Pro Bono Program
2013 Newsletter

Letter from the Chair
BY SCOTT ROGERS

Oregon Law’s Pro Bono Program aspires to create a community in which the underprivileged have access to justice. Oregon law students are incredibly committed to public service, and are capable of using the law to benefit underserved organizations and individuals. The Pro Bono Executive Board aims to harness this enthusiasm and skill, and focus it towards those who need the law on their side.

This year the Pro Bono Executive Board has fostered student participation in a wide array of legal activities. Oregon law students not only have an enthusiasm for public service, but also a diversity of life experiences and interests. Consequently this year’s pro bono efforts have been especially extensive, reaching diverse groups in various parts of the county. Although most of this year’s work has occurred in Lane County, students have served throughout the state, and have spread across the country, from Texas to Washington, and various states in between. Throughout the United States, Oregon Law students have performed thousands of hours of uncompensated service, and a wide variety of groups have benefited from their efforts.

The Pro Bono Board also tries to increase student involvement locally through our in-house programs. This year, the StreetLaw Program, which aims to inform community members of their legal rights, has expanded into various areas of the law. Today we have law students teaching both English and Spanish speakers about landlord-tenant rights and debtor’s rights. Students have helped local Spanish-speakers prepare for the naturalization test. Finally, through the Second Chance program students help community members make changes in their lives that increase the likelihood that they find stable housing in the future.

A special thanks goes out to this years first-year board members. Ashley Carter, Laura MacMillan, Jason Pierson, and Katharine Semple are incredibly energetic and creative. These four students, along with all the law students who take it upon themselves to make the world a better place through pro bono work, will no doubt continue to expand the reach of the program into new areas of need. Finally, none of this would be possible without our amazing faculty advisor, Jane Steckbeck. Our enthusiasm for pro bono work would likely get lost in a pile of memos, briefs, casebooks and outlines if not for Jane’s dedication. Jane keeps us organized and on track, and constantly seeks out opportunities for service. I look forward to the future of our Pro Bono Program. I have no doubt that our law school’s penchant for pro bono work will grow, and as our students move on in their legal careers their desire to serve will persist.

Letter from the Chair
By Scott Rogers
Legal Aid: Lending Meaning to 1L Year

BY DEREK SANGSTON

Law school can be stressful, discouraging, and overwhelming. To be successful and to stay sane, law students need to find an outlet. Something that makes the long hours we spend studying each day more tolerable. Law students often find such outlets with exercise, happy hours, and other non-law school activities. While each of those activities definitely serves as a fine outlet for my peers and me, my favorite outlet is, surprisingly, the work I do for the Lane County Legal Aid and Advocacy Center (Legal Aid).

Since last August, I have volunteered at least once a week at Legal Aid. I mainly assist the office with the initial intake interviews it conducts with every prospective client. The prospective client is often very emotional because she is losing her home, her marriage is ending, and/or she is unable to receive the assistance she needs for her support and maintenance. I like to think of my role as an intake-interviewer as the first step towards the resolution of her legal troubles. While I am unable to give her any legal advice, I do help her by telling her about other legal services, presenting her claim to my supervisor to see if Legal Aid can take her case, and providing her with an avenue to voice her legal problems.

My experience at Legal Aid has been very positive. In fact, I often describe my experience at Legal Aid is the most worthwhile thing I have done while in law school. I constantly find that I cannot replace the feeling I get when I initially encounter a person that feels that she has lost everything and observe her outlook improve over the course of my conversation with her. That feeling is the reason I enrolled in law school. It is also the source of my budding desire to advocate for those otherwise without a voice.

I am additionally surprised by the degree my experience at Legal Aid has improved my ability to recognize legal issues and my development as an attorney. Despite my inability to give legal advice, the stories I hear from clients at Legal Aid has helped me recognize all sorts of legal problems. My experience at Legal Aid has also greatly improved my ability to not only converse with clients, but also communicate the necessary steps a client must take to reach her desired disposition. Each of those skills has already assisted me in law school and should help me when I am an attorney upon my graduation.

To think, when I first became a volunteer at Legal Aid, I just wanted another line on my resume. I never would have imagined that my experience at Legal Aid would become my favorite outlet from the stressful, discouraging, and overwhelming world of law school.

Respect through Advocacy

BY JACQUELYN BUNICK

I’ve come to learn that indigent clients are unlike most other defendants. As a court certified law student at the Public Defender Services of Lane County, when I meet a client, I am often the first person who has ever listened to them, stood up for them, or treated them with respect. In my opinion, that is what quality indigent defense comes down to – respect. Indigent defendants deserve respect, but far too often, and too easily, they are cast aside for being burdens on society. There is no hope for the fundamentals of our justice system if accused indigent people are condemned for both their crimes and their financial status.

