

2004

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Recommended Citation

LPIL, *Loyola Public Interest Law Society Grant Recipients Share Their Summer Experiences*, 9 Pub. Interest L. Rptr. 26 (2004).
Available at: <http://lawcommons.luc.edu/pilr/vol9/iss3/15>

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Loyola Public Interest Law Society Grant Recipients Share Their Summer Experiences

Loyola's Public Interest Law Society is very active. The 2004 Annual PILS Auction raised thousands of dollars that was awarded to nine student applicants who obtained otherwise-unpaid summer public interest positions. Below, several of the awardees share their experiences. If your school has a successful public interest grant program, or you or someone you know has had an interesting public interest job, e-mail us at PILR_Law@luc.edu so we can share your story.

Jeffrey Blank - Children's Rights, New York City

This summer I had the privilege of working at Children's Rights in New York City. Children's Rights is a national organization that works to ensure that government child welfare systems follow the law and keep children safe from abuse and neglect. A spin-off from the American Civil Liberties Union, Children's Rights holds state and municipal governments responsible when they fail to safeguard the Constitutional rights of children in their care through class action lawsuits. When children are removed from their parents or guardians because they have been victims of abuse and neglect, the State has a duty to provide them with safe places to live, as well as adequate medical, mental health and educational services. However, the majority of states in this nation fail to meet these goals. Foster parents are not adequately screened, and social workers have

heavy caseloads and cannot adequately protect and provide for children in their care. Children often linger in foster care for three or more years without returning home or finding a new place to re-establish their lives.

My main task this summer was to assist in one of Children's Rights pending litigation cases. For one assignment, I set out to prove how judges craft liability findings in 42 U.S.C. § 1983 substantive due process cases. I examined what types of quantitative and qualitative data judges look at to find that systemic reform is warranted. In § 1983 litigation, a

combination of aggregate proof and individual-named plaintiff stories paint pictures of the abuses that children in the foster care system suffer. The ultimate goal is to work with the government to recognize abuses in the system and then under court-ordered consent decrees effectuate change. Children's Rights cases rarely go to trial because expert reports highlight the State's constitutional violations and create public pressure for the State to settle. There has not been a trial for more than a

decade. The last trial, *Lashawn A. v. Dixon*, placed the Washington, D.C., child welfare system in receivership. However, this streak of avoiding trial might soon change. The case I worked on in Fulton and DeKalb Counties in Georgia is scheduled for trial in January 2005. It will be interesting to

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watch how things play out.

I have worked with lawyers who directly represent children in abuse and neglect proceedings. Working at Children's Rights was a chance to fight for children in a different spectrum. The work done by Children's Rights allowed me to fight for thousands of children at a time, while bettering the lives of all children who will one day end up in the foster care system. Direct work with clients and systemic reform litigation impact one another while bettering the lives of children, so you cannot go wrong either way you choose.

Tony Pottinger Cook County State's Attorney

I owe so much to the PILS grants I have received. They made it possible for me to work my first summer for the Department of Justice, and this past summer for the Cook County State's Attorney. I was able to develop my research and writing skills at the DOJ, while I conducted several full-blown felony trials and motions this past summer with Cook County. Both of my summer employers could not offer salaries to law clerks, so it was the PILS grant that allowed

me to pay rent, eat, dry clean my suits, and even catch a Cubs game here and

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there! I hope to work as a prosecutor after graduation, and my summer experiences have been indispensable not only in getting me job interviews in that area, but in giving me practical, real-world experience that you can't get in a classroom or pushing paper behind the desk at many legal jobs.

Samantha Guastella Mayor's Office, Chicago

I have been serving as a Fellow in the Mayor's office since last January, and the grant allowed me to continue working in an office I love.

As a two-time recipient of the PILS grant, it provided me with the financial means to work in a field I love - public service. The first summer I received a PILS grant, I was working for Attorney General Lisa Madigan during the school year and was able to stay onboard during the summer. Although the Attorney General's office had no budget to pay me, the grant afforded me the opportunity to continue to work in their Environmental Litigation Division. This summer, the PILS Grant supported me while I worked in the Office of Mayor Daley. I have been serving as a Fellow in the Mayor's office since last January, and the grant allowed me to continue working in an office I love.

Elizabeth H. Greer - Colorado Legal Services and National Association of Counsel for Children

In anticipation of my post-graduation departure from Chicago, I decided to spend the summer in Denver in order to gain legal experience in the state where I intend to practice law. The PILS grant I received enabled me to volunteer on a part-time basis at two non-profit organizations: Colorado Legal Services and The National Association of Counsel for Children. I gained valuable skills with both internships, even though my experiences in each agency were very distinct. I greatly benefited from the opportunity the PILS grant made possible and I am sure my future clients will also benefit.

