



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

Pennsylvania
Legal Aid Network, Inc.

THE DRUM MAJOR

Class of 2016 Essay Collection



"Make a career of humanity, commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country and a finer world to live in."

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.
Louise Brookins Building
118 Locust Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

July 27, 2016

To the 2016 Martin Luther King, Jr. Interns:

We are pleased to present you with the 2016 edition of **THE DRUM MAJOR**, which is a small token of appreciation for your efforts this summer.

Through your work during the past ten weeks, you have touched the lives of many clients who have nowhere else to turn. You learned how to use your skills to make equal justice a reality.

For this, we thank you. Wherever your paths may lead you, we hope that your experience here will be an inspiration and a reminder of how you can make a difference.

Very Truly Yours,



Samuel W. Milkes, Esq.
Executive Director

Very Truly Yours,



Arlene A. Marshall-Hockensmith, Esq.
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Shahirah Brown
Widener University Delaware Law School
J.D. Candidate 2017
Community Legal Services - Philadelphia



My name is Shahirah Brown, a current law student attending Widener Delaware School of Law and recipient of the 2016 Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) Summer Internship Program. This summer, I had the privilege of interning at Community Legal Services (CLS) in Philadelphia primarily in the Energy Unit. My duties required me to provide clients with advice on how to restore and/or prevent utility shut-offs, negotiate payment arrangements on the behalf of clients with Philadelphia utilities companies, and to assist clients in requesting informal hearings to dispute account analyst decisions.

Mainly, I provided legal assistance to individuals below the 150% poverty line. The majority of my clients faced circumstances where their water, electricity and/or gas services were being terminated. All of my clients lacked the finances needed to keep their utility services on or restored. In order to deliver the most effective assistance, I was required to provide my clients with information on the Low-Income Home and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Utility Emergency Services Fund (UESF) which provides money needed to low-income individuals to restore their utility services and/or to stop them from being terminated. These grants were extremely helpful for clients who just needed temporary financial assistance.

For the clients who needed more than just temporary assistance, including payment arrangements, their problems continued. By law, Philadelphia utility companies are only required to provide one payment arrangement to each customer. Each utility company has the discretion to provide more than one payment arrangement, but typically they do not. My clients faced one of two problems: (1) they were already provided a payment arrangement and broke it or (2) they did not qualify for a payment arrangement because of fraud. With these exigent circumstances, I believed the best recourse for some clients was to apply for LIHEAP OR UESF and use those funds to pay required fees and/or fraud balances. Then they would be able to apply for a new payment arrangement. For other clients, I believed the best recourse was to request an informal hearing.

My most rewarding experience at CLS was assisting a client facing foreclosure due to unpaid water bills. I immediately contacted my supervising attorney who decided to monitor the foreclosure while I worked out a payment arrangement with the water department. As a result, my

supervisor and I were able to save the client's home and obtain an affordable payment arrangement regarding her water bill.

Interning at CLS not only provided me the opportunity to provide direct legal representation to clients but it also allowed me to participate in social advocacy work. My experience helped me to see the bigger picture that low-income clients face. Yes, it does start with some clients taking responsibility for their actions that contributed to their current situation. However, even that is not enough. Most of the clients I served suffered from medical conditions or had limited education which contributed to their issues. For the rest, there simply were not enough resources available to help them.

In the grand scheme of things, the clients I served did not alone cause their own struggles. In my opinion, the biggest contributing factor is the lack of affordability for low-income Philadelphians. When it comes to low-income individuals, one size does not fit all. Each client I served had varied incomes but all were poverty-stricken. There needs to be a system in place where utility companies base household billing on income received not normal rates. More payment arrangement options should be available to low-income individuals. I desire to be a person who brings forth this change. CLS provided me with the opportunity to do so through social advocacy.

I can honestly say that I enjoyed working for CLS this summer. Not only do I feel that I made a difference in the clients' lives that I served but I also gained valuable hands on experience. It meant the world to me to be able to provide legal assistance to individuals who do not have the resources to survive in our society, to speak up for individuals who feel they do not have a voice, and to provide assistance to individuals that I can relate to the most. I hope to be able to continue providing assistance to indigent individuals, whether in the same capacity or a different one because change begins one person at a time.

Hermionne Cadet
Penn State Dickinson School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2017
MidPenn Legal Services - Harrisburg



In law school, we are often told to apply to every internship and employment opportunity that is posted on our Career Portal. Needless to say that is what led me to apply to the Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) Summer Internship Program. However, what I did not fathom was how much I would love interning at MidPenn Legal Services (MPLS), a non-profit, public-interest law firm dedicated to providing equal access to justice and high quality civil legal services to low-income residents and survivors of domestic violence in Central Pennsylvania. My internship at MPLS set me up for many things, amongst those were self-realization and a new outlook on life. Like many people, I dreamt of graduating law school and making the “big bucks,” but it was not long before this internship opportunity reminded me of what is most important – *using my personal experiences to assist the vulnerable and help them solve their most complex problems.*

Last summer, I had the opportunity to serve as a Capital Area Managing Partners (CAMP) Diversity Initiative intern at Stevens & Lee, a mid-size law firm in downtown Harrisburg. The attorneys at Stevens & Lee specialize in bankruptcy, tax, real estate, and land use law. Stevens & Lee is the type of law firm where you are guaranteed “big bucks” if you are lucky enough to be hired post-graduation. That summer, I spent the majority of my time conducting legal research on various topics which led me to realize how passionate I was about working closely with clients on civil matters.

In short, family law is my passion. It is not for everyone, but for some, myself included, this area of law can be quite fulfilling. I realize that issues are not always black and white because in family law there are a lot of gray areas. It is my desire to help people navigate through the gray areas and get through the most difficult and challenging periods of their lives. MPLS gave me the opportunity to obtain more than just a glimpse of what lawyers do. I had the opportunity to work as a public interest attorney.

