

Free Legal Aid Clinic Fall 2007 Newsletter

2007 - 2008 Board Of Directors

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Student's Sweat and Tears Pay Off

By: Laura Smith, Student Attorney

Since I began at FLAC, I've handled many files but a lot of the same circumstances. I'd certainly thought I'd seen it all until I came into work the week before school started in August. The "file", then just a piece of paper, consisted of Yeager's note to "call client to get story". Through sobs and pleas of desperation, I gathered that her two children, 5 and 6, had been kidnapped and she hadn't seen them in roughly 3 months. And so the man-hours began...

It took about a day of calling foster care agencies, since I had no address for the "father" until the children were finally located...in a school in Wichita, Kansas. And of course, the state police were already involved. At the advisement of supervising attorneys (who still insist they were right), I drafted a Complaint for Custody. One tearful meeting with the client later, I had the necessary paperwork coupled with a trusty Ex Parte Order for Custody and entered the

3rd Circuit Court full of determination. After pleading with the Judge's clerk to look at my paperwork, I was sent away until the afternoon. So back I went at 2 pm to gather my Ex Parte Order, feeling rather confident that my situation warranted an emergency and the order would be signed. Instead of the kind reception of an Ex Parte Order, the Judge, from atop her bench, threw the paperwork down into my face and told me "it is all wrong".

Back to the office at 4 pm to start a new Paternity action instead. But one of our attorneys stayed late and we came up with a new game plan: to amend the Complaint and Order to Change Action Codes. Brilliant! I wasn't sure that this maneuver was going to work, after getting the paperwork thrown in my face last time, so I prayed.

Back to the judge's clerk I went, pleading again that this was an emergency but again was told

Come Feast at Mongolian BBQ !

What: FLAC Fundraiser

Where: Royal Oak Mongolian BBQ on Main Street

When: Wednesday, November 7, 2007

First shift: 6:00 pm - Second shift: 8:00 pm

Why: To watch Board Members work the grill, tip them because all those proceeds go to FLAC, and eat a lot of delicious food!

RSVP to flac@wayne.edu



Lyn Yeager, all-star pitcher



Alari and Kristen play with Nate White's son, Austin, at work



FLAC staff and students work the front door at the fundraiser.



Student attorneys and board members at the (PROOF) party!

Sweat and Tears, continued...

to come back later. And again I came back at 2 pm in hopes of receiving an Ex Parte Order stamped by the Judge. Finally summoned by the clerk with permission to talk, I inquired about the Order and was informed to "come back". At this, I'll admit, I was a bit saddened at all my efforts to obtain this Order. The judge was in the middle of a trial so I tip-toed out of the room. As I was half way out the door I heard... "Counselor... Counselor...COUNSELOR!" Oh my gosh, that's me! "Yes, your honor" I mumbled out as I turned around. And she said, "I realize that in your head this is an emergency, but I am swamped with work. We will call you when we get to it!"

Hopeless, I returned to the office to give a full report. Not 15 minutes later, the judge called that the Order was signed! After picking up the Order, with tears in my eyes, I proceeded to give my client a copy and urged her to go directly to Kansas and get the children. And my job was done.... not so much.

That afternoon, the FLAC office played travel agent but couldn't seem to find a way to get my client down there. But somehow, the following morning my client had made

it to Kansas by bumming a ride. And so the plan of "grabbing the children and going" ensued. I can't tell you how many things went wrong in those next couple of hours...there's no room. I finally spoke to the principal at 4 pm Kansas time, who was going to put them in foster care if my client wasn't there to pick up the children ASAP. But a miracle happened and my client was just around the corner. YES!

Then, the four attorneys and I waited in silence for what felt like hours for a confirmation call. The first call came from the state police. Not being a licensed attorney, I tried my best to sound official and verify the validity of the Order. Silence ensued again. When I finally got a hold of my client I was overjoyed to hear that she had gotten the kids. Efforts successful, the children were safe, tear down the cheek.

And so we all left work that day, of course swearing off that file forever. But we also left that day knowing why it is that FLAC exists. This woman probably would never have seen her kids again, being indigent and not having the means or resources to find them. Thank you to everyone who helped!!

