

# Immigration Law Clients Inspire Alumna

**Firm: Law Offices of  
Suzanne Brown, St. Louis**

<http://www.immigration-firm.com>

**ATTORNEYS:** Suzanne Brown, JD '96, along with Rachel Groneck, Monica N. Smith, Nevada M. Smith, Wesley Schooler, JD '08, and Abigail Stenbeck, JD '08.

**AREA OF PRACTICE:** Full-service Immigration Law

**BRIEF BACKGROUND:** Suzanne Brown has been representing individuals in immigration matters since 1987 when she became director and then executive director of the pro bono Immigration Project of the Illinois Conference of Churches. She is a board member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and chair of its Missouri/Kansas Chapter. She also has served on numerous state-wide boards in Illinois related to immigration, refugee, and migrant worker issues. Additionally, Brown works closely with students in the law school's Clinical Education Program. Among numerous recognitions, she was recently honored with the Richard B. Teitleman Distinguished Service Award from Legal Services of Eastern Missouri for her continuing commitment to providing pro bono legal services to those who cannot otherwise afford representation.

**Q:** *Why did you choose to practice in a small firm?*

**A:** Although our firm is growing, it is important to me that we continue our practice as a small firm. And I would submit that even a firm that is large numerically may still be able to function as a small firm in many critical ways.

Small *single area of practice* firms, especially, offer attorneys and staff the opportunity to work and share resources as a full team, and the flexibility of being able to shift work from one attorney to another almost seamlessly. This gives an efficiency to the practice, which enables individuals in need to afford our services. Accessibility to legal representation is a priority for me, and I believe that goal is more easily accomplished in small firms.

**Q:** *Why did you choose your particular area of practice?*

**A:** As an activist in the Central American solidarity movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s, I eventually became interested in the plight of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees arriving in the United States, fleeing persecution in their homelands. When confronted with the injustice of the U.S. asylum system toward those particular refugees, I decided then to use my abilities to try to make a change. My efforts were directed on the social/political front toward changing U.S. foreign policy in the region, and on the legal front toward helping individual refugees obtain fair treatment in our courts. My interest in refugees quickly expanded toward a total and utter fascination with immigration, including my own family's many paths to the United States.

**Q:** *What advice would you have for someone interested in pursuing this area of law?*

**A:** Immigration lawyers are the happiest lawyers around. We love our work, even when we are forced to do it in the most difficult and anti-immigrant environments imaginable. Immigration

lawyers also love to mentor and share. Because we are never appearing against one another and don't need to protect our resources and skills, the level of collegiality is very high.

I do believe, however, that because of the enormity and complexity of the field of immigration law, to be a good immigration lawyer one must dedicate one's primary focus to the field. Unlike other areas of administrative law that are governed primarily by statute and regulation, immigration law is dynamic and driven by ever-changing policies, and practitioners must be familiar with the subtleties of the policy agenda.



**Q:** *What has been the most rewarding aspect of your practice?*

**A:** Every day, my colleagues and I have the opportunity to make a positive difference in some person's life. We help to protect those whose lives and safety are at risk, we heal the wounds of family separation and displacement, and we help businesses and communities get the workers that they need to fuel the American economy. When we win a case, everybody wins, and we get to satisfy our individual and collective obligations to heal the world. I could not ask for a more satisfying job. ■■■