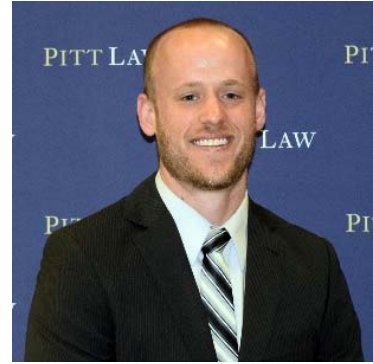
During my time at MPLS, I learned through interviewing clients for custody questionnaires, preparing and filing Petitions, Motions, Complaints, Answers, and Pre-Hearing Memorandums at the Dauphin County Court of Common Pleas. I accompanied attorneys to hearings and observed their strategies. This experience allowed me to learn things that I was not taught in law school. More excitedly, I had the opportunity to represent my own clients in custody conferences and Protection from Abuse hearings.

Moreover, MPLS exposed me to other areas of law such as unemployment compensation, consumer law, and landlord/tenant issues. What I found to be most fulfilling when working with MPLS' client population was how relatable some of their issues were to my personal experiences. I was able to empathize with the clients. For example, in 2012, my father suffered a stroke and could no longer work as a school bus driver in New York. He had been doing for this job for the past twelve years of his life. My father collected disability but could no longer afford to pay his debt. Eventually, he had to file for bankruptcy. For this reason, I was keen to learn about the different forms of bankruptcy, particularly Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 bankruptcy filings and the aftermath of such legal proceedings. I understood the complex issues that a client seeking bankruptcy would have to face. If I knew then what I know now, I would have been in a better position to help my father especially because my parents depend on me to explain legal concepts to them.

One thing that stood out to me during my time at MPLS was the dire need for underserved clients to have attorneys advocating for their rights. These clients come to MPLS because they cannot afford to hire a local attorney. If not for MPLS, many of these clients would lose their children, their homes, their income, and even their dignity. Although some of these clients are sometimes difficult to assist, I cannot ignore the fact that they need MPLS to provide them with equal access to justice and high quality civil legal services. I could never turn my cheek to helping underserved clients because my parents are a part of that population. I would hate for them to be taken advantage of in any way because they cannot afford an attorney.

In essence, MPLS made me realize the importance of giving back to my community through representing vulnerable individuals and making a difference in the lives of those who need help the most. In the future, I desire to help clients see the light at the end of the tunnel when they are facing their most complex legal issues and place them in a position to someday advocate effectively for themselves.

Peter Claassen
University of Pittsburgh School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2018
Community Justice Project - Pittsburgh



My experience working in public interest law clinics prior to law school led to my initial desire to become an attorney. That prior work and education experience taught me many things. On one hand, I repeatedly saw that our legal system is inherently unequal.

On the other hand, I saw dedicated attorneys working to give a voice to those without power in that system while driving social change and affecting people's lives daily. Those lessons have been reinforced this summer working at the Community Justice Project (CJP) in Pittsburgh.

My prior experience involved working mostly with immigrants and other low-income clients in more traditional legal aid settings. I am also new to the city of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania. For both of those reasons I was excited about the prospect of working at CJP through the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN) Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) Summer Internship Program. After living in cities from San Antonio to St. Louis to Indianapolis, I have learned that every city and community is different in the challenges they face. I saw CJP as an opportunity to learn about the legal needs of those with little access to power in this city and community. Because CJP is a specialized program within PLAN that takes on class action cases and seeks to challenge broader systemic issues, I saw it as an opportunity to get a different perspective on how our legal system affects poor and minority communities.

On a practical level, my time at CJP has been challenging, intellectually stimulating, and a great learning experience. While I ultimately hope to work with clients on a more day-to-day basis, the many hours spent during this internship researching and writing memos has given me valuable practical experience wrestling with a wide variety of real world legal issues that are not quite as clear and definable as they seem in law school classes. Over the course of the summer, I did research for cases representing local community groups seeking fair housing and access to resources for poor and minority community members, helped prepare discovery documents and strategize for trial in a case for tenants who have faced discrimination, and worked on a case challenging Department of Corrections policy for prisoners/parolees who only want a fair shot at getting their lives back on track just to name a few. I also observed the dedication of CJP attorneys, how to listen to clients' needs, and how to look for solutions to many of Pittsburgh's most challenging social and economic issues.

Ultimately, that last point is where I have learned the most important lessons this summer. I have heard the groans for justice emanating from the depths of this city. In light of not only my work, but also my entire first year of law school and recent events throughout the United States, I identify with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his letter from Birmingham jail, where he said,

“I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action.”

As a white male with immense unearned privilege, I am learning to listen more closely to people directly affected by the injustice that I do not always intuitively understand. Through gracious friends, clients, and community activists, I am continuously learning how to do that. I observe daily the discipline and persistence which law practice requires by watching and working with dedicated public interest attorneys, both at CJP and in other public interest law offices in Pittsburgh.

Through my experience as an MLK intern, I have seen and seek to continue taking part in the “strong, persistent and determined action” of public interest attorneys who are working to root out injustice wherever it is firmly planted.

Elizabeth Dennis
University of Pittsburgh School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2017
Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project



My name is Elizabeth Dennis and this summer I have been a legal intern at the Pittsburgh office of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project (PILP). This organization works directly to address conditions facing incarcerated individuals. So far, this has been the most challenging and the most rewarding position I have ever had. This internship demonstrated the incredible hardships faced by incarcerated individuals both expected and beyond reason. In the alternative, I was able to see the difference it makes to see and to demonstrate humanity.

