

EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS

2009 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

Martin Costello, Program Manager

Eric Harsch, Program Assistant

Jessica Meller, Recovery Program Assistant

Summer Corps is an **AmeriCorps**-funded program that provides hundreds of law students each year with the opportunity to dedicate their summer to public service working on a qualifying legal project at a nonprofit public interest organization.

In 2009, Equal Justice Works Summer Corps members provided crucial legal assistance to communities across the country, with 373 members serving in 42 states. They gave their time and talents in exchange for a modest educational award while discovering that the true rewards of a public service work experience are in making lasting differences in the lives of others.

The following report is a compilation of data gathered from these members.

SUMMER CORPS STANDOUT AWARDS

Equal Justice Works launched the Summer Corps Standout Awards for members in the 2009 class. These awards recognize those demonstrating extraordinary commitment and/or use of an innovative approach to meet their clients' needs. The 2009 Summer Corps Standout winners were:

- **Heather O'Connor**, Roger Williams University School of Law
South Coastal Communities Legal Services
- **Jeffrey Shneidman**, Boston University School of Law
Neighborhood Legal Services
- **Leonard Aslanian**, University of Miami School of Law
HIV & AIDS Legal Services Alliance, Inc.
- **Jennifer Garber**, Seattle University School of Law
Center for Children & Youth Justice
- **Michael Shaffer**, University of Michigan Law School
Michigan State Appellate Defender Office
- **Scott Burrill**, University of Iowa College of Law
Alaska Public Defender Agency (Kenai)
- **Stephen Scriber**, Duke University School of Law
North Mississippi Rural Legal Services
- **Shari Scalone**, Benjamin Cardozo School of Law
Legal Aid Society – Criminal Defense Division
- **Tracy Tripp**, Drexel University School of Law
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

In addition to the Summer Corps Standout program, other 2009 Summer Corps class highlights include:

- **Scott Burrill**, University of Iowa College of Law, was awarded the 2009 Equal Justice Works Exemplary Public Service Award for a Student.
- **Meagan Mirtenbaum**, University of North Carolina School of Law, was named to the Equal Justice Works Board of Directors for a three-year term.

AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT

In May 2009, the Corporation for National & Community Service announced that Equal Justice Works would receive a \$1.2 million **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** grant to support an additional 30 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and 305 Summer Corps law students for the summers of 2009 and 2010 to expand legal services to victims of the economic crisis.

In the Summer of 2009, 59 of the 373 Summer Corps members were funded through the Recovery Act and worked on projects focused on helping families most affected by the foreclosure crisis and other housing issues. Other Summer Corps projects funded through the Recovery Act targeted issue areas such as access to health care, veterans' rights, homelessness, and financial literacy.

- Summer Corps Recovery Members provided direct legal assistance to the following number of individuals during the summer: 3,126
- Summer Corps Recovery Members provided services related to home foreclosures and housing assistance programs to the following number of clients: 641
- Summer Corps Recovery Members worked with the following number of community-based organizations during the summer: 143
- Summer Corps Recovery Members led or participated in the following number of community education presentations or outreach activities during the summer: 93
- A total of the following number of people attended these presentations or outreach activities and heard or received information: 1,925

GREAT STORIES FROM RECOVERY SUMMER CORPS MEMBERS



Heather O'Connor Roger Williams University School of Law
South Coastal Counties Legal Services

South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS) serves Fall River, New Bedford, Brockton and Taunton, Massachusetts. Our work this summer has focused primarily on the effect of the current foreclosure crisis on tenants in multi-family units. Between these four cities, there were 230 multi-unit properties foreclosed upon, put up for auctions without bidders, and then bought by the mortgage holder's bank within the past year. The banks then evict the tenants and the properties sit empty for an average of 8-9 months.

Although many people feel as though being evicted – or being threatened with eviction – is something to be ashamed of, they need to realize they are not alone in this devastating economic backlash. In Fall River, for example, one client had moved into her apartment in January and weeks later an auction was held on her front lawn. She did not receive notice of a new owner so she continued to mail her rent check to her initial landlord. She called our office

after a bank representative had knocked on her door and warned her that if she did not evacuate immediately they would evict her. In New Bedford, a single mother read one of our letters and confronted her landlord about the pending foreclosure. In response, he demanded that she be out of the apartment within a week. With a newborn and no local family in the area, she had nowhere to go. I informed her she had the right to remain in her home, and that only a judge could order her to leave.

