

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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."¹ 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 (CPIL) 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 interns 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 CPIL 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.

CPIL supports summer stipends primarily through a donation from the Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund, but also through two endowments for the Lawrence X. Pusateri 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. CPIL Faculty Director Leonard Cavise and Executive Director Shaye 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. CPIL honors scholar Robin Wagner ('14) served as auction chair and supervised the volunteers throughout the months leading up to the auction.



From left: DePaul law students Cindy Bedrosian ('14), Megan Davis ('14) and Ana Valenzuela ('15), with fellow Northwestern intern Abigail Leinsdorf, enjoy their last day of work at LAF.

As the College of Law's largest annual fundraising event for public interest summer stipends, the success of the auction is vital to the College of Law's ability to award stipends to students working in unpaid public interest jobs. Without the auction and fundraising efforts of CPIL, far fewer DePaul students could hope to secure funding for summer work.

At present, DePaul cannot fund all students working in public interest law over the summer. The reality for the students who secure competitive public interest internships is that they also must face the challenge of securing summer funding. The College of Law sponsors information sessions and advertises external funding opportunities. Many students accept externship credit to receive summer loans in order to finance public interest law summer work.

The importance of the College of Law's internal stipend programs and its continued support of public interest opportunities for students cannot be overemphasized. DePaul's commitment to foster a growing stipend program helps ensure that it's 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.

¹DePaul Office of Mission and Values, available at <http://mission.depaul.edu/VincentianIdentity/Pages/default.aspx>

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 the aforementioned red dust. Luckily, I quickly learned that mentioning the word "traffic" was enough to excuse your tardiness in any situation. I also learned how to haggle for a 50 shilling ride instead of the *mzungu* ("tourist") price of 70 shillings.

Equality Now is an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) advocating for women's rights. Specifically, Equality Now in Kenya focuses on Kenyan and East African women's issues: sexual violence, female genital mutilation, trafficking and ratification of the African Union women's protocol, commonly called the "Maputo Protocol." The organization's mission is to achieve legal and systemic change that addresses violence and discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

Through advocacy, litigation and lawyers' trainings, Equality Now addresses difficult women's issues in Kenyan society that are often excused as cultural norms. Fighting against these ideas in a country newly independent from colonialism is exhausting work. I read and analyzed cases concerning a variety of problems for women in East Africa, including chieftainship rights, land

ownership rights in polygamous marriages, wartime genocide and rape, the banishment of women to "witch camps," and the failure of police to prosecute rape cases in Nairobi.

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. *Asante Sana* ("thank you") to the Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund for supporting me in this first endeavor. I hope to experience many more legal systems in developing countries as I work toward my legal career.

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 wonderful team of career service representatives that are always willing to assist students in searching for various summer funding opportunities. One such opportunity is provided by our very own Center for Public Interest Law. Through its Summer Public Service Stipend Committee, CPIL 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 have 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 would listen.

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 the interviewing process, and how to be supportive 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 came to a close, we considered the next public service we could provide throughout the academic year and opportunities next summer to further the public interest.

Aziza Khatoun ('14), Center for Disability and Elder Law



With baby boomers finally hitting retirement age, it comes as no surprise that senior citizens constitute one of the largest segments of the American population. It follows that they also comprise a greater percentage of the population vulnerable to abuse and fraud.

This past summer, I interned at the Center for Disability and Elder Law (CDEL), a nonprofit organization that provides free legal aid to low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities. I was a recipient of the Cudahy Fellowship, which provided funding to subsidize my work at CDEL.

CDEL tackles various legal issues concerning housing and financial matters, including collections, consumer fraud, and financial exploitation and abuse. CDEL also assists with estate and end-of-life planning, including advanced directives such as powers of attorney, living will declarations and simple wills. Additionally, CDEL runs a guardianship help desk at the Probate Division of the Richard J. Daley Center.

As an intern, I worked on several CDEL initiatives to gain a better understanding of the many legal mechanisms through which I could help senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. Through the Senior Legal Assistance Clinic, I drafted powers of attorney for property and health care matters and living will declarations for seniors residing in assisted living facilities. It was rewarding to provide this

particular legal service to individuals who otherwise would have been unable to afford a private attorney.

