

LIFE AND LAW



By Sergey Nemolyaev | Class of 2021

There is little doubt that the decision to become a lawyer is a pivoting point in one's life. As a result, life gets divided into two parts: before and after law school. There is also little doubt that most people who want to become lawyers also would like to do good things and serve humanity on a pro bono basis as recommended by the Code of Professional Conduct. Sometimes we look at schoolwork as a burden to "real life" and wish to be over soon, so we can finally help our clients and start changing the world for the better. What we often do not realize is the effect our decision to attend law school on others.

Lincoln Law School is a well-established and respected teaching institution in Sacramento. It provides quality education and many of its graduates are responsible for the high legal standards and professionalism maintained in the Sacramento legal community. However, a healthy community is not necessarily one with the best prosecutors, skilled defense attorneys, and impartial judges but, rather, the one with goal-oriented youth and the best criminal statistics.

Lincoln Law School offers an opportunity to its students to engage in a "world changing process" as part of its elective curriculum under the name "Street Law." Participants in Street Law teach a course to juniors and seniors in a variety of local high schools with a high percentage of underserved nonwhite populations.

Law students can earn two credits towards their JD diploma. According to some prior participants the effort was not worth the time spent just to get two credits. Yet, at the same time, there are people who participate in Street Law again and again, even without claiming the reward of school units. As future lawyers, we are trained to pay attention to the facts and apply appropriate analysis. I asked Ron Rana, a Street Law veteran and a third year student at Lincoln, what compels him to continue despite an already heavy academic load and participation in a district attorney office internship. "These kids need us!" was his simple answer. He believes that by going out into the community in the capacity of a legal instructor to share his life with at risk youth, he is given reasons to respect himself and proves his commitment to try to help those in need. He does it not because there will be school credit, but rather because by doing so, someone's life may be changed forever, "This is about changing lives" he summarized.

Inga Holmquist, another Street Law participant, shared a letter from one of the teenagers affected by the Program, ...

“Your advice to my dad to have me involved in the Street Law Program may have saved my life. Not only did it teach me what I did not want to be, it made me believe in myself ... My dad took me to court and I got to meet you in person. You inspired me to become a professional woman... I am proud to inform you that as a sophomore I am aspiring to become a law professor just like you. Maybe one day, I too, will be able to save someone’s life like you saved mine.”
(Katy 15 years old).

It is very unlikely that students participating in Street Law anticipate an opportunity to change the life of a high school student but that is precisely what happened with Inga and Katy.