It is very satisfying to know that what I do everyday gives others hope. SCCLS is coming in at a time where people feel the rug has been pulled out from under them. I have had the pleasure of standing by some of these people and fighting to guard their rights to ensure some stability during this tough time. There is accomplishment and empowerment for me and for my clients when they realize they cannot be pushed around by a bank or a landlord that is seeking to relinquish their responsibility.



Stephen Scriber Duke University School of Law
North Mississippi Rural Legal Services

Jackson, Mississippi is in the midst of a housing crisis. An alarmingly high number of the approximately 76,000 households in the city are located in or near a deteriorating neighborhood. According to the local newspaper, The Clarion-Ledger, there are over 12,300 abandoned homes in the city. That, combined with thousands of

houses either under foreclosure or facing condemnation and demolition by the city due to severe housing code violations, shows the dire state of the city and the need for an innovative project to reverse this situation. I work with people who live in some of the neighborhoods targeted by my project; they live among abandoned homes that have

become havens for crime and drugs. They live in a city that has lost hope in itself.

In a partnership between the Mississippi Center for Justice and a lawyer affiliated with the Jackson Housing Authority, I am identifying the four most blighted census tracts in the city and then further identifying what land within those tracts can be quickly seized by the Housing Authority for the purposes of urban renewal. It is my job to go through tax and land records to identify who is in possession and who has title to a given piece of land in the targeted areas, giving higher priority to blocks of land that

are already in possession of the city or state. I am also targeting land in possession by “slum lords” and determining if they are willing to sell their land. The area with the highest concentration of “available” land and housing will become the focal point of project. We will then formally begin work with a local planner to formulate a strategy to rehabilitate these areas.

Although the end results of the project remain unknown, the impact it has had on me and everyone involved so far is clear: Jackson, Mississippi is a city that can still be saved.

SUMMER CORPS 2009 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 19,550 low-income individuals.

“ I represented a number of clients on misdemeanor cases such as DUI, assault, violation of a restraining order, theft and harassment. These cases gave me a great experience researching the law in each of these areas and representing clients at a number of different proceedings.”

*Samantha Bloodworth
Colorado Public Defenders, Boulder, Colorado*

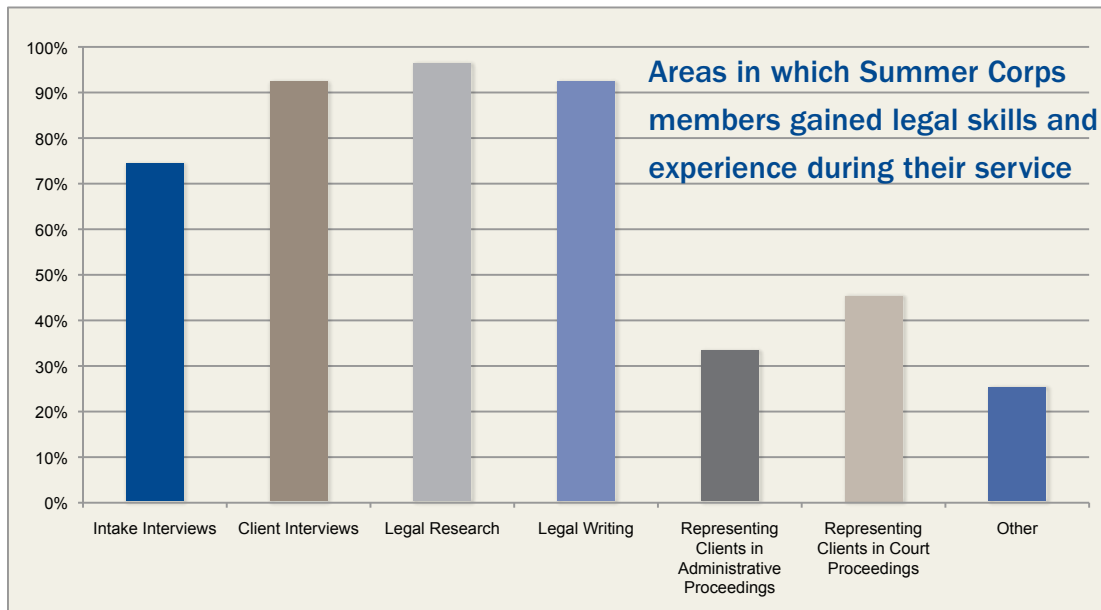
Output 2: Collaboration with Community-Based Organizations

Summer Corps members reached 991 community and faith-based organizations serving the needs of low-income individuals or communities across the country by participating in 649 community education presentations or outreach activities benefiting 15,529 individuals.

