

The Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. (LSNF) is a non-profit organization which provides legal services to low-income Escambia and Santa Rosa County residents. It focuses on landlord/tenant, fair housing, bankruptcy and guardianship areas of law. During my internship, the staff consisted of one supervising attorney (Leslie Powell), two staff attorneys (Susan Stanford & Eli Friedman), one outreach coordinator (Judy Naler) and an office manager/receptionist (Lola Thompson). The working environment is informal and everyone is called by his/her first name.

LSNF on average has 75 new clients per month. In order for a potential client to be provided with legal services, he/she must fill out an intake sheet at the front desk. After the intake sheet has been filled out, Lola then gave the sheet to Leslie, who then determined if the case would be pursued further by one of the staff attorneys or if the client received an advice letter.

If the case was pursued by an attorney, I was asked to call the client to get more background information. For three primary reasons, I feel that this was the hardest part of the job. The first reason is that a lot of the clients were unfamiliar with how a legal office works, so they did not understand that I did not have 45 minutes to listen to their entire life history, which usually had nothing to do with the legal issue of their case. The second reason is the emotional client. There were a number of clients that as soon as they heard that I was calling from Legal Services, they would start to cry.

Both of these situations occurred during the first week of my internship, and I asked Eli, one of the attorneys, what I could have done to make the call shorter or to prevent the client from crying. He said that I did everything "just fine," and that Legal

Services are considered to be a community service, and are expected to do a considerable amount of handholding.

Lastly, there were instances when the client was drunk. The way I dealt with this was if I knew the client had been drinking when I called him/her, I asked the client two or three questions and ended the conversation. I would then recall the client at 8:30 the following morning and ask him/her all the questions that needed to be answered.

In addition to calling the clients, there were times when the client would be asked to come into the office and speak to the attorney directly. When this occurred, I sat in on the interview with the attorney. Most of the interviewing went routinely; however, there was a level of frustration which accompanied this process. In the majority of the cases, the client failed to get the lease in writing, or failed to get receipts for rent that they paid for in cash. Essentially they failed to protect themselves in the most basic way. When asked why they did not receive any receipts, they responded that they were dealing with "friendly people" and "trusted them" and "didn't feel that they needed to get a receipt."

As noted above, the LSNF receives, on average, 75 new clients per month. Because of this the attorneys issue a large quantity of advice letters. When I drafted these letters, I used a basic letter template and added specialized advice given to me by the attorney. I have to admit, there were days when all I did was draft letters and this became a tedious and mind-numbing experience; however, it proved to be beneficial when at my new job the attorney accepted an eviction case, but was unfamiliar with the requirements of the eviction process. I had become quite familiar with the subject, and could tell her what statute she needed to read and the requirements of the eviction process.

The biggest learning curve I experienced at LSNF had to do with two intestate probate cases. This was the biggest challenge because I had not taken the Probate Law class yet and Leslie, who was in charge of both cases, was a little rusty with regard to intestate cases. We quickly learned that reading the statute was not a big help, this area really focuses more on procedural rather than statutory law. Because I realized that I needed specialized help with this subject, I decided to contact Professor Jason Mosley in the Legal Studies department. I went to his office and explained the situation and he gave me two books (The Probate Process From Start to Finish in Florida and Florida Probate: Beyond the Basics) to help us get started. These books saved us! It helped Leslie to decide if we would be doing a summary or formal administration and let us know that we would have to do personal representation, formal, homestead and personal property notices. In addition, they also gave us the all important deadlines that we needed to ensure that everything would be filed on time.

Even with the books to help us, we still ran into a problem. We filed a Petition for Personal Representative with the court. We knew that for anyone who had received the notice, there was a 20 day period in which they had to respond (challenge) to the notice. The 20 day period had passed and we did not receive a signed copy for the judge. I called the Judge Allen's judicial assistant and she told me that the judge had not received it. I went to the Probate Department to find out what had happened to our case. It was only then I was told that the green certified return receipts which is returned to you after the recipient has received his/her copy, had to be submitted to the probate department. Only after they receive proof of receipt, will they start to get the case ready so that it may be brought up to the judge's office – Wish someone had told me that!!!


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Another large aspect of Legal Services is their community outreach program. Because they receive their funding via a grant, they are required to educate the public on the services that they provide. I was asked by Judy, the outreach coordinator, to help her at one of the functions. The event was sponsored by the Japanese/American Heritage Association and was held at The Senior Center in Pensacola. We set up a table, answered questions and passed out brochures. There were about 35 vendors there that day, so it gave me an opportunity to meet different organizations around the Pensacola area. In addition, Consul General Hiroshi Yamaguchi from the Japanese Embassy in Miami was there and I got to meet him.

Overall, my experience at Legal Services did help put into practical use the concepts I learned in my classes at UWF. Instead of standing in front of a scanner for hours on end, I was drafting motions, pleadings, and advice letters. I became more familiar with regulations concerning government supplemented housing programs and Fair Housing discrimination. I became painfully aware that even though you may have a statute and the Florida Rules of Civil Procedure book in front of you, you still can run into problems so it is best to make the Clerk of Court your new best friend.

However, the best thing about doing an internship at Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. is the people. While I could go to Lola or Judy with any question about office procedures and they dropped everything to help me, the most important thing to any intern is being able to go to an attorney with as many questions as you have, without fear of reprimand, to get answers, and I was able to do that - EVERY SINGLE TIME!!!