Tennessee Justice Center Internship

This summer I was given the opportunity to work for the Tennessee Justice Center (TJC), a nonprofit law firm in Nashville. The organization works in a variety of areas of TennCare (Tennessee’s Medicaid system) with the ultimate goal of protecting the vulnerable citizens of Tennessee. Some of these areas include general TennCare, children’s health care through CoverKids, long term health care through the CHOICES Program, and the Medicaid Gap. They are also involved in a lot of public education about the areas that they work with.

While there I assisted with general tasks around the office, but my primary responsibilities were intake screening and working with the Medicaid Gap. Intake screening included interviewing potential clients and sorting them into 4 categories: Unsure if eligible, enrollment issues, service issues, and CHOICES. The Medicaid Gap work involved calling individuals in the Gap and interviewing them for their story, attending press conferences, and setting up meetings with clinics to discuss the coverage gap.

Intake helped me to develop a variety of skills including clerical skills, computer skills, and independence. While intake screening mainly focused interviewing potential clients, I was assigned to work unsure if eligible cases. This allowed me to gain insight into what it would be like to work my own legal cases. While these cases never required any legal action to be taken, they allowed me to practice researching cases as well as helping me become well versed in the laws regarding TennCare, Medicare, and Social security. One of the best aspects of my internships was how willing the members
of the organization were willing to teach me about the complex systems that they work
in. While there I was taught in depth about TennCare, Medicare, Social Security, food
stamps, and CHOICES. The teachings also evolved as the laws changed.

The part of my internship that had the largest impact was my work with those in
the Gap. The majority of the time I spent calling individuals in the Gap focused on old
cases that had been left open. Because the TJC provides free services to its clients, it
requires grants to fund its work. Many of these grants require exact numbers of
individuals who reach out to us, who we help, and who are in the Gap. Therefore,
keeping cases up to date is an important part of supporting the work done by the TJC.
In 2 weeks I was able to close upwards of 60 old Gap or inactive cases. During this
time, I found that those I talked to had powerful stories. In order to close the Medicaid
coverage Gap, the TJC collects stories from individuals around Tennessee and shares
them on our website, on social media, and in our mailers. While talking to those who
fell in the Gap, I was exposed to many powerful stories, including an individual who was
blind and didn’t have access to any form of health care due to their spouses income,
which was from Social Security. Despite the social security and TennCare laws formed
to help protect blind individuals who are unable to work, there are still individuals who
the system fails to help.

This internship helped expose me to a variety of aspects of working in a law firm
as well as a nonprofit. One of the most interesting portions of my time there revolved
around seeing a law being passed by the senate, learning the ins and outs of the policy
change, and then seeing it being instated. While not the area that I worked in during my
internship, this law is one of the aspects of my TJC internship that made me especially passionate about continuing work in a nonprofit.

While I am fairly positive that I see myself working in a nonprofit law firm in the future, the TJC also introduced me to other areas of law during our yearly fundraiser. There I was able to chat with individuals from larger corporations, policy workers, and attorneys from large for profit law firms. What many of them recommended is interning or working with other types of law firms in order to solidify my commitment to both attending law school and to working in a non profit law firm. Although my internship is over, I am continuing to work with the organization on some smaller events as well as setting up events where we will be able to talk to Sewanee students about health care coverage policies and the possibility that they could fall into the Gap.