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My summer was spent differently than most of the other interns from Sewanee. I wasn't researching a subject, nor was I working with a label company, or something similar. I knew from the beginning that the work I was to encounter would test me, but until that first day, I was completely blown away by what DCS actually does (my knowledge was based on people's warnings and televised child abuse cases). I understood from the beginning that child abuse is something that happens, but actually seeing it on the faces of the parents and children affected by it is something entirely different. So, I started my internship terrified that I would mess something up, ultimately screwing up a child's life. I was scared to find out that I had no business going to law school, or have a career involving juveniles.

My responsibilities this summer included the parents of the children involved, often trying to make sure that they can show up for court, or be brought in to have a fair say in their kid's hearing. I would also draft petitions for the court to declare the children dependent and neglected, taking the notes of the court and then typing them up for the judge to sign. I was also able to sit in on depositions of doctors, and meetings between the attorneys, children and DCS employees. It was never a dull moment in the world of DCS. I had the opportunity to also go on home-visits with the case managers, gaining an insight of the world of social work. I researched cases to find out how other courts had ruled juvenile proceedings, and researched laws relevant to the work DCS does. I often helped to prepare the attorney for the court, reading through the file, watching the forensic interview of the child, and making notes relevant to the hearing taking place within the next day or so. The best part about this internship was that I never sat still for any extended period of time, was always moving and worked with the most dedicated people I know.

I was consistently challenged at this internship, which made me extremely grateful that I was chosen for this position. I learned by the end of the summer that a small amount of work can often go a long way, even though it's a never ending pile, and you often are frustrated by how slow things move in regards to the state government. There were times in which I had my patience challenged, becoming exhausted by receiving the same answer multiple times, regardless of who I was exposed to many different environments, different people, and learned that no matter what I had done during the day (be it copying 100 pages reports, or running documents all over Manchester & Tullahoma to attorneys) that I had helped a small bit in a field of never ending work. It's hard to look at these children and not feel emotional, knowing that my life was drastically different from theirs. James Stephens, my supervisor and DCS attorney, never complained about my countless questions (I'm positive that I asked the same exact question about 50 billion times), and wanted the interns to tag-along on everything, yet allowed us to work as an independent force. He was always there to lend a helping hand or give an encouraging word, and almost always had a solution for any problem that I encountered. My internship with the Department of Children's Services offered me a lifetime chance to step out of my comfort zone, and immerse myself into a world that was so foreign to me. I realized that I wanted to be a part of the important work, and enjoyed it at the same time. There are no words to describe my experience with DCS this summer, and am excited to see how my experiences influence my future career option.