Katie Filous ('15), Equality Now, Nairobi, Kenya

In summer 2013, I worked for Equality Now in Nairobi, Kenya. When I arrived in Kenya I was unprepared for the red dust that covers everything. Matatus—small, tin can-like vans with names like ‘Rastafari,’ ‘Adidas,’ or ‘Steam’ that blasted Enrique Iglesias—were my transportation to work. I had been warned about Nairobi traffic, but naively assumed Chicago traffic had prepared me for the worst. On my first day I arrived 1.5 hours late, sweating and covered in that red dust. Luckily, I quickly learned that the word “traffic” was enough to excuse haggling for a 50 shilling ride instead of the planned advocacy events, became the office’s ad hoc photographer and self-proclaimed mango juice aficionado, wrote newsletters and social media updates, planned a lawyers’ training for lawyers from more than 10 different African countries, and made myself available to do whatever else my supervisors needed.

Most of what I learned came from living and working abroad alone, something I had not had the chance to experience before this summer. Coming to DePaul, I knew I wanted to work with women in developing countries, and my summer in Kenya has solidified that goal. East Africa has a challenging, fast-paced legal community and it offered me a chance to understand some of what legal NGOs in Kenya are working to achieve.

Through advocacy, litigation and lawyers’ trainings, Equality Now addresses difficult women’s issues in Kenyan society that are often excused as cultural norms.

For most of my internship, I worked on a comparative report on legal approaches to sexual violence in three different countries. The report focused on India, the United States and South Africa, and identified best practices for lawyers attempting to bring rape and sexual violence cases in their own countries. Additionally, I planned advocacy events, became the office’s ad hoc photographer and self-proclaimed mango juice aficionado, wrote newsletters and social media updates, planned a lawyers’ training for lawyers from more than 10 different African countries, and made myself available to do whatever else my supervisors needed.

Most of what I learned came from living and working abroad alone, something I had not had the chance to experience before this summer. Coming to DePaul, I knew I wanted to work with women in developing countries, and my summer in Kenya has solidified that goal. East Africa has a challenging, fast-paced legal community and it offered me a chance to understand some of what legal NGOs in Kenya are working to achieve.

Throughout this school year, I hope to continue my work through an internship with the ABA Africa division and also by completing a paper on pan-Africanism and its importance to the feminist movement in Africa. I plan to use the knowledge and skills I gained in Kenya to further my career goals.

Law Students Devote Summers to Public Interest, Thanks to Stipend Programs

By Megan Davis ('14)

DePaul’s Vincentian identity calls upon us to engage in service to others, with a “special concern for the deprived members of society.” This mission of furthering human dignity and social justice has long distinguished DePaul University from other educational institutions. Many students at the College of Law help to further DePaul’s service-based mission by dedicating their summers to unpaid social justice work and public interest advocacy. The Center for Public Interest Law (CPL) and the Public Interest Law Association (PILA) awarded stipends to 32 students to help subsidize their summer living expenses in 2013. This issue of The Advocate shares a few of those students’ public interest work experiences.

Summer internships provide an invaluable resource to understaffed and underfunded nonprofit legal organizations. Internship positions are almost guaranteed to be unpaid, and law students are confronted with the dilemma of pursuing public interest summer work while still finding a way to make ends meet. Fortunately for many DePaul students, summer funding has become increasingly available thanks to the fundraising efforts of CPL and the proceeds of the annual DePaul Law Auction supported by generous donations from alumni and other distinguished members of the Chicago-area legal community.

CPL supports summer stipends primarily through a donation from the Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund, but also through two endowments for the Lawrence F. Puotera Fellowship and the Helen M. Cirese Fellowship, a foundation gift from the Albert & Anne Mansfield Foundation, and additional fundraising efforts. Most recently, the Office of Mission and Values started sponsoring two partial summer stipends. CPL Faculty Director Leonard Cavise and Executive Director Shay Loughlin believe that all students should have guaranteed funding for summer public interest work, and are always seeking additional avenues for financial support to make this belief a reality.

The PILA student leaders are driven by the same funding goals. The 17th Annual DePaul Law Auction, sponsored by PILA and organized entirely by a team of student volunteers, raised more than $28,000 this past January. Dean Gregory Mark is extremely supportive of the auction and was able to secure a generous anonymous donor who matched the amount raised the night of the auction. A grand total of $56,000 funded public interest stipends for summer 2013. The event attracted law students, faculty, alumni and community members for an evening at the Chicago Cultural Museum. CPLIL honors scholar Robin Wagner ('14) served as auction chair and supervised the volunteers throughout the months leading up to the auction.

DePaul’s commitment to foster a growing stipend program helps ensure that its students are helping respond to the national legal services crisis. With secured funding, students can commit their summers to working in such areas as criminal defense, housing, public benefits, immigration, child and family law, disability and elder law, and human rights advocacy. Students not only gain valuable lawyering skills and experience, but also help meet the ever-present need of legal services for low-income clients who otherwise would have no access to the justice system.

Ana Valenzuela ('15), LAF

“What are you doing next summer?” That question begins to plague students as early as the first week of classes. Because immigration law is my passion, I knew I wanted to have an opportunity to work at a nonprofit that provides legal services to the immigrant community. I learned of an opportunity to start applying for a summer internship through the Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI). PILI’s internship program places students at more than 50 public interest organizations. It also provides various educational and networking opportunities for participants. Through PILI, I was fortunate enough to secure an internship with LAF, formerly the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago.

