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### Work

Shortly after Ryan LaFevers started his Public Interest Law Initiative fellowship at the National Immigrant Justice Center in 2009, he heard the story of Talalilo Kiochi Benedith Gamboa, a member of the Garifuna ethnic minority who fled Guatemala at age 16 and became detained by immigration officials in Texas. He learned that Gamboa was born to drug-and-alcohol-addicted parents, lived on the street since age 6 and suffered endless racial persecution by a criminal street gang.

"I had become familiar with the claims in Central American cases," said LaFevers, a graduate of UCLA School of Law. "But the fact that it had a racial component to it – I'm not used to seeing race-based claims from Central America since it is such a homogenous society there."

LaFevers began representing Gamboa pro bono and carried his case with him to Latham & Watkins in 2010. Firm Partner Robin Hulshizer joined him on the case and was also drawn to Gamboa's unique and inspiring situation.

"This child had been on the streets for much of his life, he had obvious wounds on his body from abuse, and yet, he had this really great attitude and hope," she said.

To get asylum, LaFevers and Hulshizer needed to help Gamboa prove that he was attacked because of his race in order to stay in the U.S. on protected grounds. LaFevers explained that many gang-based asylum cases fail after seeking protection on broad terms, such as being homeless or young. In this case, however, Gamboa could show he was targeted for being a minority in his native country.

After Gamboa's case was continued on several occasions, he was granted asylum in the U.S. on Aug. 20. Now 21, he is working toward his GED diploma and plans to serve in the military.

"I think it's a true testament to human nature, that so much bad can happen to a person and yet, he has such a positive outlook on life," Hulshizer said. "If we hadn't taken on an immigration case of this nature and spent hundreds of hours doing it, his outlook probably wouldn't be so good. It's great to be a part of that."

Pictured at right are Latham & Watkins Partner Robin Hulshizer and Associate Ryan LaFevers.



Photo by Natalie Battaglia.