

The 3Rs Program

Including Immigrants and Refugees

BY CASSANDRA MANNA

Growing up, my parents instilled many important things into my child-sized head: “Say please and thank you!”, “Don’t talk to strangers!”, “Maybe *next* year, the Browns will be good...”, and “Ohio State is better than that school up north.” Most of us, at least those of us from Northeast Ohio, grew up hearing very similar sentiments from our parents or other adults in our lives. There were two specific things slightly unique to my parents that greatly affected me once I finally graduated from law school and began the move back to Cleveland. The first was the belief that “to whom much is given, much shall be required.” The second, originating from my father’s firm belief, which he never hesitated to articulate, and from extensive personal research of my own, was the certainty that immigrants are the backbone of this great country.

I began to wonder how I could wed these two concepts. I was done with school, I had landed a job at Roetzel & Andress, and I was in my dream city. I was in a great place personally and professionally. I had been given so much and I knew I had to give just as much.

I also knew that the immigrant community was where I needed to give. I had just been on a tour of the Cleveland School District’s International Newcomers Academy at Thomas Jefferson (INA). The tour was inspiring and I wanted to find a way I could use my schooling to help these immigrant and refugee kids adjust to their new lives in a country that had given me so much and had the potential to give them just as much. I had spent my entire life reading about the immigrant experience. Both of my sisters are adopted, one from South Korea and the other from China. Since I was six years old and we adopted my first sister from South Korea, I was fascinated with the idea of someone, an infant or an adult, traveling halfway across the world to start a new life. The fascination never left me.

That was when I heard about the CMBA’s 3Rs Program. The 3Rs is a landmark program connecting lawyers, judges, law students, and paralegals with high school students in Cleveland and East Cleveland schools. Through a series of in-person lessons, 3Rs volunteers help foster an understanding and appreciation of the U.S. Constitution, as well as share important information about how students can achieve their goals beyond high school.

I reached out to Terrence Barry, the American Government teacher at INA, to see if The 3Rs had been in his class with the intention of specifically requesting his classroom when I volunteered. To my surprise, Mr. Barry told me that the program had never been to INA before. The CMBA and Mr. Barry had communicated but were never able to get a team of volunteers over to the school.

The problem was two-fold: The 3Rs program does not have enough volunteers every year to be in all American Government high school classrooms in Cleveland schools and INA’s American Government classes included students with varying degrees of English proficiency. Some of these students had been in the United States for mere days, while others had been here for years. Teaching a class about how the judicial branch works is extremely difficult when most of the students have never heard the words “judicial,” “judge,” or “judiciary.”

Mr. Barry told me that he truly believed the program would be exceptionally valuable to these students. The 3Rs was originally designed to help high school students understand their community, government, and civic rights, an understanding that was lacking per results of required testing for graduation. If American citizens, who were born and raised in this country, were struggling with these concepts, imagine how difficult it was for immigrant and refugee children.

For example, one of my students is from Iraq. He told me he and his father sought asylum in the United States because his father worked for a U.S. company in Iraq prior to the war. His father continued to work for the

company after relations deteriorated between the two countries. The Iraqi government added his father’s name to a traitor list: a traitor does not have a right to a fair trial; a traitor is killed. And the government added this student’s name to the list as well simply because he was his father’s son.

To this specific student, his community and government were literally out to kill him. The police are an extension of the community and government. He did not know what his civic rights were because he did not have them. Without education and without detailed explanations about the United States community, government, and civic rights, how is he supposed to know that the government is designed to provide for its citizens? Or that calling 9-1-1 when something goes wrong won’t result in something far worse happening once the police arrive? Or that he has the right to speak out about things he likes and dislikes without fear of the government hunting him down because they disagree with his statements?

I then offered to teach the class myself and Mr. Barry enthusiastically agreed. I understood language would be a barrier and that I would have to adjust the program to work with these specific students but I was willing to work with them because of how important I thought this program was to their education. And the CMBA agreed. The 3Rs was now a part of the INA American Government curriculum.

I enlisted the help of my dear friend, Sarah Smith, a lawyer in the auditing division of PNC Bank, and we began teaching. A few adjustments had to be made right away. First, we could not break out into sub-groups during the classes. English was the second, third, fourth, or, for one in particular, eighth language to many of these students. It was hard enough for them to hear, digest, and understand words while I was the only one speaking let alone if we had multiple speakers talking within one room.

