When the young man took a quick look around he had nowhere to go. Misfortune and abandonment characterized his life thus far, and even his own mother wanted nothing to do with him.

He was not a disruptive teenager, but his negative attitude toward school increased and limits on probation wore thin. The fight to get him into an assisted living program was a long shot, but someone’s hard work and determination got him there and his similar efforts kept him there.

A young man who easily could have fallen through the cracks is now succeeding. All because someone chose to give him the one thing he never had – a chance. This someone who works to make a difference in the lives of children is third-year Drake Law School student Jessica Miskimins.

Miskimins is one of the students currently involved with the Children’s Rights Clinic at Drake. The Clinic represents abused, neglected and delinquent children. The students serve as the “first chair” in the courtroom with Karnale Manuel, visiting associate professor of law and director of the Children’s Rights Clinical program.

“The clinic experience provides so much more than you can learn in class,” Miskimins said. “You are in the control seat, and your name is on every court document.”

 Besides receiving valuable, real-world experience, Miskimins is interested in something else – giving children a place to turn for help. The motivation to protect children’s rights came to Miskimins in college while students successfully lobby for passage of bill

Drake University Law School’s Middleton Children’s Rights Center lobbying team of third-year students Angela Doss, Sam El-Ayazra, Marcy Lundberg, Jessica Miskimins and Steve White successfully lobbied for the passage of House File 2528. This bill affects the jurisdiction of the juvenile and district courts regarding child support payments by allowing district court to consider a juvenile court order that changes child custody placement when the district court determines whether to change child support orders. The ultimate goal is to eliminate an extra hearing that is part of the process currently, which will save the state money in the long run.

The bill HF 2528 provides an important first step in correcting a jurisdictional dichotomy between the district and juvenile courts in Iowa. The lobbying team garnered bipartisan support in the Iowa House, and also received support from the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Child Support Recovery Unit, and judicial branch lobbyists. The bill will allow the court system, child advocates such as the Middleton Children’s Rights Center, and legislators to come together during the interim to develop more constructive steps to remedy this problem, which has been a concern for several years. The bill represents the first step in a series that will address the needs of children and families by making the system more responsive to their needs.

The students were honored during a signing ceremony with Gov. Tom Vilsack on May 11 at the Iowa State Capitol building.

In the Name of the Children

By Chris McDonnell

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she worked for the Juvenile Public Defenders Office in Des Moines. “Children’s rights is not something you hear about until something really bad happens,” Miskimins said. “There are thousands of kids out there that are barely hanging on. I wanted to do something that was meaningful to me, but especially to others.”

Miskimins emphasized that the issues facing children and adolescents are serious. She said once a guardian loses the rights to their children, the children are never returned.

“It is hard to be the one to tell a child they can’t go home,” Miskimins said. “I have to know what I am doing.”

And that is where Professor Manuel comes in. He said students use him as a “back-up” in case something arises in the courtroom with which they are unfamiliar. An additional two to three hours a week are spent with Manuel at the Legal Clinic integrating everything from court issues and strategies to hearing guest lectures.

“We are preparing our students to hit the ground running,” Manuel said. “Our goal is to help students specifically practice, refine and professionalize juvenile justice.”

Students also further their involvement by writing legislation for children’s rights. This year, the legislation included three bills: one that expedited the development of a permanent living plan for younger children; one that required the Department of Human Services to do concurrent planning; and a third that changed the Iowa version of the Indian Child Welfare Act to comport with the Federal Act.

The future for Miskimins holds nothing but the best. She is looking forward to carrying her Drake Law School education into lobbying and government affairs. Though the road may be rough, Miskimins greets the challenge with open arms.

“For every 10 bad days, there is that one good day that will carry you on for a lifetime,” said Miskimins.

Chris McDonnell is a junior public relations major from Oak Forest, Ill.

“Perhaps the most exciting news from this year is the launching of a new legislative program that we have established in partnership with the Law School’s Legislative Practice Center. This new program brought together law students, students from the School of Education, community advocates, lawyers, judges and social workers to create the Clinic’s child welfare legislative agenda. From there, five students from the Legislative Practice Center—along with our lobbyist Leann Brunnette—wrote bills to support the agenda and lobbied those bills. We had no expectation in our first year that we would actually pass any legislation, but the students worked wonders and, with much team effort passed House File 2528—an Act expanding the jurisdiction of the juvenile court in areas of child support. Students are already excited about continuing the work we started on this issue, and working on other areas of our legislative agenda, including the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), disenfranchisement of felons, and a host of others.

