

I worked at Catholic Charities Immigration Services. Catholic Charities is a national organization with the Portland office providing a variety of services to refugees, AIDS patients, domestic violence victims and immigrants. The immigration department within Catholic Charities Portland is small. There are two lawyers and two accredited representatives who have the authority to practice within the immigration courts.

As a result of the small size of the office I worked with the four different people and had the freedom to choose which immigration areas interested me the most. I spent a lot of my time working on asylum applications. Within this area I helped the clients and lawyers create personal statements, compile country reports on the human rights situations in several countries and research new areas of asylum law based on domestic violence.

Catholic Charities also handles family visa petition applications. I worked on several of these cases throughout the summer. I sat in on client meetings, went to court and compiled the applications that were sent to immigration. A large part of Catholic Charities is working with domestic violence victims who are in the immigration process under VAWA (Violence Against Women Act). Under this act battered spouses or children have special protections that would otherwise not be afforded to them. This is a relatively new area of immigration and has different requirements and standards of proof than other areas.

Other days I would organize trainings for volunteers, go out to a juvenile detention facility or write memos for the lawyers. Every day was different and the staff of Catholic Charities worked very hard to keep it that way. I learned about several areas of immigration law and gained hands on work experience.