

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Xavier Planta:

Former Family Law Attorney Finds His Passion in Pro Bono

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

In 2009, Xavier Planta was ready to move back to his hometown of Seattle. After practicing family law in Las Vegas for several years, he realized it was not a good fit for him, and he needed a change. Little did he know that it was a pro bono case taken from the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada (LACSN) that would keep him in Nevada. He feels that case demonstrated some of his most impactful work as a lawyer.

In that case, he represented three siblings in the foster care system, and he loved being their advocate. While studying for the Washington state bar exam, LACSN Executive Director Barbara Buckley offered him a position as a staff attorney for the Children's Attorneys Project at LACSN. He packed up his study material at the library, and he has never looked back.

Planta is a first-generation Filipino American born and raised in Seattle. His mother was a nurse, and his father was a laborer. Growing up, Planta was a shy and quiet kid who was an average student at best. That all changed at O'Dea High School, an all-boys Catholic school. Planta knew that if he wanted to go to the University of Washington, he would have to start

making honor roll and get more involved in extracurricular activities—and that's exactly what he did. He joined the school newspaper, the yearbook staff, the National Junior Honor Society, and the Junior Statesman of America.

Increasing his efforts in school paid off, and he was accepted to the University of Washington. Naturally introverted, Planta initially majored in business. In an effort at personal growth, Planta stepped out of his comfort zone and changed his major to communications.

And grow he did. He spent his junior and senior years participating in Pinoy Teach, a program that teaches Filipino history to middle-school students in the Seattle area.

"Pinoy Teach was a turning point for me. I was now using my voice to educate others on Filipino history and culture," Planta said.

To gain work experience, Planta interned as an investigator at the King County Public Defender's Office, where he worked on misdemeanor and felony cases. His time there solidified his desire to attend law school.

After finishing college, he worked at a before-and-after school program while applying to law school. He loved working with children, and considered how he could continue helping children during his career in the law.

Two short years later, he was admitted to the University of Oregon School of Law. At first, Planta suffered the culture shock of going from a large metropolitan city to a small college town in Eugene, Oregon. A person could travel from one end of the town to the other in a short car drive, and everything was closed by 9 p.m. After the shock wore off, Planta began to enjoy the small college-town experience. It made it easier to get to know people. In addition to a full course load, he made



time for multiple internships. Two of his favorite law school experiences included participating in the Domestic Violence Clinic and clerking at the Linn County District Attorney's Office.

After law school, Planta decided to move to Las Vegas on a whim; he had only visited the city once during a short vacation. He packed up his belongings in a U-Haul and drove to Las Vegas. After arriving, he delved right into bar exam preparation. While this time is often the most formidable experience in a young lawyer's life, Planta's time spent prepping for the bar paid off. In addition to passing the bar, he met his future wife while studying for the bar exam.

Planta was the ninth attorney to join the Children's Attorneys Project (CAP) in 2009. Today, CAP has 33 staff attorneys, and Planta helps lead the team as the deputy directing attorney. In his 14 years with CAP, he has nothing but praise and admiration for the organization, his colleagues, and their collective work.

"I appreciate their trust in me and work every day to show I am grateful for it," he said. "It's the most satisfying feeling to not only have found my voice but be able to use it to help kids in care. I love the people I work with. They're all so dedicated and it's inspiring. They're the most smart and passionate attorneys. I love it. I can't imagine being anywhere else."

When Planta is not speaking up for the children in our community, he enjoys spending time outdoors with his wife and two young boys. He is always driving around town to baseball, basketball, and Boy Scouts.



Xavier Planta and his family, Rowan (left), Graham and Larissa Planta took part in the Frank Lamping Elementary School Fun Run.



Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada staff Angela Cook (left), Danyell Cadell, Amy Hondodel, Marina Dalia-Hunt, and Xavier Planta enjoy ice cream cones in Baltimore.



Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada attorneys who attended the National Association of Counsel for Children's 45th Conference in August 2022 were: Patrick Hirsch (top row, from left), Samantha Zabo, Candace Watkins, Amy Honodel, Angela Cook, Marina Dalia-Hunt, Alexis Stewart (bottom row, from left), Danyell Cadell, Tonya McCormick, Yolanda Miller, and Xavier Planta.



Children's Attorney Project attorneys Xavier Planta and Amy Honodel were part of a panel presentation at the National Association of Counsel for Children's Counsel for Kids Post-Conference Convening.

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