Some of the deprivations of incarcerated life are foreseen, even reasonable. For example, a loss of freedom, access to outside luxuries, or lack of personal space is to be anticipated. These realities are considered to be necessary parts of incarcerated life and are readily accepted by the general population. What most people do not expect is the utter destruction of basic personhood that results from incarceration. As part of the internship, I read intake letters, summarized the letters and evaluated whether or not there was a plausible claim that PILP could address. Most of the letters cannot be addressed because they involve a matter that is either too small, too impossible to prove, or too far beyond the statute of limitations.

Lack of appropriate medical and mental health care is so prevalent that only a minor injury without permanent damage is generally too small and too difficult to prove. Based on the resources allocated, it would be too unlikely to bring a case that would cause a policy change. How heartbreaking is that? To realize that these pains are too common and so they cannot be appropriately addressed here. The same goes for retaliation claims and any claim that was not grieved completely and appropriately. This was one of my most difficult challenges. I am still trying to find a way to give appropriate credit to each story, to each individual, and to at the same time compartmentalize and prioritize what issues can be addressed.

My largest project so far has been to work on a summary judgment brief for a religious diet accommodation. I started with deposition summaries all the way to composing the brief. I have been able to see the breadth of the processes involved in creating this type of document and I feel incredibly invested in this project.

Another integral part of my internship involved visiting corrections institutions. Visiting prisons and meeting with clients was a remarkable experience. I have a deeper understanding of

the process involved and seeing this firsthand has strengthened my commitment to working with incarcerated individuals.

Dr. King was committed to ensuring intersectional human rights and serving those most under served in our communities. The prison model in the United States has become the modern means of racial control and subjugation. As outright racism became disfavored, those that sought the same racially controlled means implemented statutory minimums for minor crimes and the drug war. By imposing laws that avoided overt racial means, proponents of these methods were able to fill the nation's prisons with the same black and brown bodies they continue to disenfranchise.

Anyone that visits a prison today will see the overwhelming racial disparity. Dr. King sought out the people who needed the most representation. I believe those people are the prison population. This group of people has been systematically stripped of their power, their liberty, and their humanity. It has been a privilege to be a part of the work that PILP does serving the prison population. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Internship Program offered through the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. (PLAN) gave me the chance to work with an organization I may have otherwise never experienced. I am very grateful for this opportunity and I hope to continue to work to remedy areas of injustice within the prison system, both large and small.

Taylor Haga
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J.D. Candidate 2018
Pennsylvania Utility Law Project - Harrisburg



In his “Drum Major Instinct” sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., admonished that the “drum major instinct,” or the constant need for recognition, is characteristic of every human being in every stage of life, that it can have a negative or positive effect on society, and that those who choose to act on it should do so in the service of others, in order to reach greatness. Dr. King’s sermon acknowledged a universal definition of what greatness is. Greatness may be many things to many different people and one act which reflects greatness for some, may reflect nothing for others. However, greatness will always be reflected when acting in the service of others. Through his sermons and civil rights work, Dr. King instilled the importance of public service. The Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP) is a reflection of his ideals. I am grateful and lucky to have gained real-world experience working with the attorneys at PULP and to have been involved in the critical assistance they provide.

The attorneys for PULP represent the interests of low-income households in all matters dealing with the provision of utility service to residential customers. Like food and water, people need utility services to make it through the winter and to maintain a nutritious diet. While utility service is essential for basic habitability and bodily health, it is not a protected right and is not equally accessible for everyone. Through this internship, I gained a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation for the plight of low-income households in obtaining or maintaining this essential service and the important role that PULP plays in containing and mitigating the inequities felt by low-income households.

The inequity is most easily observed when comparing the energy burden for low-income households to that of the majority of households. The average household might expend 3% of their income on their energy bill, while a low-income household might expend 15% of their income on their energy bill. This disparity is alarming given the fact that the income provider of a low-income household is likely working similar hours and expending a similar amount of effort to make their income, as the income provider for other households. When the service paid for is the same regardless of which house it is going to, yet the price paid in time and effort, for a given amount of service used, is drastically higher for low-income households compared to all others, there is a need for assistance that must be met. The Pennsylvania Utility Law Project works toward mitigating this disparity and ensuring that it is not worsened by the raising of rates or the cutting

of funding for energy assistance programs, and many more issues that come with having competitive private companies regulate the provision of an essential service. Without PULP, these potentially life-threatening harms would go unchecked.

While this internship has made me aware of the inequities and flaws that exist in the provision of utility service and the detriment caused, it has also made me cognizant of the fact that there are many more inequities and flaws that exist in our world—that may be less obvious and just as detrimental. There is a need for people to provide service and combat inequities and injustice. While an attorney may not find frequent recognition working for the public interest, they will find satisfaction in the work that they do because it is needed. The work done through PULP is vital and directly affects the physical well-being of others. I am thankful to have gained real-world experience and a broader understanding of public interest work while interning with the Pennsylvania Utility Law Project.

Rondell Jordan
University of Pittsburgh School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2018
Regional Housing Legal Services



As I write this essay, beads of sweat drip from my chin onto my laptop keyboard. Meteorologists may not agree with me, but I feel confident in saying that this summer has undoubtedly been one of the hottest on record. Surprisingly, this temperature spike has not come as a result of an increase in carbon emissions. This summer's sweltering heat is the product of increased racial tensions across our nation. Police shootings of black men across the country have caused race relations to reach a boiling point. As any black man in America knows, these issues are not a novel. For as long as I can remember, unarmed black men have lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement. The Black Lives Matter movement has provided, among other things, a platform for the United States to have an open and honest discussion about how we can stop and prevent these tragedies from occurring.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wanted to be remembered as a “drum major for justice... [and] a drum major for peace.” Nearly fifty years after Dr. King's death, justice and peace remain out of the reach for far too many black men in America. Admittedly, the most recent shootings in Baton Rouge and Minnesota caused me to lose my faith in the legal system. For me, these killings are just the latest in what has been a lifetime of letdowns by the criminal justice system. In the midst of all of this turmoil, I have asked myself “is this the system that I am working hard to become a part of?”

