

Davina Mayo-Dunham

Fordham Law Feerick Center For Social Justice

For eight weeks, I had the opportunity to participate in the Summer Legal Fellow Program at Fordham Law Feerick Center For Social Justice. The Center's mission is to fight poverty through partnership and help reduce the 'justice gap' for individuals of low income and marginalized communities. At the Feerick Center I had the pleasure to engage in the many programs that the center has to offer to combat social justice issues through hands on work and had a number of research opportunities. I gained a lot of knowledge and skills that I can carry with me to any future work setting. This experience has allowed me to improve my interpersonal, interviewing, and communication skills. I was also armed me with the skills of cite checking and paying attention to detail, while also getting exposure to the legal field.

During my time at the Ferrick Center I was able to attend many unique programs, projects and meetings. For example, the Feerick Center has the Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office (CLARO), which helps combat economic abuse and protect economic right for the citizens within three of the five boroughs of New York City. CLARO operates in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx. CLARO is an Access to Justice Program that provides limited scope services from supervised volunteer attorneys to assist with consumer debt issues. I was able to conduct intakes which allowed me to improve my interviewing skills. I was also able to observe lawyers helping the clients and become more aware of how complicated some of the cases can be and leaning the different documents such a motion to dismiss and order to show cause. Most importantly, I got to see the impact the consumer debt issues on low-income individuals and people of color, and how hard it is for this population to seek legal help, due to the limited number of resources in their community. I also learned about Domestic Violence (DV) CLARO by reading the denied report and attending the DV Consumer working group meetings. The denied report is an advocacy tool which goals are trying to expand legal services, training for judicial personnel (Judges and Court Attorneys) and lastly to update educational materials for pro se litigants. I had the opportunity to attend a meeting with Justice Medlson who heads the Office for Justice Initiatives, with the executive director of the Feerick Center Dora

Galacatos to express the new issue of DV survivors facing economic abuse. Economic Abuse is a tool to try to maintain control of the survivors life by obtaining credit cards, mortgages, stealing personal information that ends up destroying the survivors credit report. Due to this the survivor is not able to obtain housing and makes it very difficult to start a secure financial future. I thought that this meeting was very productive, Justice Mendelson was very receptive to the problem and expressed how she was unaware that these two separate issues are now merging together. At the end of the meeting she advised the group to create a list of ask for recommendations the group would like to see put in place to combat the problem. Another intern and myself were given the responsibility to draft a thank you letter with the list of asks. I found this project presented us with a useful skill because it allows to follow up with the individual the meeting took place, while also expressing how grateful you are for the time you were given to express your concerns.

All the interns were given a chance to observe NYLAG Volunteer Lawyer for the Day (VLFD) in New York Civil Court. VLFD uses volunteer attorneys to provide limited scope representation, file a notice of appearance just for that day and appear before the court to deal with the opposing counsel. The clients can come back as many times as they want and the services are free. I thought this was an amazing experience personally because I have never been exposed to the court system in action and it was really helpful to see. I was able to observe the attorneys talk to the other side (plaintiffs) and see how they were able to negotiate a deal that is manageable for the litigants. During my observation I got to see an identity theft case and see how helpful was for the litigant to have the VLFD attorney.

During the eight weeks, the other interns and I were given many research opportunities. The other interns and I were given areas of research for the AEP report in the NYSBA news letter. The AEP program also known as the Attorney Emeritus Program, recruits, places, and supports senior lawyers who commit to doing 60 hours of pro bono work during a two year period for legal services providers or court pro bono programs. I was responsible for senior wellness and research on the benefits of volunteering for senior lawyers and the different programs that offer volunteer opportunities for seniors. I was very honored when my research was used to draft the NYSBA newsletter. In 2020 the Program is celebrating its 10th Year

anniversary. The other interns and I were responsible for conducting a national survey of state Emeritus programs to identify best practices and exceptional examples of success. I was responsible for calling nine of the fifty states. This helped me develop skills in time management because we needed to get the calls done by a certain time. I gained skills in how to research contact information in advance, how to organize the information and prioritize questions. I learned how to be strategic about when to call people and how eloquently word the information so the associations are interested in sharing their thoughts and best practices.

The other interns and I also conducted research on the Migrant Protection Protocols also known as the remain in Mexico campaign that was put in place by the Trump Administration in January of 2019. Dora Galacatos heads the Dilly Pro Bono Project which enables volunteers to provide limited scope assistance to asylum seeking women detained with children at the nation's largest detention center, the South Texas Family Residential Center near the south Texas border. We were tasked with the job of reviewing the court cases, finding press release information, and locating any media or updated coverage of the issue. It was mind boggling to not only see the whole process in full circle but to also hear about the challenges first hand from attorneys who are in Mexico working with asylum seekers through a conference call I and the other interns got to participate on.

As someone who is passionate about social justice and making sure that people of marginalized communities feel empowered and are provided with the necessary resources to have access to proper justice, it was amazing to see the overlap between social work and the law. I gained a lot of professional skills, such as organization through agendas and minutes, time management skills, and also communication skills. I also got a taste of what it is like working for a law journal by given an opportunity to bluebook and check citations for a law school literature review. Lastly, I appreciated how I was able to work with clients in CLARO conducting intakes while also being exposed to the legal process. It showed me that lawyers can have a positive impact on people's lives even though there is that stereotype that they are seen as not willing to help. Furthermore, I am still unsure of whether I want to get both my MSW/ JD but this internship has reiterated the passion I have for working in the area of social justice.

