

EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS

2007 SUMMER CORPS

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Early public interest experience for law students and new lawyers leads to a lifelong commitment to public service. Equal Justice Works has created and continues to develop a continuum of opportunity for law students and new lawyers. Learn more at www.equaljusticeworks.org.

Equal Justice Works Summer Corps

Cait Clarke, Director of Public Interest Law Opportunities

Cole McMahon, Senior Program Manager

Sarah Jayne Dipert, Program Coordinator

Summer Corps is an [AmeriCorps](#)-funded program that each year provides hundreds of law students with the opportunity to dedicate their summer to public service at a qualifying legal project at a nonprofit, public interest organization.

From educating elderly residents in Mississippi about identity theft, to creating a free and reduced fee legal clinic for the LGBT community in Missouri; from educating Cantonese-speakers in San Mateo, California about their health care access rights, to helping a community in North Carolina fight the construction of a mega-landfill in their town, in 2007 Equal Justice Works Summer Corps members provided crucial legal assistance to communities across the country. They give their time and talents in exchange for a modest educational grant, but many discover that the true rewards are in public service work experience and in making lasting differences in the lives of others.

In the 2007 Summer Corps program, 347 members served at 233 organizations in 37 states and the District of Columbia, and completed over 119,824 service hours. The following report is a compilation of data gathered from 337 of these 347 members (97 percent reporting).

OUTPUTS

The following outputs track the program's progress toward its performance measures, which are reported to the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Output 1: Direct Legal Assistance

Summer Corps members expanded the delivery of assistance by providing direct legal services to 15,360 low-income individuals.

“My most meaningful experience occurred in my work with an HIV-positive man appealing his denial of SSI/SSDI benefits. He had a combination of physical and mental impairments and had been involved in the disability and appeals process for two years. He was frustrated with the entire process and viewed it as just one more obstacle set up against him in a long line of traumatic and unfortunate events in his life. His hearing date was set while I was working on his case and he seemed hopeful. I worked with the client to get his case ready for hearing. He was eager to help and tracked down missing medical records and delivered various forms to his doctors. I prepared his brief and updated medical records and forms and sent them to the ALJ assigned his case. A week before I left EBCLC, the client was granted a fully favorable decision on the record, without the necessity of a hearing. It was a great experience to call the client and let him know the good news. He was so happy, he was speechless.”

Amy Killelea, East Bay Community Law Center, Berkeley, Calif.

Output 2: Collaboration with Community-Based Organizations

Summer Corps members reached 1,185 community- and faith-based organizations serving the needs of low-income individuals or communities across the country by participating in 702 community education presentations or outreach activities benefiting 29,806 individuals.

“In addition to my work on cases, I coordinated a pro bono service week for ten incoming law students on the issue of predatory lending and foreclosures. We partnered with other community organizations to draft a phone survey...We offered two half-day sessions of training for the students on public interest law, confidentiality, fair housing, and landlord tenant law. The students then called the individuals identified by community organizations as having potentially predatory loans. The students talked to approximately 90 people. I think they learned a lot from hearing about these peoples’ experiences with their home loans. Also, Legal Aid and other organizations will be able to use what we found out from the surveys in advocacy efforts.”

Sarah Weiss, Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis, Minneapolis, Minn.

Output 3: Development of Written Resources

Summer Corps members enhanced the capacity of their host organizations by researching, creating, translating, updating or otherwise working on 693 community education or outreach publications benefiting an estimated 32,364 individuals.

“Medicare Rights Center’s most notable feature is its consumer hotline. Medicare consumers can call and receive advice or consult with knowledgeable individuals regarding any aspect of Medicare. All of the legal department’s casework also flows from the intake conducted over the consumer hotline. I updated and developed new sections for a manual that is used by all the hotline workers when consulting with clients, [including] overviews of the legal appeals process for Medicare coverage, updated information regarding the relevant law, examples of common problems that consumers may encounter and possible avenues for resolution of these problems. The manual acts as a roadmap for caseworkers as they aid clients.”

Kiran Gore, Medicare Rights Center, New York, N.Y.

Output 4: Member Skills Development

All respondents (100 percent) reported that they gained practical legal skills as a result of their 2007 Summer Corps experience, with percentages gaining particular legal skills as follows:

- Legal Research: 97.62 percent
- Legal Writing: 93.15 percent
- Client Interviews: 89.88 percent
- Intake Interviews: 74.40 percent
- Representing Clients in Administrative Proceedings: 36.90 percent
- Representing Clients in Court Proceedings: 36.61 percent
- Other Legal Skills: 31.85 percent

“This summer taught me how to be a better client advocate within the legal system. While I believe my legal research and writing skills were strengthened, client interaction, which was not a part of my first year curriculum, was truly developed over this summer.”

Karolina Lyznik, Farmworker Legal Services, Bangor, Mich.

Nearly all (99 percent) of respondents agreed with the statement: My summer experience has developed or strengthened my belief that I can use my legal skills to improve community conditions.

“Advocating on behalf of those with no voice, who have been marginalized and are unable to afford legal representation, is an important way that I can impact the community I serve.”

Jarrett Knox, Legal Aid Bureau, Chicago, Ill.