My confidence was all but gone until I recalled a moment that occurred earlier in the summer. One-day last month, my supervising attorney and I visited a local neighborhood housing coalition on the north side of Pittsburgh. We were there to meet with members of the coalition to discuss some of the concerns that they had with a housing trust fund that the city is implementing. We arrived shortly before noon and walked up a flight of old steps into the coalition's headquarters. We signed in at the front desk, and then walked into a small back room where the meeting was scheduled to take place. It was there that I met the coalition's leader.

She strode in about fifteen minutes late to the meeting, but as soon as she came into the room all eyes focused in on her. She was a large black woman who oddly reminded me of my mother. She was a woman that did not look anything like the struggles that she had overcome. As this woman (let's call her Sharon) slowly puffed her cigarette, she began to list off her grievances

with the city's housing task force. One particular thing that Sharon said stuck with me. She said that she wanted the city to "acknowledge the harm" that had been done to Pittsburgh's African-American community. She said that she wanted the city to let people know that their lowly housing conditions were intentionally contrived through decades of redlining and forced evictions. It was in this moment that my faith in the legal system was restored. What Sharon was actually asking for was an opportunity to be heard. She was disappointed with several aspects of the proposed housing fund, but she was more fed up with years of having her cries muted. Her desires to be heard had reached a boiling point.

To me, Sharon's sentiments are aligned with much of what black America feels. This is why in addition to her physical stature she reminded me so much of my mom. My mother had the same tough outer appearance of a woman that did not look like what she had endured. Meanwhile, in the inside she was tired of her suffering never being acknowledged. This is the condition of Black America. Perpetual suffering without the harm being acknowledged.

My summer interning with Regional Housing Legal Services has revitalized my confidence in not only the legal profession, but it has also revitalized my confidence in people. My supervising attorney was not compensated for his time spent at the coalition headquarters but he knew that he had to be there. Not only did he possess a necessary legal skill set that would be beneficial for Sharon, but he also possessed a necessary skill that you do not have to be a lawyer to master: the ability to listen to someone that needs to be heard.

Dr. King's drums are needed now more than ever. This small moment in what has been a long and scorching summer was profoundly impactful on me. I will be leaving this summer certain of how I can most help people like Sharon; people like my mom; people like me. I intend on being an ear for the people that need to be heard and I intend on being a mouth for the people whose voices have been silenced.

Ariel Oliver
University of Pittsburgh School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2017
Neighborhood Legal Services Association



The Drum Major Instinct: Answering the Call

“Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace... I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Drum majors are officers commanding the drummers of a regimental band. Drum majors for justice are the leaders who command the advocates for change on the front lines of poverty, racial and socio-economic inequality. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., preached about the drum major instinct in his last sermon on February 4, 1968. He told his congregation that instead of seeking greatness to boast about our own achievements, we should seek greatness through service and love towards others. When I enrolled in law school two years ago, I knew I wanted to surround myself with those who heard the call; those who had that same instinct to drum for justice. This summer, I have had the opportunity to answer that call and use my knowledge and legal skills to represent those most in need.

At Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLSA), I helped low-income clients navigate their landlord tenant disputes through the legal system. A large portion of my work involved client interviewing and writing letters that gave information and advice. This ranged from explaining what the eviction process entailed, how to secure their Section 8 voucher as they transitioned to new housing, to obtaining their security deposit once they moved. As a Certified Legal Intern, I was able to represent clients at hearings before Magisterial District Judges and in Common Pleas Court. Almost everyone wants their day in court. However, many clients voice their fears of going before a judge because they have heard how judges can be biased against them. As a drum major for justice, I must be prepared at all times to bring to light the many injustices clients face on a daily basis that are ignored.

Each client at NLSA taught me how important it is to not only know the law and advocate zealously, but to also listen to their concerns. It is easy to get caught up in thinking about issues we believe are pertinent to a case based on the elements or procedure that we may breeze over

other concerns a client may have. We cannot harness the drum major instinct for the betterment of our clients unless each is heard, their concerns addressed, and their goals acknowledged. Otherwise, we fall prey to our own selfish desires to win. My experience at NLSA got me out of text books and surrounded by people whose basic necessities have been put at risk. No selfish desire for attention can compare to safeguarding a client's home.

Housing security is a major issue, but for those who lack financial stability this issue is magnified. Although there are programs like the Housing Choice Voucher Program, or Section 8 as we know it, clients still have to face their apartments being treated like market rent units because their landlords do not want to make the necessary repairs to maintain housing assistance payments. Some landlords actively push out tenants who receive vouchers to replace them with those who are able to pay market rent. Unfortunately, depending on the kind of housing a client has, relocation assistance is not always available. In these cases, all we can do is negotiate more time be given in order for a client to find another home.

I know it is possible to be the change we wish to see in our communities. Nonetheless, we must be careful in how we use the law to solve these issues and remember to keep focus on who we are fighting for. It is easy to be fascinated with our own achievements and the attention that comes along, but the attorney's profession is based on the service of others. The legal system is riddled with bias and prejudice that has been white washed and is forced to be viewed through colorblind glasses. The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., ring out loud and clear, "I cannot waste time to bask in my own glory while people in my community are being ignored, their civil liberties are being walked on, and their livelihoods destroyed." This is a hard path to follow, but I have put my hand to the plow this summer; I have answered the call through NLSA. I will continue to beat the drum for justice so that others can hear this same call. If even one individual hears and answers, there would be another who harnesses the drum major instinct to seek greatness through service and love. If even one individual hears and answers the call, that would be a great victory for our community.