You’ll find in this short newsletter a small taste of the work in which the students, faculty and staff have been involved this year. I hope you peruse these pages, and that they provide you some insight into the exciting work that is happening within the Clinic and the Law School. We are proud of everything that has been accomplished.
spotlight on
Faculty & Staff

Professor Karnale Manuel, director of the Children’s Rights Clinical Program, graduated with a B.S. from Drake, as well as a J.D. from Drake Law School. He began teaching law at Drake in 1977. His areas of expertise include juvenile justice, bankruptcy, clinical education and general practice. His significant accomplishments range from an organized interdisciplinary program in child welfare for lawyers, educators and social workers to model court improvement committee member.

Q. Why did you become a lawyer?
A. I wanted to become a lawyer because, not only did it seem to be a rewarding and potentially lucrative vocation, it also appeared to me that many of the people making the greatest contributions in our society were educated as lawyers. It seemed a legal education would also open up opportunities to accomplish a myriad of objectives.

Q. What do you find most encouraging about the American legal system?
A. The American legal system, while not perfect, strives to inculcate a core value of fairness for all people regardless of class, economic status or social condition. While not perfectly attained, this core objective is generally reflected in the manner in which the legal system endeavors to address and impact individual legal interests.

Q. Are you working on any publications or projects?
A. Projects that I am currently working on include evaluation of existing and proposed programs that are intended to address the condition of youth transitioning from foster care or as part of the child welfare system to adult living. The emphasis is on brokering greater cooperation between the various systems and programs so that a transitioning youth can be better prepared; and follow-up to assure that the systems are accomplishing the intended goals. I am also a member of the Polk County Model Court Team and the Juvenile Law Section of the Iowa State Bar where we are working on various projects to enhance and improve the delivery of services to children and/or their parents who are in the juvenile court and/or child-welfare systems.

In December 2003, Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino awarded the Joan and Lyle Middleton Children’s Rights Center at Drake Legal Clinic $10,000 in grant money. Pictured are Professor Karnale Manuel, Drake Law School; Sue Lambertz, Prairie Meadows Grants Advisory Committee; Jim Stepp, Drake Legal Clinic Operations Manager; Gary Palmer, Prairie Meadows Senior Vice President/COO, Professor Suzanne Levitt, Executive Director of Drake Law School Clinical Programs; Max Morrison, Prairie Meadows Grants Advisory Committee; Judy Person, Prairie Meadows Grants Advisory Committee; Tom Drake, Prairie Meadows Grants Advisory Committee.
drake legal clinic **SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

**JUNE**

3 **ALN Advanced Estate Planning and Practice Update** 11 a.m.—3 p.m.
10 **ALN Clean Air Act** 11 a.m.—3 p.m.
15 **Clinical Conference: “Concurrent Planning in the Context of ASFA,”** Co-Sponsored by the Joan and Lyle Middleton Center for Children’s Rights and The Iowa Court Improvement Project 9 a.m.—4:30 p.m.
24 **ALN Intellectual Property Issues in Structuring Deals** 10 a.m.—5 p.m.
25 **ALN Ethics** 11 a.m.—2 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER**

9 **ALN Emerging issues in Employment Law and Litigation** 11 a.m.—3 p.m.
23 **ALN Estate Planning and Practice Update** 11 a.m.—3 p.m.
30 **ALN Drafting Corporate Agreements** 10 a.m.—5 p.m.

**OCTOBER**

28 **ALN Business Law Update** 10 a.m.—5 p.m.

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**FACULTY & STAFF**

**Suzanne J. Levitt**, Professor of Law and Executive Director of Clinical Programs

**Sally Frank**, Professor of Law

**J. Karnale Manuel**, Visiting Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Children’s Rights Clinic

**Robert Oberbillig**, Adjunct Professor

**Robert R. Rigg**, Visiting Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Criminal Defense Program

**James Stepp**, Legal Clinic Operations Manager

**Sara Bering**, Assistant for the Middleton Children’s Rights Center

**Katie Freeland**, Legal Secretary

**Shaunarae Bury**, Legal Secretary

**Catherine Fitzgerald**, Legal Clinic Receptionist/Legal Secretary