From my time at the public defense office, I’ve learned an incredible amount about criminal law practice and the legal system. From the ins and outs of search and seizure law to how to conduct a jury trial, the practical experience and knowledge I’ve gained has been more than I could have hoped for. More importantly, however, I have gained insight into the lives of countless people – about how they get by on a daily basis, cope with addictions, hope to regain custody of their children, and regret messing up and getting into trouble. These details are what distinguish and personify my clients from “common criminals” and “defendants” and are what make them real people that I respect, and, at times, truly admire. Through the stories of their lives, my clients continually motivate me to want to work harder to be a stronger advocate for their rights and freedoms.

I recognize that it is optimistic to hope that I have an incredible impact on my clients and that when we part ways they head out into the world to lead reformed lives that will never land them back in court. While I would like to think that can happen, what I actually hope is that through being treated with respect, and seeing someone else advocate on their behalf, that my clients will come to understand that they are important – that they should respect others, but also respect themselves.
Climate scientists agree—we stand on the brink of a human-induced climate catastrophe. Our children have the most to lose, and if we do not act, they will inherit planetary conditions harsher than we can imagine. In response, leading climate scientists established a prescription that would stabilize our climate. To prevent catastrophic impacts, our scientists have determined that immediate emissions reductions and massive reforestation must occur to return atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) to 350 parts per million (ppm) by 2100.¹ Yet our governments have made no real progress toward this scientific prescription. So youth are stepping up. Young people cannot vote and do not have the resources to lobby their government, so in May 2011 they brought unprecedented legal action to protect our atmosphere and their future. I have the honor of supporting these young people through my work at the Eugene-based, non-profit organization Our Children’s Trust (OCT).

Through the TRUST Campaign, OCT works to empower youth to share their stories of climate impacts by providing them with opportunities to have their voices heard. OCT is helping young people get before judges, decision-makers, media outlets, and the broader public to increase awareness about the legal and moral obligation our government has to youth. Support from attorneys is critical to ensure young people can fully exercise their right to participate in our democracy. This attorney support, much of it pro bono, has enabled youth to bring legal action (through administrative petitions for rulemaking and lawsuits) in all 50 states and against the federal government in an effort that is called Atmospheric Trust Litigation (ATL).

ATL seeks to hold governments accountable to return the atmosphere to the safe climate zone for the benefit of both current and future generations. ATL is rooted in the Public Trust Doctrine, which holds that it is the duty of government to protect essential natural resources for its citizens and future generations. The sovereign obligation to protect air and water has been held by government since time immemorial. ATL suits call upon the judiciary to compel the other branches of government to fulfill this fiduciary obligation by creating a comprehensive climate recovery plan for rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions to the levels prescribed by the best available science.

Supporting the amazing young people involved in the TRUST Campaign and working with the attorneys representing them has been incredibly rewarding and a unique learning experience. Because OCT is a grassroots non-profit with limited funding, my work during law school (primarily unpaid) has been important in helping OCT achieve its goals. My work with OCT has also furthered my experience in and passion for public interest environmental advocacy. I now serve as OCT’s Legal Coordinator and will continue to do so after graduation.

You can meet some of the incredible youth involved in the TRUST Campaign in these award-winning short films, which were co-produced by OCT: ourchildrenstrust.org/trust-films.

Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation Program

BY KALYNN ALLEY

The Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation program A.K.A Second Chance is a program funded by St. Vincent De Paul of Lane County. The 10-week program is designed to support individuals with a criminal or rental history that makes finding adequate housing difficult. The program teaches valuable life skills and legal knowledge to help participants navigate through the legal system, secure housing, and prevent future evictions.

While in law school, Oregon graduate Shelly Aschenbrenner ’12 further developed Second Chance’s legal related classes and built an on-going partnership between St. Vincent De Paul and the pro bono program. Recently, the program was passed on to 2L Jacqui Quaré. Quaré has recruited and trained a strong foundation of student volunteers from UO Law that now teach weekly classes on subjects like landlord tenant and fair housing law. In addition, Quaré has gone above and beyond with the course material by creating games, role-plays, and interactive activities for program participants.

The program is making a huge impact on our community. Participants from the program are using the knowledge to recognize and report discriminatory, fraudulent, and other illegal practices in the rental community. Further, the program participants are securing housing by applying new skills like how to make reasonable accommodation request to how to present themselves when applying for a rental.