Once I secured the internship I was faced with another obstacle: securing summer funding. As a DePaul student, I have access to a variety of summer funding opportunities. One such opportunity is provided by our very own Center for Public Interest Law. Through its Summer Public Service Stipend Committee, CPLI provides summer stipends to students who are interested in working at public interest organizations, such as LAF. I was selected by the committee for the Mansfield Fellowship, provided by The Albert & Anne Mansfield Foundation, a foundation dedicated to social service. Because of this fellowship, I was able to follow my passion in immigration law and work full time as a summer intern with LAF in its immigrants’ and workers’ rights practice group. I conducted intake interviews for potential clients, assisted in drafting and translating affidavits, prepared applications for applicants seeking immigration relief, and researched various immigration law issues. That was just a small portion of what I did. The most impactful part of the experience was connecting with clients who had to endure some of the most tragic and heart-wrenching experiences I have ever heard. As the daughter of immigrants, I felt a sincere connection to our clients. Most clients were happy just to be able to explain their circumstances to someone who understood.

Working at LAF taught me skills that I will use throughout my legal career, such as how to elicit specific information during client interviews, how to approach very delicate issues during immigration interviews, and how to develop a support system of clients during frustrating and difficult times. Many of these skills are seldom learned in the classroom. In addition to what I personally gained, I hope our contribution as interns was worthwhile to LAF. Out of five summer interns in the immigration project, three were from DePaul. Collectively, all five interns contributed more than 2,000 hours of legal work to the project. As the summer intern came to an end, I felt the public service we could provide throughout the academic year and opportunities next summer to further the public interest.

As an intern, I worked on several CD EL initiatives to gain a better understanding of the many legal mechanisms that represent the rights of individuals with disabilities. I was a recipient of the Cudahy Fellowship, which provided funding to subsidize my work at CD EL. CD EL tackles various legal issues concerning housing and financial matters, consumer fraud, and financial exploitation and abuse. CD EL also assists with estate and end-of-life planning, including advanced directives such as wills, living wills, and durable power of attorney. CD EL attorneys give daily presentations on environmental law and financial issues at a sustainability nonprofit in Chicago.

Prior to starting law school in fall 2011, I spent a couple of years working on transportation and environmental justice issues at a sustainability nonprofit in the Chicago area. I decided to go to law school because I believed that environmental justice is a critical issue that needs to be addressed through the legal system, and that a career in environmental law would allow me to directly help populations that were adversely affected by environmental justice issues. Given my background and interests, I set my sights on environmental law agencies for my summer 2013 internship.

When I was selected as a summer student extern at the U.S. EPA, I knew the experience would give me the opportunity to work primarily with the legal team and specialists, which I found appealing. I was selected to receive a summer stipend from PILA, based on my involvement with the DePaul Law Auction, the CPLI Symposium, and my ongoing volunteer work with Cabrini Green Legal Aid. The money I received from PILA allowed me to come to the EPA and work with the legal team and specialists, which I found appealing.

In addition, I worked at the guardianship help desk, conducted hundreds of prescreening and intake interviews, and drafted documents for specific cases. In each of these assignments, I was able to engage the legal team and specialists directly, which allowed me to gain a better understanding of the legal mechanisms through which I could help senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. Through the Senior Legal Assistance Program (STP), which provides free legal aid to seniors and low-income seniors, attorneys help shoppers with current tax status, and notified them of various tax incentives they have available to them. Through STP, I assisted in drafting and translating affidavits, prepared applications for clients seeking tax relief, and researched various tax law issues. That was just a small portion of what I did. The most impactful part of the experience was connecting with clients who had to endure some of the most tragic and heart-wrenching experiences I have ever heard. As the daughter of immigrants, I felt a sincere connection to our clients. Most clients were happy just to be able to explain their circumstances to someone who understood their experience. Many of these skills are seldom learned in the classroom. In addition to what I personally gained, I hope our contribution as interns was worthwhile to the EPA.

This summer, thanks to funding from Lawrence X. Pusateri Fellowship, I had the wonderful opportunity to work at the Lawyers’ Committee for Better Housing (LCBH). Since 1980, LCBH has been providing free legal services for Chicago’s tenants and homeowners, providing advocacy, representation, and access to safe, decent, affordable and nondiscriminatory housing in Chicago through legal representation, public advocacy, supportive social services and education.

LCBH provides a wide range of services, from advocacy and intervention on behalf of tenants to litigation, such as a recent housing court case so that a third party can collect the rent and necessary improvements will be made. Work with tenants includes educating them on their rights under the Landlord Tenant Ordinance, condemnation conversion laws, state laws, fair housing, foreclosure and other applicable laws. LCBH operates many specialized programs to serve Chicago’s various housing needs, including the Eviction Defense Program, Tenants in Foreclosure Intervention Program and Affordable Housing Preservation Program.

In addition to what I personally gained, I hope our contribution as interns was worthwhile to LAF. Out of five summer interns in the immigration project, three were from DePaul. Collectively, all five interns contributed more than 2,000 hours of legal work to the project. As the summer intern came to an end, I felt the public service we could provide throughout the academic year and opportunities next summer to further the public interest.