Second, we had to slow down. The 3Rs curriculum provides, for example, 10 hypotheticals to go over with the class. At INA, we usually get through three hypotheticals. This is because we have to act out every part in

a very dramatic manner. We also have to define terms. Many of the students did not know what the term “prosecutor” meant. Additionally, we have translators in the class. We sometimes have to wait for them to translate a particularly hefty part of the lesson before proceeding.

Besides those simple adjustments, the students wanted to learn just as much as any other high school student. Once they got comfortable they would ask and answer questions or volunteer to read aloud or act out a specific part. They brought an interesting perspective to the class that shocked us. For example, one student asked what were their rights if a fake police officer asked for their money? Sarah and I looked at each other quizzically and asked, “A fake police officer?” The student, with murmured agreement from her classmates, explained how thieves back in her native country used to dress up as police officers and go around demanding money and threatening to arrest people if they did not

comply. We had to explain (1) how that should not, and rarely does, happen here; and (2) what to do if that happens. They provided another hypothetical based on the reality of their native country, and another, and another, until the class was over and we had gone through only one of our previously prepared hypotheticals.

We adjusted on our feet as needed and have had a great response from the students and Mr. Barry. We have taken notes on what has and has not worked in each class in order to better scale the program for next year’s students. We are hoping that we can take The 3Rs program and modify it for use in INA and other immigrant and refugee schools in the area.

These are great students who have dreams to be artists and FBI agents and manicurists and teachers and singers and doctors. Educating them to help them fulfill these dreams is an amazing experience. Even if I have simply helped these students understand a common English word (e.g., statute), I feel like I have

helped them adjust to life in America. Those small victories are very exciting to them, which makes them very exciting to me.

If you have the time to get involved with The 3Rs program, I highly recommend it. As lawyers, we have so much knowledge and so much skill to help those in our community. It can be easy to lose that awareness in the day-to-day grind of our careers. Making a conscious effort to step out of and away from our day-to-day can help benefit our community and help make us better lawyers and better people.



Cassandra Manna is an associate at Roetzel & Andress. Her practice is focused on comprehensive real estate development work and traditional M&A work for family-owned businesses. She has been a CMBA member since 2016. She can be reached at (216) 623-0150 or cmanna@ralaw.com.

Welcome
New Members
Get Involved at CleMetroBar.org.

George O. Aljoe
Daniel P. Seink Co., Ltd.

Morgan E. Austin

Alexandra R. Brinkman

Duncan Taylor Brown

Brodie M. Butland
Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP

Michael P. Byrne
Mazanec, Raskin & Ryder Co., L.P.A.

Jordan James Call
Weston Hurd LLP

Antonia Carbone

Mark Allen Cicero
Cicero Law Firm, LLC

Luke Stephen Condon

Joseph Anthony Custer
Case Western Reserve Univ. School of Law

Catherine Ann Davis
Skoda Minotti

Coreen Debelak

Hallryn S. DeLong

Otto S. Ersek, III

Kathleen Suzanne Fish
Robert Brown LLC

Emily Hainsworth

Laura Harrison

Aaron Arthur Hessler
Wegman, Hessler & Vanderburg

Breanne Lu Hitchen

Jaime Klausner
BakerHostetler

Jeffrey Jason Lauderdale
The Lubrizol Corporation

Kristen Michelle Lease
Darling Duffy Co., LPA

Mamoun Mahayni

Kiara Matos
Ross Brittain & Schonberg Co., LPA

Hugh McDaniel

Virgil T. Morant

Nicholas D. Mucci

Lara S. Nochomovitz
Thorman Petrov Group Co., LPA

Bridget M. Ritossa
Careplan Geriatric Care Managers

Sandra G. Rolitsky
BakerHostetler

Peter A. Russell
Law Office of Peter A. Russell

Svetlana J. Schreiber
Svetlana Schreiber & Associates Co., LPA

Leo M. Spellacy, Jr.
Thrasher Dinsmore & Dolan LPA

Peter John Sullivan, Jr.
Cleveland-Marshall College of Law

Michael William Timms

Daniel Tirfagnehu

Jennifer Villyard

Brendan Whitted

Mengxue Xie