



# 2017 NEWSLETTER

---

## BLF Welcomes Post-Graduate Fellow Alexis Erkert Depp



BLF is excited to announce our 2017 fellow, Alexis Erkert Depp, who recently started her project **"Housing Justice in the World's Prison Capital"** at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. Alexis is focusing on mitigating the collateral consequences of mass incarceration in the greater New Orleans area by increasing access to stable, affordable housing for low-income, formerly incarcerated people and their families. Alexis will represent families in housing court and administrative hearings to fight evictions and loss of housing subsidies based on a family member's criminal record. She will also develop know-your-rights and pro se materials and advocate with housing providers to change burdensome screening policies. Alexis will

partner in her work at SLLS with VOTE (Voice of the Experienced), a community organization led by and serving formerly incarcerated people, where Alexis helped develop advocacy strategies to address barriers in housing caused by criminal background policies.

Alexis is a recent graduate of Northeastern University School of Law. Before law school, Alexis worked for six years as a policy analyst and human rights advocate in Haiti. After the 2010 earthquake decimated her neighborhood, she coordinated Under Tents, an international housing rights campaign to support displacement camp residents advocating for affordable housing.

## Update from 2016 fellow Mihal Ansik:

Mihal had a dynamic and successful year at A New Way of Life Reentry Project. Mihal provided legal representation, court support, and advocacy tools to more than a dozen families overcoming criminal record barriers in the dependency court system. Mihal also contributed to a bill that streamlines the criminal record exemption process for families, partnered with UCLA School of Law to explore litigation theories concerning the due process rights of incarcerated parents and their loved ones, and serves on several advisory boards and work groups focused on addressing the unique barriers incarcerated parents face in their efforts to sustain their family connections. Her fellowship work was featured in a Truthout article titled, "New Legislation Would Soften Foster Care Rules That Tear Extended Families Apart." Says Mihal: "A highlight that I'm most proud of is that I have the opportunity to engage in movement lawyering, which is the foundation of my practice. In partnership with ANWOL's community organizers, I am co-facilitating a six-month leadership development and legal rights workshop with formerly incarcerated mothers that will culminate in a sustained organizing campaign. These women are fighting at the intersection of foster care and mass incarceration, and I'm so excited to be collaborating with this powerful group."

---

---

## Two New Phoenix Fellows Arrive at Berkeley Law

*BLF is proud to announce our new Phoenix Fellows, who entered Berkeley Law this fall as part of the Class of 2020. BLF's Phoenix Fellowship provides tuition support to outstanding students of color who are committed to social justice work.*



**THE PHOENIX FELLOWSHIP**



**Saxon Cropper-Sykes** graduated magna cum laude from the University of California, Santa Barbara, with degrees in Sociology and Feminist Studies. While at UCSB, Saxon developed the Black Student Engagement Program within the Department of Academic Initiatives. He also coordinated seminars, workshops, and discussion spaces aimed at providing resources to address issues in educational equity and learning. Saxon served as co-chair of the Retention & Student Services sub-committee on the Black Resource Committee, a campus taskforce that identifies opportunities and institutional deficits in enrollment, retention, and graduation for Black students.

Saxon was named the Michael D. Young Scholar, awarded annually to one student who has skillfully integrated their scholarly knowledge and values into action. Saxon also received the Cross-Cultural Coalition Building Award in recognition of his extraordinary service and leadership in building a strong LGBTQIA community at UCSB, and the Anita Mackey Service Award, which is awarded to one graduating senior who embodies advanced scholarship and service. Saxon is a California Bar Diversity Scholar and UCLA Law Fellow (2016).

**Lana El-Farra** is a first-generation American Muslim who grew up as the eldest of three in a single-mother household. She graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a degree in Political Science and a minor in African and Middle Eastern Studies. While at UCLA, Lana was elected as the External Vice President, served on multiple boards, and prioritized policies that promoted more inclusive, diverse, and affordable education.

After graduating in 2014, Lana worked at Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA. She organized efforts to ensure that minority and limited English speaking voters had access to voting; acted as Pro Bono Coordinator; and worked as a Community Legal Advocate to partner with other legal rights organizations in providing Know Your Rights workshops at mosques and Islamic centers across Southern California.

As a 1L at Berkeley Law, Lana looks forward to developing skills that will enable her to more effectively and actively advocate for underrepresented communities. During her free time, Lana enjoys cooking and spending time with family.