Output 3: Member Skills Development

100% of respondents reported that they gained practical legal skills as a result of their 2009 Summer Corps experience, with percentages gaining particular legal skills as follows:

98.9% of respondents agreed with the following statement: My summer experience has developed or strengthened my belief that I can use my legal skills to improve community conditions.



WHAT SUMMER CORPS MEMBERS SAY ABOUT SUMMER CORPS

“This summer was one of the best I have ever had. I had the opportunity to do my dream job - be a public defender. “

*Audrey Woosnam
Alaska Public Defenders, Ketchikan, Alaska*

“It was a great experience to work at the Federal Tax Clinic and help others learn about federal taxes. With the help of Summer Corps, it was possible for me to contribute back to the community working in a program that primarily serves low-income individuals.”

*Edwin Wu
Villanova Federal Tax Clinic, Villanova, Pennsylvania*

“Summer Corps was a great program! Housing Conservation Coordinators gave me the ability to serve as much as I wanted, with as much responsibility as I could handle. I greatly improved my client intake and interview skills, as well as improved my ability to advocate on behalf of clients; both by dealing with opposing counsel and in representing clients in administrative proceedings.”

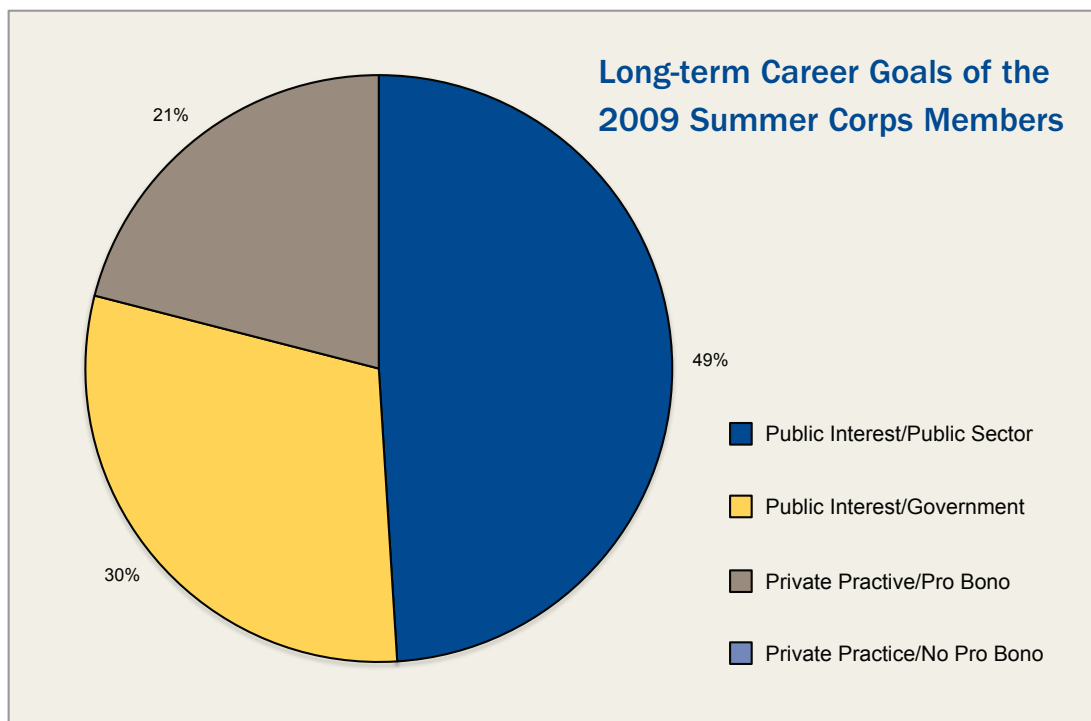
*Eric Goldman
Housing Conservation Coordinators, New York, New York*

PROGRAM EVALUATION

98.7% of Summer Corps members would recommend their host organization to other law students seeking summer internships.

99.7% of Summer Corps members would recommend the Summer Corps program to other law students.

LONG-TERM IMPACT ON THE PUBLIC INTEREST FIELD:



“I will never forget my clients, their stories of defeat, triumph, pain, strength, frustration, and hope. I will be forever humbled and motivated by their stories, their trust in me, and their perseverance. I worked hard to provide them with culturally-competent, empathetic, and empowering representation and hope to continue working to reform the legal system to provide more meaningful access to justice.”

Reyna Ramolete Hayashi
The Unemployment Law Project, Seattle, Washington