

September 3, 2012

As an intern, I met with clients when they came to our office with problems, but a great deal of my time was spent going on outreach to migrant housing to meet with potential clients and advise them of their rights. Outreach was an amazing experience. I grew up in Michigan, and my mother worked for the Department of Labor inspecting migrant housing, so I had some idea that migrant and seasonal farmworkers were living in horrible conditions. However, it wasn't until I went on outreach, saw the conditions myself, and met with clients that I really understood and could empathize with their situation. I truly believe that if more people were to perform outreach as we did, or even go to migrant housing, great changes would be made for the migrant population. Outreach gave me a profound insight into the population that I didn't know I was missing previously.

I worked on several projects that were extremely interesting throughout the summer. For the entire ten weeks, I researched the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration, its potential deficiencies, and whether our office may have grounds to file a complaint against the program for its deficiencies. This project opened my eyes not only to the specific deficiencies of the program, but also the general plight of government inspection programs and their effect on the migrant population. In many cases, the government's failings resulted in grave injury to our clients.

I also helped gather information and documents to amend the tax returns for several workers in Michigan on foreign work, or H-2A, visas. This project allowed me to speak with clients on a regular basis and build relationships with them. Through this project, I also drafted an informational flier explaining the tax rights of H-2A workers, to pass out to the workers, and an open letter to H-2A employers explaining changes in tax withholding laws.

Perhaps the most powerful experience of my internship occurred one week from the end of the program. We were called out to a hotel where a group of 20 migrant workers were living to perform emergency outreach; the group of 20 workers we met with had been stranded in Michigan without food or money after their crew leader stole their pay checks and their transportation home. Within a few hours, we were able to contact an emergency agency and get food for the entire group, find transportation resources so they could get back to their permanent homes, and get information from them in order to work on substantive wage and housing complaints. This one group had every issue that I had worked on over the summer, and this experience really epitomized my summer.

Overall, I had an amazing experience. I worked with and for amazing people that really care about the work they are doing and the people they are helping. The experience has cemented my desire to pursue a career in public interest law and continue this type of work for the long-term.

Sincerely,
Rachel Brown
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