Zoe Reyes
University of Pittsburgh School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2017
Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services



Pursuing a career in the legal field was always driven by my desire to help individuals who are unable to gain access to legal help on their own or who could not afford the representation they needed. During the summer of my first year of law school, I interned at the Public Defenders' Office in Allegheny County Pennsylvania. This experience was extremely rewarding and sparked my curiosity on exploring other ways in which I could help the indigent population in a legal capacity.

When the opportunity arose to intern at Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services (SPLAS), I thought it would be great way to learn about other parts of the law that touched the lives of indigent individuals. Going into the internship, I had a very basic understanding of the types of services SPLAS provided as a typical legal aid services. However, what I did not know was how many services SPLAS provided and what that entailed. The office itself handles a variety of cases ranging from landlord tenant and fair housing issues to divorces and child custody matters. The majority of the casework that SPLAS handles is Protection from Abuse (PFA) and Child Dependency cases which is what I worked on the most.

Before interning at SPLAS, I had an understanding of what PFAs were. However, I had never interviewed a client who had been abused and was seeking an order to be able to move on with their lives. Many times these victims were abused by their husbands, wives, or the parent of their children. This type of relationship seemed to make the process of obtaining a PFA even more emotionally trying on the victims. Working with these men and women, interviewing them, and eventually advocating for them in front of a judge really brought to light just how much helping them in one legal matter really helped them in their life in a much larger way. This aspect of my internship taught me how to use my compassion for victims of abuse and combine it with the legal procedures of obtaining a PFA to get an overall result for a client in order to help the move forward in their life.

Exploring the dynamics in Child Dependency court was also an eye opening experience. Prior to my internship at SPLAS, I was vaguely aware of what child dependency meant but I had no idea just how intricate this area of law could be. In Child Dependency cases, there are many interested parties. At SPLAS, we typically represented the parent of the child who had been adjudicated dependent. However, there were many other parties involved. For example, many

times there were two parents involved and the attorney representing each parent, the children who are represented by a Guardian-Ad-Litem and the agency caseworker who is typically represented by the Agency Solicitor. What I found the most interesting about Dependency Court was that many times all of the attorneys representing the parties tried to negotiate on how to move forward in the case and come to an agreement before presenting the agreement in front of the judge or the Master. In this way, it was very enlightening to see how the attorneys worked together to achieve a goal that was beneficial to everyone involved.

Dependency Court also brought out a number of issues that the individuals we represented were having in their lives outside of dependency issues. Many parents had problems with stable housing, mental health, drugs and alcohol, and employment. In this regard, I saw how as a legal services provider SPLAS could help them in more than one way.

My experience throughout the summer really solidified my passion in helping those who really do not have the means of being able to help themselves. For most of my clients simply having someone advocate on their behalf was a win for them. I truly believe that attorneys who work in the public sector, especially those in legal services, really provide a great advantage to indigent clients and give them hope at bettering their lives.

Burak Serbetci
Rutgers-Camden School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2018
Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania-Norristown



“Keep feeling the need for being important. Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity. That is what I want you to do.”

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, message in his drum major sermon was one that was grounded in the idea that all people struggle against their egos. The poor face this struggle and so do the rich. It is fundamentally human, a nagging voice in the back of our minds: I am better than others, I should have more than them, or I deserve more respect than them. This mindset lends itself to looking the other way as you prioritize your own pursuits thus ignoring the problems that our society faces. What I respect the most about Dr. King’s message is not the fact that he brings to light a fundamental flaw in us as humans; rather, it is his optimism and sincere belief that this sense of pride, ego, and desire can be tamed away from its destructive potential and harnessed towards positive change.

I spent my summer working with the staff at Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP) Norristown office. The office provides counsel in a variety of areas, among the biggest are: family law issues, bankruptcy, and mortgage foreclosure. Day in and day out, I was confronted with that same stark and disappointing reality that Dr. King alluded to. Despite the fact that the attorney’s, paralegals, and other interns that I’ve worked with do the best that they can, we were not able to help every client. We gave each client an opportunity to talk and to seek advice, and representation from an attorney, an opportunity that they would likely be unable to take advantage of in our absence. However, the legal system as a whole is ill equipped to process the vast majority of its indigent clients. Some of our clients came to us too late; some could not be helped because they did not conduct themselves properly before reaching our office.

I wish I could point to something solid or do more than grasp at straws in order to come up with an idea of how to make things better. I wish I had the opportunity to do more, and to help more. My co-workers undoubtedly feel this same way and Dr. King would likely look fondly on our desire to help our communities. However, legal aid services as a whole are inherently limited in their capacity. We have the opportunity to make significant differences in our client’s lives and we often do. However, there is only so much time, money, and man power to go around.

This is where Dr. King's idea of the drum major instinct can provide us with a guidepost. He suggests that for us to help ourselves, we must first be compassionate and look outside of ourselves by helping others. For such a simple statement, it is one that carries a significant amount of weight because of how difficult it is to put into practice. It is easier to accept an idea than it is to live by it. However, my time with LASP has given me more hope than I have felt in years. There are men and women who are committed, day in and day out, to giving their best effort to helping the indigent in our legal system. It gives me hope that this is a trend that will continue to grow as the years go by. I am also confident that the hard work of my fellow co-workers will not go to waste. They are inspiring a new generation of legal professionals through their conduct. Legal services can only continue to grow as more individuals are touched by their services and the word continues to spread.

