

Aid

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services in order to make smooth post-release transitions.

Block points to the \$80,000 spent per child each year that keeps youngsters in the juvenile justice system up-to-date on their class work and psychological well-being.

"Those resources get squandered if we can't reintegrate those children into their communities," Block said.

"Too many kids were coming home, having been in school, having gotten mental health services and other rehabilitative support — they've been getting home and getting denied education and other services."

Thanks to the efforts of JustChildren, the state Board of Education approved regulations that require enrollment coordinators at schools, have students re-enroll within two days of their release from juvenile prisons and make available counselors to help youngsters with the transition.

"Charisa will be using these new legal protections and new legal tools to make sure these kids get connected to their communities," Block said.

Housing help

Smith will also address the children's access to housing and vocational support, Block said, adding that he hopes her work in Richmond will serve as a model for other programs around the state.

"Too little attention has been paid to the issue of children coming back to the community," Block said. "Hopefully, if we can get it right when they are kids, we can prevent them from being adult offenders."

Smith, 27, from Lawrenceville, N.J., has a history of work with children.

In high school, she founded a youth empowerment organization, and in college, she volunteered with teen moms.

Later, Smith ran a camp for inner-city children in Newark, N.J., and worked with homeless boys in the Dominican Republic.

Smith said she was drawn to Legal Aid because of its reputation for helping people through

out Virginia and because of Block.

"He's really a model defender of juvenile rights," Smith said. "It's an honor to work with him."

Solid background

The Justice Center has a track record of attracting committed lawyers and advocates — such as Block and Tim Freilich, director of the Virginia Justice Center for Farm and Immigrant Workers — through fellowships.

Freilich will work with Trodden, a 2005 graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law and recipient of a Skadden Fellowship, established in 1988 to recognize the need to fund graduating law students interested in providing legal help to the poor.

"Erin will be reaching out to the hard-working immigrants doing a variety of the toughest and lowest paying jobs in the community," Freilich said.

Trodden is currently clerking for Judge Norman K. Moon in U.S. District Court in Lynchburg.

"I think I've always been interested in doing this sort of work," said the 29-year-old former Peace Corps volunteer.

The Justice Center program has traditionally focused on assisting migrants working in agriculture such as harvesting apples or Christmas trees. With the addition of Trodden in the Charlottesville office, the program will connect with "settled out" immigrants who are raising families in this area and are employed in non-agricultural industries, such as restaurant work.

A testament to its commitment and success, the Justice Center has recovered more than \$2 million in judgments and settlements for unpaid wages.

"Many Virginia employers had begun using immigrant workers to fill their low-wage labor needs," Freilich said. "Some have exploited them because of the language barrier. Erin's fellowship will help the workers eliminate those barriers

and ensure that they have access to the justice system if they are cheated out of their wages."

A typical client is someone who has worked two or three jobs, Trodden said.

"The people that I'll be serving ... are people who, instead of getting ahead, are being taken advantage of. I think that's intolerable."

Like Smith, Trodden is bilingual, an obvious asset in immigrant advocacy.

Speaking their language

From the Justice Center's Northern Virginia office, Choi, 26, will be working with day laborers in Annandale.

Fluent in English, Spanish and Korean, Choi will help promote cultural understanding

and better working relations between the Korean and Latino day laborers.

Choi is on track to graduate from New York University Law School this spring. His two-year fellowship is sponsored by Equal Justice

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Andy Block
Director, JustChildren

Works, a program that organizes, trains and supports public service-minded law students.

"[Legal Aid] has been doing nationally recognized work in enforcing labor laws and educating people about their legal rights and obligations," Choi said. "Personally, as someone interested in labor law and workers' rights, I cannot think of a better place to start my legal career."

According to Gulotta, the Justice Center hopes to develop additional resources to keep Smith, Trodden and Choi on staff beyond their fellowships. With the addition of the new fellows, the center will have 30 employees this fall, up from 22 in 2005.

"It's a great opportunity for us," Gulotta said. "It comes with a duty. When you have this kind of talent coming in, we're going to have to step up to the plate. We'll have to give them the training and mentoring so that they can excel."

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