

JENNIFER HANSEN,

PARTNER

LARA CLEARY,

PARTNER

HANSEN & CLEARY, LLC

What started as a childhood speech articulation issue for attorney Lara Cleary has grown into a successful law career today. Cleary, who partnered with attorney Jennifer Hansen in 2017 to create Hansen & Cleary, LLC, credits her time receiving speech services and helping students in her elementary school's special education program as an inspiration for her career. "Based on this experience, I became a special education teacher, taught in the Chicago Public Schools for a few years, and then went to law school with the express purpose of representing individuals with disabilities," Cleary says. After law school, she partnered with her mentor, Brooke Whitted, to form Whitted & Cleary in 2001 where they practiced for 15 years before Whitted's death. That is where she met Jennifer Hansen—a practiced attorney who attended the Universiteit Maastricht in the Netherlands to obtain a LL.M. in European and Comparative Law after law school in Wyoming. When Hansen returned to Chicago and took on a role of assistant public defender in Lake County, she had every intention of practicing at a big firm in International and Human Rights Law. But, as fate would have it, Hansen fell in love with the criminal defense side of law. "I began to realize that many of my clients were adults with disabilities or mental health issues, and I found that my empathy and understanding of individuals with disabilities really helped my representation," Hansen says. Today, the two, along with another highly skilled attorney and paralegal, make up the team at Hansen & Cleary—a boutique law practice that focuses on special education law, school law, mental health law, and other disability law. Hansen and Cleary pride themselves on providing sound legal advice with empathy and attentiveness—qualities that have attracted many client referrals over the past five years.

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