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SPECIAL SECTION

YOUNG LAWYERS *in* PUBLIC SERVICE

The Recorder focuses much of its energy on the business of law and big-ticket litigation, both civil and criminal. Today we offer up four short stories about young lawyers who are making a difference outside the business world and government law offices.

“There are some very bright young lawyers who are doing exactly what they said they were going to do when they started law school: making the world a better place,” says Kevin Fong, a Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman partner who has mentored many young attorneys.

The Bay Area is a hotbed of such lawyers, of course. But the four profiled here — two who work at public interest organizations, one

doing pro bono at a corporate firm, and one who teaches — might be considered a representative sample.

In addition, we have compiled a list of 37 young attorneys on law firm-sponsored public interest fellowships. The list is based on a survey of major law firms and of Equal Justice Works, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that organizes such fellowships.

We hope you will enjoy this inaugural edition of Young Lawyers in Public Service.

— Scott Graham

Keeping troubled kids out of juvenile justice



Fiza Quraishi knew exactly what she wanted to do when she started law school, and today she's doing it: helping at-risk youth.

Specifically, Quraishi advocates for minors — often foster children — whose mental health problems could get or have gotten them in trouble with the law.

“There's an overwhelming number of children in the juvenile justice system who have mental health needs,” she says.

At the National Center for Youth Law in Oakland, Quraishi, 29, works to ensure that children with major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder and similar issues get the mental health services they're entitled to — rather than a revolving door to Juvenile Hall.

This can include obtaining SSI benefits individual children are entitled to, or special education plans that include intensive home-based mental health services. On a broader scale, Quraishi is part of the NCYL team helping litigate a federal class action in Los Angeles, *Katie A. v. Bonta*, that seeks to force the state of California to improve mental health services for foster children.

Quraishi says it's not surprising that kids in foster care often have mental health issues. In addition to “the disruption from actually being removed from the family, the experience of being in foster care itself is traumatic,” she says. “Children often experience multiple placements and there is so much unpredictability with the length of their placements.”

The overall goal of Quraishi's work is to develop wide networks of family, community and expert support that can respond appropriately when disturbed children start acting out, rather than simply calling the police or sending them to the hospital.

“The key is keeping kids out of the [justice] system in the first place,” she says.

Quraishi has always wanted to work with youth. As a high school student she worked as a camp counselor, and after graduating from Barnard College she worked with foster children at the Vera Institute of Justice in New York and then directed Brooklyn's Red Hook Youth Court. She attended University of Michigan Law School and is now working for NCYL on an Equal Justice Works fellowship sponsored by the Morrison & Foerster Foundation.

Quraishi said her interest in children's issues may date to childhood trips to Pakistan, where her parents are from, and exposure to children living there in poverty. She had similar feelings in the U.S., as a high school student working as a camp counselor. “It really struck me that in my backyard there were kids growing up in a completely different environment than I was,” Quraishi says.

“Kids just don't have a voice,” she says. “There's a real tendency to become paternalistic when you're talking about kids. I'm helping them advocate for themselves.”

— Scott Graham