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I had a great experience working at Legal Aid in downtown Portland. I was trained for the Domestic Violence Project, which assists victims of domestic violence mostly in preparation for contested restraining order hearings. After the first intake phone call that I did, I began to realize the difference between theory and practice. (The theory seemed like a lot of information to swallow at once, the practice seemed a lot more bearable). Usually the calls lasted about 30 minutes (but sometimes they exceeded an hour). With the help of Legal Aid attorneys and paralegals, we would determine if we could match the clients with a volunteer attorney. If we were not able to do this, then I called the person back and gave her (or sometimes him) advice on self-representation. At times, I was able to follow the case all the way to the hearing stage and witness the results.

I also participated in a housing law training session and sat with an attorney for a housing intake session one afternoon. I then participated in a couple of client interviews. This client interaction was probably the most rewarding part of my experience. When I was able to meet with clients and hear what they had to say, I could really tell that they were grateful for the services they were receiving. I also learned a lot from hearing about the world from their points of view.

In addition to housing and family law, I worked on a few administrative law cases. (Having only finished my first year of law school, I didn't know what administrative law was at the beginning of the summer!). I worked on three SSI disabilities cases. One case was particularly overwhelming at times because I had to read about every mental disorder imaginable and see if a client fit into any of the medical listings (if he did, then he would get SSI benefits). I spent several hours combing through the evidence, reading the CFR's, meeting with the client, and preparing notes for the hearing and then I actually got to go to the hearing and see how it all played out. I researched other interesting topics for SSI hearings as well. Two cases that I helped with involved refugees who had come to the States from Somalia and Afghanistan. The client interaction in those cases was great. I was able to take part in client interviews and also go to one of the hearings. And, both clients won (and probably would not have been able to do so without the help of Legal Aid attorneys).

In addition to working on specific cases, I worked on a couple of memos that dealt with victims' rights provisions in Oregon state law. I presented a brief synopsis of my research at a meeting of public interest lawyers. Second, I researched the current initiative to form a People's Utilities District in Portland and the effects this would have on the low-income population, specifically on low-income housing.

Finally, there were several outings and get-togethers with Legal Aid staff. Field trips to Baskin Robbins, picnic lunches in the Park blocks, baby showers, happy hours, and barbeques gave me a good chance to get to know the people I was working with on a level outside of the office. Also, the fact that there were five summer clerks from schools throughout Oregon and the U.S. made it even more fun. In conclusion, my experience at

Legal Aid was excellent and I would definitely recommend it to other first year law students.