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I had the opportunity to spend this past summer at Kansas Legal Services (KLS), a statewide non-profit organization that provides a diverse range of essential legal services to low-income Kansans. Without KLS, thousands of Kansans, especially those with special needs, would have no way of obtaining access to the justice system. More specifically, the KLS office in Manhattan, Kansas where I spent my summer specialized in representing victims of domestic violence, children in foster care, the elderly, and the disabled, especially those who were in need of assistance accessing health care services and employment training.

At KLS, I had the chance to work with two attorneys, Kitra Schartz and Gabrielle Thompson, the managing attorney for the KLS Manhattan office. I conducted research for Ms. Thompson, learning to “Shepardize” cases, tracking down the reports of appeals decisions and Federal and State statutes that were relevant to her cases. I also had the opportunity to accompany Ms. Schartz and Ms. Thompson to their trials and meet with their clients. Meeting these clients and hearing their often heartbreaking stories opened my eyes to just how difficult it is for many individuals – hindered by limited resources and blighted by family crises, health problems, and financial woes – to try to navigate the confusing channels of the justice system. Helping clients who would otherwise have no way to deal with their situation find positive solutions to their problems was something that the attorneys at KLS found very rewarding about their jobs; however, the fact that their clients came from such limited means also made their jobs extremely difficult at times. Simply trying to stay in touch with a client was often a challenge, as many clients did not have working phones or did not have access to a car. A number of clients, particularly victims of domestic violence, changed residences frequently in an attempt to evade their spouses. Many clients also lacked family support and had to struggle to find time to meet

with their attorney in between trying to keep a job and trying to find someone to supervise their children. As a result, it was difficult for a number of clients to keep their appointments or even show up to court.

In addition to working with the attorneys at KLS, I also had the chance to work with Brandi Staatz, the paralegal who handles all of the Social Security cases for the office. KLS assists individuals with physical and mental disabilities file their claim for Social Security and also provides them with legal representation in the appeals process if their claim is denied. I was given the files of clients whose claim for disability had been denied and was entrusted with the task of reading through and summarizing the hundreds of pages of medical records on each client in an effort to compile all the evidence necessary to show why the client did in fact meet the criteria for disability as specified by Social Security law. Like domestic violence cases I came across in my work with Ms. Thompson and Ms. Schartz, the Social Security cases I read were heartbreaking. Oftentimes, what I found most depressing while reading through a client's file was not the meticulously detailed hospital medical records, which tended to describe the client's mental or physical disability in detached, scientific jargon, but the "function report" that the client had to fill out themselves when they filed their Social Security claim. In the function report, the client had to describe their daily routine and how their disability impaired their ability to engage in simple daily tasks. In the majority of the files I came across, the client's daily routine consisted of spending all day in bed. Oftentimes, they were suffering from not only debilitating physical pain but were also battling some sort of depression or anxiety disorder. In almost every case, the client reported that he or she no longer kept in contact with friends and had no family support. They spent every day alone, in bed, and in pain. It was also heartbreaking to read what the clients wrote when they described how their lives were before the onset of their

disability. They described themselves as having busy social lives, engaging in a variety of hobbies, holding steady jobs, and basically enjoying life. More often than not, their disability not only affected their ability to find employment, but also their personality. A number of clients, who described themselves as being talkative, social, and outgoing prior to the onset of their condition, explained that they now no longer had any desire to be around others and as a result, rarely left their homes. These files also often contained heartrending personal handwritten letters from clients, describing how alone their condition made them feel and pleading for help with their case.

Spending the summer at KLS deeply impacted the way I came to see the legal profession. I had a strong interest in law prior to my internship and had always felt that lawyers did important work, but I did not realize just how crucial the work of an attorney could be until I came to KLS and had a chance to witness how attorneys could completely transform people's lives. Many clients came to KLS not simply looking for legal assistance, but for hope, guidance, and emotional support. It was not unusual to see a client enter the office in tears. I realized that the attorney not only had to play the role of legal expert, but also had to play the role of mentor, counselor, and friend. As I came to learn from the attorneys at KLS, clients had many needs, needs that were not necessarily limited to legal concerns, and one of the biggest challenges of their job was trying to figure out exactly what the needs of their clients were. Oftentimes, a client would apply for a service or make a request for a particular course of legal action, but it would be for a service or course of legal action that they did not actually need. I learned that it took time and factual investigation before an attorney could assess what the client really needed and what course of legal action would best suit their needs. It also took time for the attorney to

build a relationship of trust with the client and make the client feel comfortable enough to disclose information that was important to their case.

One particularly memorable moment that made me realize how the job of an attorney encompassed much more than providing legal representation occurred in the second week of my internship, when I accompanied Ms. Thompson to court for a child custody case. Her client was a young mother who had suffered abuse from her husband and was looking to obtain sole custody of her children. Her husband, fighting for custody of their children, made the case that he was no longer violent and had addressed his problem of anger management through classes and counseling. At the end of the trial, the judge ruled in favor of our client. The husband, infuriated by the judge's decision, started cursing and stormed out of the courtroom, slamming the door behind him. The mother, though happy with the judge's decision, was noticeably shaken by her estranged husband's display of anger and was afraid that if she walked out of the courthouse in front of her husband, he would try to hurt her in some way. At this point, Ms. Thompson had switch from her role of attorney to the role of protector and friend. She helped lead her client through a back exit and escorted her to her car, making sure that she safely left the courthouse without being seen or harassed by her husband. It became clear to me at that moment that Ms. Thompson's job involved much more than representing her client's legal interests and winning her case in court. She was committed to ensuring her client's wellbeing, a task far more comprehensive and challenging than resolving her client's case.

My current plans include finishing up my final year at Princeton, obtaining m B.A. in history and attending law school after I graduate. I am grateful to the Liman Foundation for allowing me such an opportunity; I cannot think of anything I would do to change the fellowship program. My experience at KLS has only served to intensify my interest in public interest law,

and I am seriously considering focusing on the area of family law in order to one day work with victims of domestic violence and abuse. The stories of these victims are heartbreaking and tragic; however, I am inspired by the stories of success I have learned at KLS where the work of attorneys has served to drastically improve and even transform these victims' lives. Though such work is challenging and often emotionally taxing, I believe the possibility of being able to make such a profound difference in the lives of others would make this profession very fulfilling and rewarding.