

## Christopher Anders

I had the good fortune to work at Immigration Counseling Services (ICS) in downtown Portland this summer. ICS was founded in 1978 and provides low or no-cost legal services in immigration law. Most of the clients come from Latin America, but include people from countries as diverse as Tibet, Rwanda and Canada. It is a small collegial office, with two attorneys, a certified representative and two paralegals. The founder, Margaret Godfrey, is retired, but still works full-time.

My work focused on asylum seekers. Public interest law is crucial in this field because very few private immigration attorneys devote their practice to asylum cases. They are very laborious and the typical asylum seeker arrives without much in the way of resources. Working with asylum seekers gave me a concrete lesson in how public interest law makes a difference in our clients' lives.

One example is especially pointed. A man from a politically repressive African country came to our office for help. His story was compelling: he fled the country in fear of being arrested and possibly killed by government security forces. He was forced to leave his family behind in very dangerous circumstances. Through the process of several interviews, working through a translator, we put together his application for asylum and requested that the Asylum Office (a branch of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service) expedite his interview so that he could petition to bring his family to the United States. Now, some asylum applicants wait more than a year for an interview where an officer decides if they meet the statutory conditions for asylum. This man had his interview and received his approval notice within six weeks of when we applied. One of the last things I did before wrapping up my work for the summer was fill out the forms for him to bring his family here.

Working at ICS let me learn from very experienced and dedicated practitioners. The staff has a depth of experience and expertise that is impressive. Besides the formal projects that I was involved with, I learned a tremendous amount just from participating in the continual discussion of cases and wrinkles in the law that they involved. Immigration law is very "nuts and bolts", even to the point that sending an application to the wrong address can lead to the government rejecting it. Seeing how cases are prepared and move (slowly) through the system was very interesting. It was the kind of knowledge a class could never impart.

From a personal standpoint, my internship gave me an opportunity to experience working in a public interest immigration agency. Because that was-and still is-my goal after law school, I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to test the dream against day-to-day reality. And it left me more inspired and motivated than ever.

I am very grateful to have been awarded a PILP stipend: it was a tremendous opportunity for me, and it is a great way for law students to serve the community.