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The drum major instinct compels people to do things that get them recognition, to do things that stoke their egos. Martin Luther King, Jr., in delivering his famous sermon on it, said that if the drum major instinct is not properly harnessed it can lead to harmful results. King cites the drum major instinct as the impetus that compels people to “keep up with the Joneses” and causes people to live beyond their means.

As a Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) intern this summer, I faced my own struggle to harness the drum major instinct. The moment came in the middle of June—as I approached the end of my third week as an intern when I received my grades for the previous semester of law school. Although the grades were not terrible, they were significantly worse than I had expected and were the worst grades I had received at any level of school to that point.

When I saw my grades, I began to doubt myself. I thought about my classmates, each of whom (I imagined) had gotten grades that were far superior to mine. I thought of all the opportunities that I would no longer receive because of my grades. These feelings continued into the following day.

Eventually, I realized that my reaction to my grades was a manifestation of the drum major instinct. My grades did not affect my ability to serve others; instead they merely acted as a tool to stoke my ego and give me an artificial sense of value. My reaction was exactly the type of negative behavior that Dr. King said resulted from an uncontrolled drum major instinct; what was it other than a desire to “keep up with the Joneses?”

Once I realized the reason why I reacted negatively to my grades, my outlook changed. Instead of thinking of my grades as a reflection of my value, I thought of them as what they really were: narrow assessments of my performance on very specific tasks. I realized that my value does not rise and fall with my grades. Instead, my value lies in the services I perform for others. By properly harnessing the drum major instinct, I can be the best version of myself; I can focus on what best serves others, rather than on what makes me look the best.

As an MLK legal intern, I spent my whole summer helping people. Perhaps the most rewarding episode began when I sat in on a client interview with my supervising attorney, Joe DeCristopher, late on a Wednesday afternoon. The client was a single mother of two who was facing possible eviction from subsidized housing. The client appeared to have little legal recourse:

she had materially breached a provision of her lease, making eviction seemingly inevitable. That evening, however, Joe remembered a case that might give our client relief. The next morning, Joe told me about the case and asked me to write a memo on it. That day, I wrote a five-page legal memo on how the case helped our client, a task that likely would have taken me weeks when I had started law school. The next morning, Friday, Joe went to an informal hearing with the local housing authority over our client's eviction. After Joe mentioned the research I had done and how good our client's case was, the housing authority agreed to drop the eviction proceedings.

Another notable example came from the large project I worked on throughout the summer. Right before I had come to the office, Joe had filed an appeal to the Commonwealth Court challenging provisions of a statute that had led to our client having her home sold in a tax upset sale. As an intern, I spent a substantial amount of time over the summer working on a brief in support of our client's position.

These episodes showed the good that can result from a properly harnessed drum major instinct. I realized that the skills I had learned in law school were primarily useful in how they could be used to help people, rather than in how they could be used to make me look good. By focusing my energy on serving others, I was able to help someone avoid seemingly certain eviction from her home and write a brief that could help stop another person's home from being sold. Although my grades had not been what I had hoped, I was still able to use the skills I had learned in school to help others. This, rather than the ego boost that good grades provide, showed the true value of my education. In the future, when I find it difficult to harness my drum major instinct, I will remember Dr. King's sermon and remind myself that true value lies in service to others, rather than in service to one's ego.

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I interned with the Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP), a legal services organization that provides free legal services to lower-income consumers, seniors, and person with disabilities who are having trouble accessing publicly funded healthcare coverage or services, this summer. I accumulated tips and tools that I can carry with me throughout my internship.

Teamwork

Teamwork is the first tool I collected while working for PHLP. Each week, all staff employees from the three offices participate in a conference call to discuss their current cases. Unlike law school, where we are presented the problem and are charged to find a solution on our own, here, staff members sought help from their team members. This allowed everyone to know not only what was going on but also gave the employees the chance to seek guidance on how to research their case, what questions to ask, and discuss case strategies.

Furthermore, there were countless times where we partnered with consumer advocates from across the state to better the lives of others. For example, we partnered with consumers to propose to state officials the creation of demonstration project that provides intervention for children up to the age of twenty-one (21) with high aggressive behavioral tendencies. These experiences reinforced the importance of legal aid attorneys working in teams of both attorneys and consumers to find the best solution for clients.

Strategy

The second tool I collected while working for PHLP is to have a strategy. Specifically, I learned that attorneys should remember to strategize politically. When faced with a complex fact pattern, I learned that it is better at times to think of the client as a constituent and involve their state legislator as a possible avenue to solve the case. An example of this was when one of the attorneys included the client's state legislator in discussions on how to solve the issue of clients being denied medical coverage because they were a few dollars over the income limit.

