

August 14, 2011

Exit Memo

Diana Marin

Working at FLS this summer has been one of the most rewarding experiences. At FLS I was able to do exactly what I wanted and more. I interacted with clients frequently. I learned about new areas of the law. I worked with incredibly dedicated, knowledgeable, and kind attorneys, who mentored and guided me through some of the more complicated aspects of representing farmworkers. I took on the typical legal internship assignments: researched, drafted memos and briefs, interviewed clients, while also experiencing outreach for the first time.

Conducting outreach in Michigan was a unique experience that is at times hard to describe to those who have not done it. Driving through rural Michigan and trying to find workers was a mix bag of anticipation, some disappointment (when workers were not found), and relief and excitement (when encountering large groups of workers). Each outreach session was an opportunity to hear workers tell their stories and for us to give a mini “know your rights” session.

Outreach challenged me to use my client interviewing skills in ways that are not typically taught in law school. I gained new tools to reach clients from all backgrounds and education levels. In addition, I picked up on many new farm work related Spanish vocabulary, something that would have been unlikely had I stayed in NYC. Outreach also allowed me to get to know my fellow interns and in the process learn from them. I worked with law students who were sincerely dedicated to public interest work and to helping farmworkers. Similar to migrant farmworkers, we came from all walks of life and brought our unique perspectives to the work. We formed a special bond as we stumbled through our training and first outreach evenings.

The most rewarding part of outreach was meeting farmworker families. The workers I met and spoke to were kind and generous with their time. Even after a long day in the fields, some would ask us to come into their homes and would talk to us candidly about their work and issues. They were inspiring in their ability to deal with the hard labor and isolation of farm work. They did not pity themselves or their situation. These workers’ humbleness and fortitude pushed me to use my legal skills and education creatively this summer. Although the legal help we could provide was sometimes limited, whatever assistance we did give was extremely important to them. They were always grateful to receive visitors and get an FLS calendar.

Despite all of the cases I handled and the outreach I conducted during my 10 weeks at FLS, I feel I received a lot more from the organization and the workers, than my short time allowed me to give back. Without hesitation I highly recommend working at FLS for a summer. The experience is distinct and what is gained as a law student is invaluable, especially for those who are interested in civil legal services and/or immigrant workers’ rights.