LIMAN SUMMER FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Shaina Watrous
National Legal Aid & Defender Association

As a 2012 Liman Summer Fellow, I worked at the National Legal Aid & Defender Association. NLADA, a national organization that represents hundreds of legal services providers, recently celebrated its 100th year of pioneering access to justice initiatives. In addition to holding several national conferences bringing together service providers from across the country, NLADA also serves as the collective voice for its members in Washington, promoting support within congress and the executive branch for legal aid funding, improved indigent defense services, and the resolution of other social issues that affect low-income Americans.

I spent the summer as an intern for the NLADA's civil team, which allowed me to become involved in a number of different areas of NLADA's work. I was typically given my own projects to work on, such as reviewing the American Bar Association's guidelines for civil legal aid provision, and developing possible self-assessment methods for providers. I designed and implemented a survey of previous recipients of NLADA's new attorney scholarships, in order to determine the most effective online forum for new attorneys to discuss the difficulties of starting out in legal aid and public defender careers. I created a national database of states' usages of mortgage settlement funds, which advocates around the country were able to use as a tool in their efforts to secure additional funding for state legal aid programs. Throughout the summer, I also read through academic research on the effectiveness of legal assistance programs, wrote synopses, and compiled a catalog of previous research on the subject, in order to assess what future research topics might be of value to the legal aid community.

The substance of what I was working on always kept me interested and engaged, but perhaps the most meaningful of my interactions and experiences this summer were times when

I was just interacting with the staff of NLADA. I've come to realize that individuals that dedicate their lives to legal aid are some of the kindest and most interesting people I've ever met. Every person on the civil team was happy to stop by my desk and talk with me, whether to discuss questions I had about the research I was reading, or to tell me about their own journey to NLADA. My supervisor, Lydia Watts, was always on the lookout for events I would find interesting, and encouraged me to attend rallies, conference calls, and congressional lobbying meetings for Violence Against Women Act re-authorization with domestic violence prevention advocates. The office also organized a weekly brown bag lunch series, through which I was exposed to topics like lobbying and negotiation strategies for women.

This summer confirmed my interest in the intersection of public policy and access to justice. As a current junior at Princeton University, I am participating in a Woodrow Wilson School Task Force on Resuscitating Inner-City Neighborhoods, and hope to study abroad in South Africa's University of Cape Town in the spring. I know that both of these activities will provide me essential insight into the importance of the justice system as a potential tool for correcting societal inequalities. These experiences will continue to guide me toward a better understanding of the justice gap, and help me work to make a meaningful difference in the fight to end it.

I feel so lucky to have worked at NLADA with some of the nation's leading advocates for justice for low-income people, and I want to thank the whole NLADA office for making me feel very much at home in a new working environment! The amazing experience I had this summer would never have been possible without the generous funding and support of the Arthur Liman Public Interest Program at Yale Law School. I am so grateful to both the Liman Program staff, and the staff of Princeton's Program in Law and Public Affairs for their patience and support in guiding me through the internship process.