NACC is a non-profit child advocacy and professional membership association dedicated to providing high quality legal representation for children. Its mission is to improve the lives of children and families through legal advocacy. NACC provides training and technical assistance to attorneys and other professionals, serves as a public information and professional referral center, and engages in public policy and legislative advocacy. While there, I managed and updated the NACC resource library,

responded to resource requests, handled referrals, conducted research projects, wrote case summaries for *The Guardian*, co-wrote a chapter of a certification manual, and assisted with general operation of the national office.

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CLS is a non-profit corporation that aims to provide meaningful access to high quality, civil legal services in the pursuit of justice for low-income persons and members of vulnerable populations throughout Colorado. I worked closely under the supervision of two practicing attorneys in the Denver office Family and Child Unit, where I assisted legal staff and attorneys, responded to pre-trial discovery motions, conducted research projects, drafted final orders and judicial rulings, and represented clients in Permanent Protection Order hearings with supervision.

**Katherine Licup
Chicago Legal Clinic, Inc.**

Although I live less than a block west of the Chicago city line in the neighboring suburb of Oak Park, I had not spent much time in the Austin neighborhood before I began my internship at the Austin Circle Law Center.

Previously one of Chicago's most upscale neighborhoods and still graced with the skeletons of elegant Victorian homes, Austin fell prey to "white flight" in the 1960s and has never recovered. ACLC is located near the western edge of Austin, on Central and Washington - less than a mile from my house geographically, but light years away socioeconomically and culturally. As a branch office of the Chicago Legal Clinic, Inc., ACLC provides civil legal services at a greatly reduced price to not only neighborhood residents, but to people from all over the city and suburbs looking for reasonably priced lawyers. ACLC's four staff attorneys, two support staff, and army of interns handled predominantly family law, real estate and probate matters, but attorneys at the other branches also have specialties such as environmental and immigration law.

In my first hour on the job, my supervisory attorney whisked me to the Daley Center and introduced me to the Probate Division's presiding judge, in front of whom he had a status call. On Day 3, I was sitting at the counselor's table during a custody trial, helping one of our staff attorneys prepare direct and cross-examination, and then participating in settlement negotiations. I accompanied the attorneys to court on a frequent basis, went on a guardian ad litem site visit, drafted settlement agreements, helped a foster mother adopt a toddler, edited clemency petitions, and interacted with clients. At every step of the way I felt like a valuable member of the team.

The most valuable part of my experience was getting to know the attorneys who work at ACLC. They are enormously dedicated to their clients, who are sometimes difficult to work with and often do not pay their bills. Those of us not at court gathered to eat lunch in the small break room almost every day - we always brown-bagged it because there were no places to go out to eat near the office - and we would talk about cases, judges, strategies, and our lives. I learned a lot about serving the public interest - and the kind of people serving in public interest positions - just from those lunches.

**Bryna G. Williams - Citizen
Advocacy Center, Elmhurst, Ill.**

Receiving a 2004 PILS grant allowed me to work at the Citizen Advocacy Center in Elmhurst, Ill. The CAC is a non-profit, non-partisan community organization. While at the Center, I had the opportunity to contribute to the Center's mission of building democracy through public education, issue advocacy, and precedent-setting litigation through various projects.

From day one ... I felt like an indispensable member of the Center team charged with real assignments that have outcomes that will impact the Center as well as local citizens.

My first major project focused on Electronic Access to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). I conducted research and analyzed access to the Illinois FOIA on county and municipality Web sites and compiled a list of recommendations of amendments for the Illinois FOIA that will improve access to public documents online and via e-mail.

I also reviewed the newly enacted Illinois Ethics Act and compiled an educational brochure about its major provisions. This law regulates prohibited political activity, imposes a gift ban, and limits the appearance of constitutional officers in Public Service announcements.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to write lesson plans for the Center's Civic Empowerment Zone project. The four lesson plans I created cover the Death Penalty, Music Censorship, Jury Selection, and the Illinois Ethics Law.

Finally, I worked directly with members of the community through a number of intakes. Members of the community (primarily DuPage and Cook County residents) regularly call the Center with questions ranging from how to get a referendum on the ballot to contesting the grant of a liquor license at a neighborhood establishment.

From day one, when I started my first major project, to the final two weeks, which were filled with practicing for public presentations and wrapping up intakes, I felt like an indispensable member of the Center team charged with real assignments that have outcomes that will impact the Center as well as local citizens. I am fortunate to have had this opportunity that was made possible by the generosity of PILS supporters.

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Public Interest Law Reporter

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Subscription rates

\$15 per year

\$9 per year, students

\$6 per single issue/back issue

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Publication Schedule

PILR publishes three issues annually

March

June

December

Send subscription orders to:

Public Interest Law Reporter

Loyola University Chicago School of Law

One East Pearson, Room 417

Chicago, IL 60611

Please make all checks payable to *Loyola University Chicago*.

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Loyola Public Interest Law Reporter

ISSN #1087-2159

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One East Pearson, Room 417
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