“I believe that the greatest way that I used my legal skills to improve the Lynn community was by empowering its citizens. As an intake worker I was able to actively listen to people’s problems and provide information, feedback, and advice. I also wrote legal memoranda to be used in the defense of clients who otherwise would not be able to afford quality legal representation and provided a voice in the legal system to them. When people feel like someone cares enough to listen and support them, they feel empowered – and empowering people is where positive change begins.”

Jason Langberg, Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts, Lynn, Mass.

Nearly all (98 percent) reported continued and enhanced commitment to public interest work.

“This was the best experience of my life. I am absolutely inspired to continue this line of work. Without the funding from Summer Corps, it would not have been possible.”

*Jessica Goldman, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund,
Washington, D.C.*

What Summer Corps Members Say about Summer Corps

“This is an amazing program, and is sorely needed for law students. I feel like we all have these lofty ideals when we enter law school, and then get sidetracked by the shock from loans and such. It’s programs like these that make it possible for students to remember why they wanted to be lawyers in the first place. Thank you.”

Ashley Luick, New Orleans Legal Assistance, New Orleans, La.

“This is the first time that I have begun to see the “forest from the trees” as they say in law school. That is, knowledge gained from contracts, civil procedure, business associations, commercial law, criminal law, and legal ethics has finally manifested itself into real-life, important situations. I now see the value of a legal education and its applicability to the fight for social justice.”

Michelle Mendez, CASA of Maryland, Baltimore, Md.

“The program was a win-win situation for both me and my host organization: I got a chance to work in a job that reaffirmed my desire to work in public interest law and my host organization benefited from my research, writing and client interaction. This experience has helped me regain my focus and remember why I came to law school in the first place.”

Hannalore Merritt, Northwest Justice Center, Bremerton, Wash.

“My experience with Summer Corps was excellent. I gained lots of useful knowledge and practical experience while being able to help people that truly needed and appreciated it.”

Jenessa Hicks, North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Oxford, Miss.

KATRINA SUMMER CORPS

As part of the ongoing Equal Justice Works Katrina Initiative, the 2007 Summer Corps included 34 Katrina Summer Corps members. These members provided legal services to those in the Gulf Coast region affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Katrina Summer Corps members addressed a range of immediate and systemic needs that resulted in the wake of the disasters including: interviewing and counseling clients facing eviction from FEMA trailers; informing elderly public housing residents about writing wills; assisting clients file applications for aid and appeals; helping clients complete Road Home applications; and creating and distributing flyers on housing rights in rapidly gentrifying communities.

- Number of host organizations: 16
- States: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, New York, Washington D.C.
- Direct assistance: 1,266 individuals received direct legal services
- Org collaboration: Members collaborated with 79 community organizations

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Summer Corps members were surveyed regarding their experience with Equal Justice Works and the Summer Corps program as well as their career goals.

Equal Justice Works Staff

- Average rating of assistance from Equal Justice Works Staff (out of 10): 9.31
- Percentage that rated Staff assistance 8 or higher: 90.75

Member Orientation Guide

- Average rating of the 2007 Member Orientation Guide (out of 10): 8.68
- Percentage that rated the Guide 8 or higher: 82.39

Host Organization

- Percentage that would recommend their host organization to other law students seeking summer internships: 99.40

Overall Experience

- Average rating of overall experience with the 2007 Summer Corps program (out of 10): 9.07
- Percentage that rated experience 8 or higher: 91
- Percentage that would recommend the Summer Corps program to other law students: 99.7

Long-Term Impact on the Public Interest Field

- Nearly three out four members (74 percent) plan to devote their career to public service, in the public or government sector.
- An additional 26 percent plan to provide pro bono legal services to low-income and/ or underserved communities during their career.

HOST ORGANIZATION FEEDBACK

Summer Corps members provide invaluable capacity-building power to hundreds of stretched and stressed legal services organizations each year. While Summer Corps members are given an environment in which to learn, organizations are given the ability to serve greater numbers of individuals and to create and complete new projects.

In 2007, 233 organizations served as host sites for the Summer Corps program. Those who served as supervisors for Summer Corps members were asked about their experiences and 89 responded. The following information comes from that survey.

Program Evaluation

- Average rating of Summer Corps member (out of 10): 9.07
- Average rating of Equal Justice Works (out of 10): 8.84

What Host Organizations say about Summer Corps

“As a direct result of having this law student support, we were able to offer legal services to more clients than we otherwise would have been able to serve, and we were able to offer to perform more types of services than we ordinarily would have been able to offer.”

*Cambridge & Somerville Legal Services office of Greater Boston Legal Services,
Cambridge, Mass.*

“[Our Summer Corps member] was an invaluable resource for our office. He was committed and professional. He greatly allowed us to expand our services, particularly in the area of immigration and landlord tenant law by meeting with clients and performing investigative and research tasks that our staff does not have the capacity to do. He also took great initiative in working with our community partners and in participating in bigger picture issues impacting our community.”

Public Law Center, Santa Ana, Calif.

“The [Summer Corps members] provided necessary support to our new program. They were able to create documents, systems, and protocols that have made the program more efficient. The students also were able to assist with client interviews and case management. They were able to give clients direct and long-term attention, and this would not have been done if they were not with our program.”

Homeboy Industries, Los Angeles, Calif.

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