Students' Fundraiser a Success!

There was a great turnout at this summer's fundraiser which was planned by student attorneys. FLAC raised well over \$1000 to help fund our operations. We want to send out a huge thank you to (PROOF) Martini Lounge in Detroit for lending their venue and letting us keep all of our proceeds. Thank you to council-woman Alberta Tinsley Talabi, and Steve Schneider for making significant contributions to FLAC. Thank you to the student attorneys who planned this event: Chris Schneider, Mike Akins, Alari Adams, Amanda Morris, George Saba, Ben Birkhill, and Laura Smith. And of course, thank you to everyone who came out to support our organization!

Habitat for Humanity

On July 27, a dull and rainy Friday morning, FLAC students gathered together to embark on a special mission...to help Habitat for Humanity build new homes in Detroit. Habitat is currently working on their Morningside Project on Detroit's east side, building low income housing for the city's residents. It seems only natural that FLAC would try and further their goal of helping Detroit's low income residents by teaming up with Habitat. And although the weather wasn't perfect on that particular Friday, everyone who came out to help had a great time for a great cause. We can't wait to do it again next summer!



Taking a lunch break at Habitat

Volunteer Income Tax Association

FLAC has decided to expand its services even further by pairing with the Volunteer Income Tax Association (VITA) this winter. Our Treasurer, Neil Williams, is working with an LLM right now to organize a VITA clinic at FLAC. Students will be trained to help people in the Detroit community starting in late January. If any alumni are interested in helping us, please contact Neil at our office.



We look pretty darn good in hard hats

A Day in My Life at FLAC

By: Kristen Sombati, Student Attorney

Being involved with FLAC has been extremely rewarding, however there are times when certain challenges seem impossible to overcome. While being a law student isn't the easiest thing I have ever attempted, I somehow made it through my first year and even had some fun along the way. FLAC has the unique benefit of giving students first-hand experience not only in a firm but in the courtroom as well. Going to court and preparing for a hearing is a large task in itself, but in my case, it is compounded by the fact that my clients don't speak English as their first language.

It's always interesting when the judge asks your client a question and she looks back blankly. The judge then looks at you questioningly, and you must ask

for permission to explain to your client what he asked, in her language. Dealing with Spanish-speaking clients has of course helped my language skills, but more than that, it gives me the sense of helping people who are, in a very real sense, isolated in our society. This is my rewarding experience as one of the few Spanish-speaking employees at FLAC. Many of my clients would not have been able to navigate the legal system because of their language barrier. My favorite case included an entire suitcase of paperwork, that resided at our office and was handed down to me on my first day. The settlement included around \$35,000 and the client was able to keep her home. It was a proud day when the suitcase finally rolled back out the door.



Kristen is an expert with power tools



FLACies and alumni at the annual softball game

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Staffed by Wayne State University Law Students~ Supervised by Legal Aid & Defender Association

Show Your FLAC Pride!!

If you have not already ordered a FLAC alumni shirt, now is the time to do so. We have blue polo shirts with white embroidery that say "FLAC Alumni" for only \$20! This is a great way to make a donation to your favorite non-profit organization while showing off your FLAC pride at the same time.

If you would like to order a shirt, please send \$20 with your mailing address and your shirt size to:

Free Legal Aid Clinic, Inc.
Attn: Bernisha Waller
5435 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, MI 48202



Movin' on up? Retiring down South?

Whether you're finding a new job or leaving an old one, be sure to keep your current FLACies in the know.

There are three easy ways for you to do this:

1. Send us a postcard with your new address
2. Call (313) 831-3871 and ask for any available Board member
3. Drop us a line at flac@wayne.edu

Another great way to stay informed is to subscribe to the FLAC alumni list! Just send an email to: listserv@lists.wayne.edu. Leave the subject line blank and include "subscribe flacalumni your name" in the text portion of the message.

Example: subscribe flacalumni Joe Schmo

Updating your address with us is a great way to learn about various FLAC events! And we promise not to bombard you with tons of junk emails or sell your email to anyone else.
