



October 2015

NAVY VETERAN STUDENTS FIGHT FOR NAVY VETERAN'S INNOCENCE

A case hit close to home when two Northern Illinois University (NIU) law students, both U.S. Navy veterans, discovered one of IIP's clients was a decorated sailor headed toward a distinctive Navy career when he was convicted of first-degree murder. Over 20 years later, he still is in prison for a crime he did not commit.

Brian Cunningham and Daniel Thetford, two of IIP's 17 third-year students at Illinois' three public law schools who provide legal assistance on cases under the direction of IIP attorneys, say this client was struggling to care for his children within a family broken by the strains of military life.

"Family difficulties is the beginning of a Navy story you hear over and over," Brian says. "But often you don't hear the ending. This is one ending."

Daniel is excited to meet his client. "It'll be great to trade some old sea stories when I meet him," he says. Daniel, who was drawn to IIP by his work in public defense, suspects this kind of personal connection will help sustain his client through the years it may take to conduct the DNA testing IIP expects will prove innocence.

UIS STUDENTS GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE AT IIP

Janet Howell

Janet is a senior from Chicago, Ill., earning a dual degree in criminal justice and psychology. She joined IIP to gain experience in a legal setting. Janet is evaluating three cases by reviewing appeals, post-conviction petitions, court transcripts and case facts. Following graduation, Janet plans to pursue a law enforcement career with the Chicago Police Department in a homicide or narcotics unit.

Gabriela Ortiz-Placencia

Gabriela is a junior from Chicago, Ill., majoring in criminal justice. She aspires to obtain an investigative position with a federal agency such as the FBI. Gabriela was drawn to the Project by the opportunity to conduct investigative work. She is focusing on cases involving Latino inmates and helping the Project address the special problems Latinos encounter in the criminal justice process and in seeking exoneration, such as translation issues.

Alex Zon

Alex is a junior from Plainfield, Ill. He is double majoring in legal studies and political science with a minor in criminal justice. In his spare time, he enjoys working out and playing squash. Alex joined the Project as a volunteer in preparation for law school. His favorite part of his work is experiencing the thrill in knowing he could help advance a case and provide justice for someone who is potentially innocent.