simcox’s teaching assistant in the veterans’ clinic, noted that many of Simcox’s students cited their experience in the clinic as the “single most rewarding experience” of their legal education. “She is the most dedicated professor I have ever met,” said Byers. “When she is not in the classroom, she is meeting with students in her office, driving us to hearings, or taking us to meet with clients at a local homeless shelter.”

The award is named for Walter L. Williams, Jr., a member of the law faculty from 1972 to 1991. A scholar of international law, Williams taught with “enthusiasm, warmth and good humor,” as noted by the resolution establishing the award in his honor.
Citizen Lawyer in Training: Student Spotlight

By: Jacqueline Sandler, Class of 2014

I worked at the Puller Clinic during the summer of 2012. Going into law school, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to pursue. I was mostly interested in various areas of commercial business law, but when I heard about the Puller Clinic and its mission, I was eager to become a part of it. I grew up outside an Air Force base and have many friends in the military. I saw this as my way to help those who protect our country.

This summer was my first opportunity to work with clients. The skills I learned are invaluable. I learned how to manage client expectations, craft legal arguments, and carry a case from start to finish. I also learned that I really enjoy personal interaction with clients.

I developed a close working relationship with my clients over the summer, and I became personally invested in their cases. One of my clients received a 40% increase in his disability rating, and I felt a real sense of personal satisfaction.

My experience in the Puller Clinic will make me a better lawyer in the future. Not only will I benefit from the advocacy skills I learned, but also from the self-knowledge that I gained. It has been a wonderfully rewarding experience helping veterans through work that I enjoy.

"I learned how to manage client expectations, craft legal arguments, and carry a case from start to finish."

Ride 2 Recovery Continued

...Michael Althouse ('14) agreed stating, “It was really cool to go out and see such a diverse group of veterans gathered together--it really put a human face on the cause we’re fighting for at the clinic.” The students were also inspired by the event. Simone Williams ('14) and Jacqueline Sandler ('14) emphasized how fulfilling the experience was, and how inspiring the veterans were because they were able to accomplish so much after all they experienced during their service.

The Ride 2 Recovery raises money through various bike rides throughout America in order to support cycling-based Mental and Physical Rehabilitation Programs for our country’s wounded veterans.
Recent Grad John Cimino Named First Clinic Fellow

By: Stacey-Rae Simcox

We are pleased to welcome recent William & Mary graduate John Cimino (JD '12) to the Puller Clinic. John has been appointed the first Clinical Fellow and Director of the "Helping Military Veterans Through Higher Education" (HMVHE) consortium.

John is a veteran of the US Army and has worked with the Puller Clinic in numerous capacities over the past few years, including as a graduate research fellow, a summer employee of the Clinic, and as a student in the Veterans Benefits course aiding in the representation of veterans before the VA and in the medical retirement process.

John's work as a mental health specialist before law school gives him a solid understanding of those clients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or Traumatic Brain Injuries. We look forward to the relationships that John will continue to build in the HMVHE consortium.

John is a native of Rhode Island and lives...

HOW CAN YOU HELP OUR MISSION?

The Clinic is always looking for ways to get our supporters involved. We are always looking for someone to:

1. Donate! Your donation can help a veteran receive mental health and other medical assessments that are critical to their cases.

2. Volunteer! We are always looking for people to help.

If you would like more information on donating or volunteering or if you have any questions, please call us at (757) 221-7443 or email us at veterans@wm.edu.
A Client's Perspective, Cont'd.

... advocates were guiding the system to a just result. We were not looking for a handout, we were looking for a hand up and that is what we received.

My wife and I will always have a soft spot in our heart for those smart young aspiring attorneys who donated so much of their free time to make a difference in our lives. They were competent and caring. For the first time, in the face of a system which had been too often humiliating, denigrating and bureaucratically obtuse, we had a warm and respectful advocate to guide us through the maze. I know firsthand that the Puller Clinic has touched many lives and it does make a difference. They truly honor the veterans they serve.

EVENTS OF NOTE:

The Puller Clinic’s Professor Stacey-Rae Simcox co-taught the Virginia Bar Association’s course on Veterans Benefits Law this summer.

Professor Simcox co-presented with Dr. Leticia Flores, Director of the Virginia Commonwealth University’s Center for Psychological Services and Development (CPSD), on the Puller Clinic’s unique collaboration with the CPSD at the American Psychological Association’s annual meeting in Orlando in August.

The Puller Clinic says farewell to our summer students and welcomes our incoming Fall 2012 students. Thanks for all the hard work on behalf of your clients.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The clinic is planning on having two outreach programs this Fall. Check out our Facebook page for more information! https://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefitsClinic

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