“Second Chance helps people without stable housing find power within themselves to make changes that will remove the barriers they face in finding stable housing and become the ideal tenants that landlords seek.”

www.svpd.us

Second Chance
Renter Rehabilitation

BY JAMES BUNTS & CHRIS JIRGES

The University of Oregon School of Law has shaped a tradition of student commitment to public service that we endeavor to continue. As law students this is certainly challenging as our time is filled with many tasks and responsibilities. But life as an attorney will not likely be any easier. Now is the time to make it a habit to give back and support our community. Donating only three hours per week during our time at law school would amount to donating ninety hours per school year, surpassing the Oregon Bar standard for practicing attorneys.

Tuesday nights with St. Vincent DePaul’s Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation have been a routine for us. Our involvement with the program has been teaching four Renter’s Rights classes: Fair Housing Law, Landlord-Tenant Law, Conflict Resolution, and Landlord Expectations. These classes are designed to empower renters to assert their legal rights, establish positive landlord relationships, and protect themselves from discrimination. The program helps resolve homelessness and helps individuals become self-sufficient in Eugene and Springfield such that 94% of Second Chance participants secure permanent housing within sixty days of graduating.

Our involvement with the community has been greatly rewarding. We have served people from all walks of life by providing the tools they need to improve their future livelihood. Throughout our participation with Second Chance, we have gained invaluable experience learning about landlord-tenant and housing law. Providing simple and easy to understand descriptions of how the legal process works has been a refreshing change of pace for us and our students. While law school classroom discussions hinge on the use of appropriate terms of art, Second Chance classroom discussions emphasize the use of plain language. Additionally our listening and discussing students’ experiences seems to bolster their confidence and outlook in making fundamental positive life changes. Bridging our law school education to everyday application to help people seek justice has been immensely fulfilling for both of us.

It is easy to forget the reasons why we came to law school when the focus is on reading cases and preparing study outlines. Second Chance has been a weekly reminder that we are here to advocate for equity, not just to earn good grades. Pro bono work is the opportunity to do that by getting out in the community. We should not wait to give back to the community. Our values are formed in the present, not in future promises.
Serving our Seniors
BY SALLY CLAYCOMB

Many law students, including myself, come to law school ready to work hard, but also to begin interacting with and helping people. However, two things became rapidly clear to me after just a few months back in school. First, though law school gives us the education to interact and help people, it does not offer many opportunities, at least at first, to do so. Not surprisingly, law school was so overwhelming that I felt even more insulated from the people I wished to work with than before. Second, in order to succeed as a lawyer it is necessary to have excellent people skills, skills that I had not needed before.

Luckily, I found an opportunity that helped mitigate both of these issues. For almost a year, I spent one or two Saturdays a month doing intake work for the Senior Legal Service. Through this service senior citizens living in Lane County can come and get a brief, free legal consultation with an attorney. My task was to interview the clients to get pertinent information, such as name, address, etc., but also to begin to get an understanding of the legal issue for which they had come for advice. I would then give the attorney an overview of the issue before bringing in the client.

I figured out the basics pretty quickly, as it really just involved filling in the blanks on a form. However, I soon discovered just how much skill and delicacy it takes to ask people such personal questions – questions about finances, personal relationships, living situations – and all this came before asking about their legal question. I then asked them why they had come. Sometimes it was hard to get the clients to talk, but sometimes it was hard to stay with just their legal questions. Each story I heard opened my eyes a little more to the world around me, and gave me a little more empathy to bring with me to the next interview. My experiences not only exposed me to new legal issues, but helped me learn to listen to and encourage conversation with each client.

Though working directly with the very population I wanted to help was my favorite part of my experience, spending Saturdays at the Senior Legal Service had other benefits as well. Each week I met and spoke with a different attorney from the area, which gave me greater confidence in interacting with the legal community. Further, listening to stories and attempting to pick out the legal issues gave my education within the classroom new meaning. Finally, I was occasionally allowed (with the client’s consent) to sit in and listen to the advice from the attorney. Overall, working at the Senior Legal Service augmented my legal education, but more importantly helped me being to understand the many issues facing elders in our community today, and to be a small part of finding a solution.

Citizenship Class
BY KILLIAN DOHERTY

This semester UO law students began instructing a citizenship course at the Centro Latino Americano for members of the community who intend to apply for citizenship and wish to study before taking the citizenship exam. The curriculum for this 12-class citizenship course was developed by Karla Ward of the Centro Latino Americano, who invited bilingual law students to help instruct the course this semester.

The citizenship course has been a great opportunity for bilingual law students to share their knowledge of the Constitution and United States’ history while learning more about the needs of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the United States and the process of obtaining citizenship. Although there are only four students in the citizenship course this semester, they all come to class eager to learn more about the history and legal framework of the United States, which is foreign and novel to them yet so normal and familiar to us American law students. Although the students often struggle to understand all the material, every day there are moments where they perceptibly grasp something new, often times accompanied with a great smile.
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