I also assisted with the Senior Tax Opportunity Program (STOP), which uses information from the Cook County Assessor's Office to identify and contact senior citizens with delinquent taxes from 2011 that are currently open for sale to third-party debt collectors. Through STOP, I provided seniors with updated information regarding their current tax status, and notified them of various tax exemptions for which they can apply. CDEL also held numerous tax workshops to educate seniors about their property taxes. Perhaps the most disheartening aspect of participating in STOP was listening to many seniors express their frustration, some even breaking down in tears over the phone, at their inability to pay their property tax with retirement benefits alone simply because they were unaware of their eligibility for many exemptions.

In addition, I worked at the guardianship help desk, conducted hundreds of prescreening and intake interviews, and drafted document and case summaries for CDEL attorneys. My CDEL internship greatly benefitted my understanding and knowledge of various subjects within the field of elder law. The mentorship provided by attorneys Tom Wendt and Caroline Manley ('11) was an added bonus to the excellent training I received on working with low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Sam Keen ('14), Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing



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. Its mission is to promote the availability of and access to safe, decent, affordable and nondiscriminatory housing in Chicago through legal representation, individual and 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 seeking a receivership in housing court 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 Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance, condominium 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.

I worked primarily with the Eviction Defense Program, which provides high-volume defense to low-income renters facing eviction. In essence, it was my job to preserve housing for those whom, without our help, would likely end up homeless. I also helped operate the Tenants in Foreclosure Intervention Program help desk.

This help desk provides legal advice to pro se defendants facing eviction because the buildings in which they are living have been foreclosed.

My experience with LCBH could not have been better. Not only was I in court almost every day getting to argue motions, conduct trials and negotiate settlements, but I was also winning my motions and trials, and settling cases with terms favorable to my clients. LCBH gave me the training and supervision I needed in order to be successful in the eviction court setting. One of my most memorable moments came after I won a Motion for Summary Judgment on a very technical issue that is by no means well-settled law. After somehow convincing the judge to rule in my favor, he called my supervising attorney and me to the bench to compliment my performance in his courtroom throughout the summer. That was one of my proudest moments as a law student.

Thanks to the fellowship that I received through CPIL, I was able to work a job this summer that allowed me to have a clear and immediate positive impact on this very vulnerable population. Without organizations like LCBH, decent, affordable housing for low-income renters in Chicago would be nonexistent. Its work is the last line of defense for people on the precipice of homelessness by way of eviction, oftentimes due to unfortunate dealings with unscrupulous landlords. Such work is important because, without this help, there is no doubt that LCBH's clients would have been railroaded by their unfamiliarity with the rights provided for them by our legal system.

Kate Galbraith ('14), Environmental Protection Agency



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 change is best effectuated 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 see firsthand the inner workings of the country's most powerful environmental entity. However, the EPA is not able to offer any compensation to summer externs, which was a huge drawback. Luckily, I was selected to receive a summer stipend from PILA, based on my involvement with the DePaul Law Auction, the CPIL Symposium, and my ongoing volunteer work with Cabrini Green Legal Aid. The money I received from PILA made it possible for me to take the summer position that would provide the best experience for me, and allow me to continue working in the public interest field.

On my very first day at the EPA, I attended a negotiations meeting with my boss. It was a great introduction to several of the issues that I would be working on, and

allowed me to see the interaction between EPA attorneys and industry groups. Besides attending meetings and calls, my supervisor also assigned me a diverse range of research assignments, helping me understand the way that environmental statutes apply. While working on these assignments, my supervisor put me in touch with EPA engineers, scientists, public relations professionals and specialist attorneys, who assisted me with any questions that I had.

Because the EPA typically selects around 12 summer externs, it has a well-established educational program for interns. For the first three weeks of the internship, expert attorneys gave daily presentations on environmental law topics. It was an excellent way to get an overview of the statutes that I would be working with, and to meet many of the attorneys in the office. These sessions also allowed the interns to get to know one another. We came from a diverse range of schools, including Lewis and Clark, Yale, Cornell, Illinois, Minnesota and more.

The work that I saw and participated in during my externship far exceeded my expectations. I learned that the EPA fights for "the public" as a whole by implementing rules and policies, and advocates for individuals through cleaning up Superfund sites, enforcing Clean Air Act regulations, and considering environmental justice concerns in every agency action. Because of the stipend that I received from PILA, I was able to experience environmental law firsthand, and move one step closer to a career in this field.