Advocacy

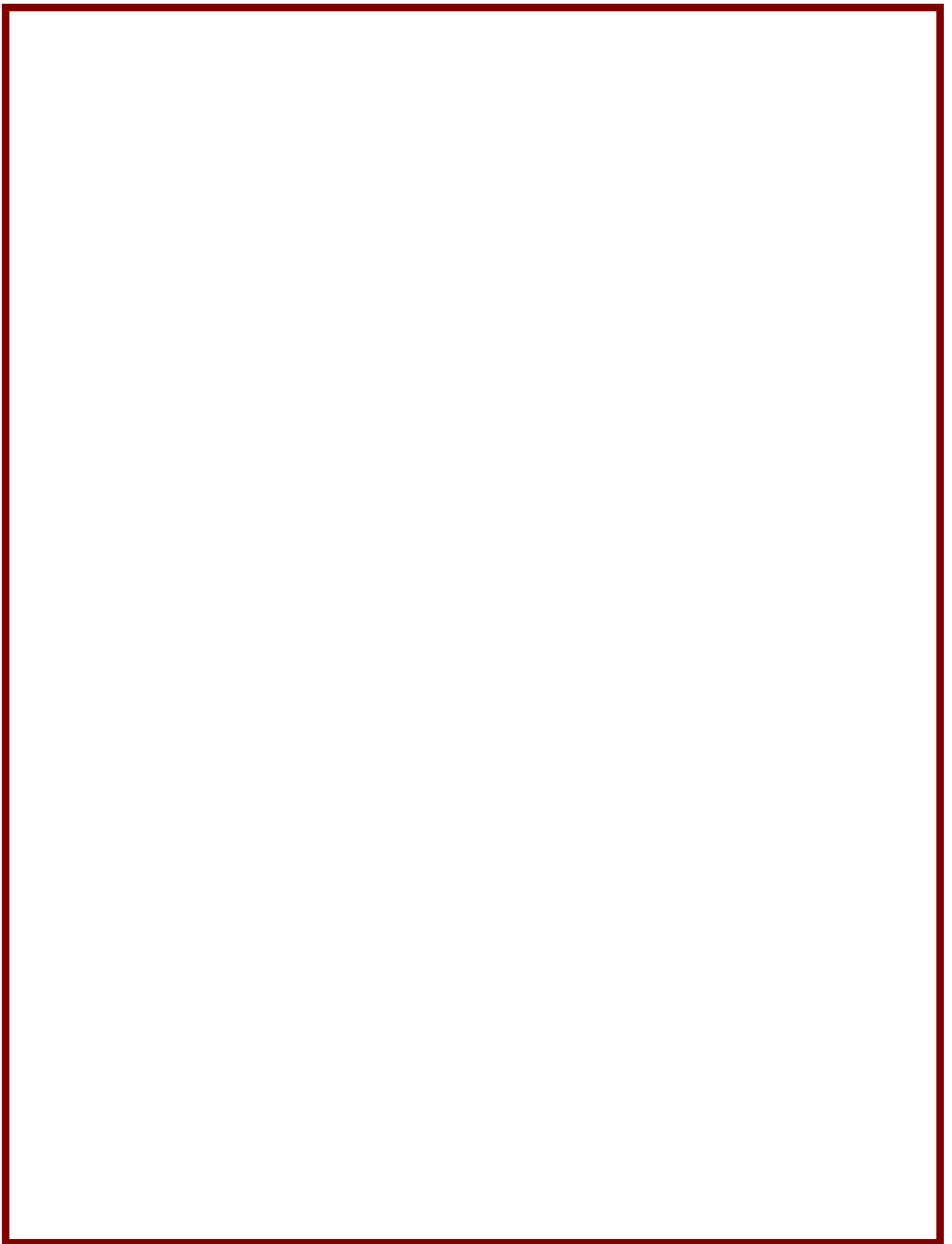
An understanding of the various models of advocacy is the last tool I collected on my journey with PHLP. I was able to guide our clients who sought help with their healthcare coverage. I was also given the opportunity to advocate for systemic changes to healthcare reform for residents across the Commonwealth. This was accomplished by attending meetings with high-level state

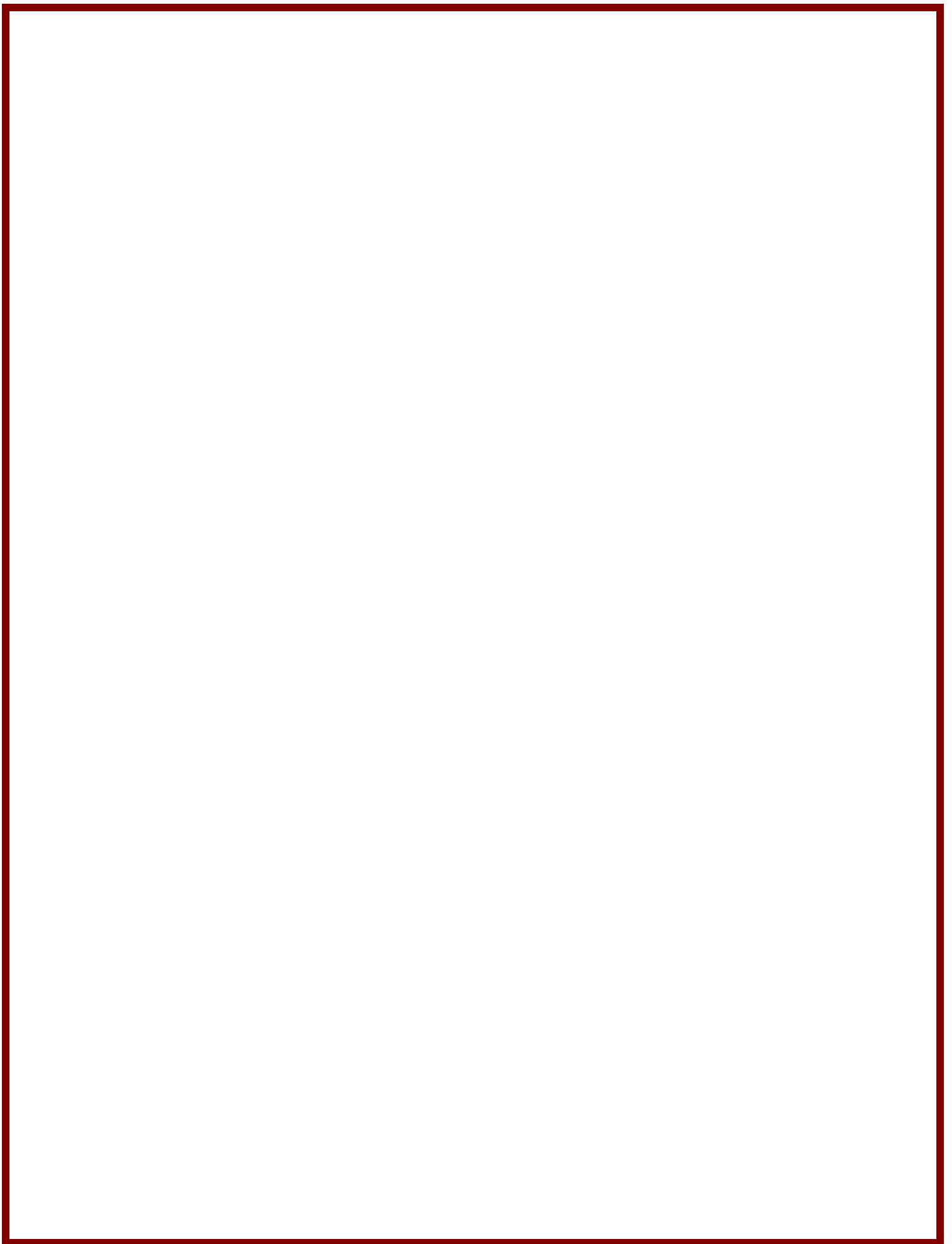
officials to bring about awareness to important issues such as providing Applied Behavioral Analysis services for those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Additionally, these were good forums for state officials, consumer advocates, and advocacy groups to come together and voice their concerns and questions so that they could find solutions to the problem.

Furthermore, the internship opened my eyes to the problems within the health care system. Being able to work with the clients to overturn medical eligibility denials has cemented my passion in public interest work because I know that I can fight on behalf of the client by helping them with an appeal. For example, my client, an adoptive mother for a child who has been in numerous foster and adoptive homes before their final placement with the family, spoke of the ailments that her child was facing. Her insurance company was not providing full services for her child. She grew tired attempting to get help from the insurance company and relied heavily on the minimal services she received through her child's school. Ultimately, I was able to present information about families just like this one to the insurance company who then took action to supply these families with the appropriate behavioral health services.

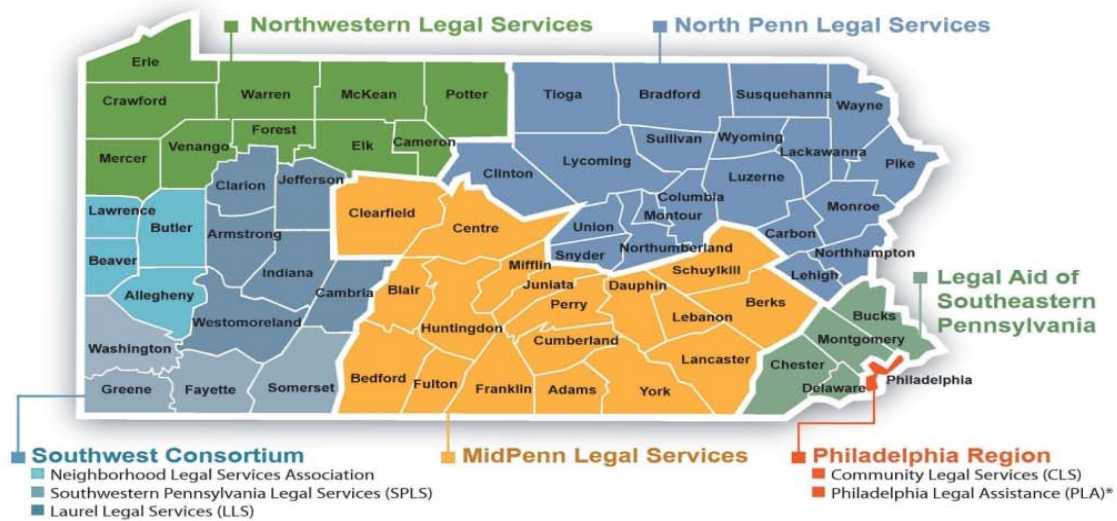
My greatest takeaway from my summer as a Martin Luther King, Jr., (MLK) intern was that the people who would call into the helpline are far from the portrayal painted of them in the media. They work just as hard to provide for their family, and should get quality healthcare like all others who can afford private healthcare. Being able to work with clients to overcome their problems but also systemic problems for those across Pennsylvania has motivated me to continue work in public interest.

Overall, I have learned tips and tools that will not only help me when I return to school in the fall, but will help me as a future lawyer. More so, I had the ability to learn from the clients. Even though they were plagued with a problem that seemed daunting, it did not stop them from laughing or having a positive outlook on life. These are the experiences that I would like to have throughout my career, not sitting in a stuffy office barely having conversations with the client. I discovered through my internship why I would like to be in public interest law. I would like to enter the field because these lawyers are given the chance to make a difference in lives on a daily basis. In all, I have learned that a lawyer can be the client's advocate from places other than the courtroom.





Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN)



Specialized Programs

These programs provide statewide legal expertise for addressing specialized legal problems or serving populations with special needs.

- Community Justice Project (CJP)
- Friends of Farmworkers (FoF)
- Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP)
- Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project ((PILP)
- Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP)
- Regional Housing Legal Services (RHLS)

*Non-PLAN Funded Program

Regional Programs

Community Legal Services
 Laurel Legal Services
 Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania
 MidPenn Legal Services
 Neighborhood Legal Services Association
 North Penn Legal Services
 Northwestern Legal Services
 Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services
 Philadelphia Legal Assistance

Specialty Programs

Community Justice Project
 Friends of Farmworkers
 Pennsylvania Health Law Project
 Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project
 Pennsylvania Utility Law Project
 Regional Housing Legal Services

Pennsylvania
Legal Aid Network

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