



THE CANADIAN
BAR ASSOCIATION

Young Lawyers International Program (YLIP): Out of the Office, into the Field

Young Lawyers International Program (YLIP): Out of the Office, into the Field

The Young Lawyers International Program, administered by the CBA and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), places interns overseas to work with human rights legal organizations. In recent interviews, three of this year's participants described their involvement in efforts to shape legal systems in Guyana, South Africa and Kenya and highlighted the value of international experience.

By Ava Chisling

Many young lawyers will tell you that working at a firm can be challenging. There are the usual stresses of time and money, of course, but also of fitting in and producing excellent work. Although the first few months in an office can be tough for a 20-something, the law firm experience is nothing compared to working long hours, thousands of kilometres from home, in a less developed country, with clients who speak little English. Now that's pressure – and 20 recently licensed Canadian lawyers wouldn't have it any other way. They chose to spend their first months in the profession working for human rights and development organizations abroad, helping people with real needs.



Tara Kyliuk, at the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic in Georgetown, Guyana: “I think these internships offer practical hands-on experience that you may not get when starting your career back home. I really appreciate that I have had this opportunity.”

Winnipeg-born Tara Kyliuk, a 2010 call to the Bar, was posted to Georgetown, Guyana, where she is working on some very important projects at the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic. “Much of my days are filled with client interviews, most of whom are women,” says Kyliuk from her home in Georgetown. “I often deal with domestic violence and other family-related issues like divorce, custody and property division. There are also some civil and criminal issues, and I sometimes go to the prison to interview clients.”

The UBC Law School graduate is also involved in research-based projects, including tracking down some of the Clinic's previous clients and documenting success stories, challenges and potential areas for improvement.

Kyliuk, who has spent extended periods of time in Taiwan and Cape Town, among other places, has some excellent advice for lawyers considering working overseas. “You must arrive with an open mind,” she says. “And no matter how much you prepare beforehand, there are always unexpected events and you have to be flexible.”

Kyliuk sees her time in Guyana as a series of small accomplishments, as opposed to one big one. “When you work in less developed countries you realize how much work it takes – and how many

players it takes – for everything to come together to create a valid rule of law. There are injustices, often daily, that can make you want to give up. I think you really have to focus on the small things and realize that, eventually, small accomplishments and changes yield the way for big ones."

Roger Love, an Osgoode Hall law graduate called to the Bar last year, is posted with Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) in South Africa, where he works with migrants and refugees from all over Africa, as well as asylum seekers from places as far away as Bangladesh and Pakistan. When he arrives at his Sunnyside, Pretoria office each morning, the place is already packed with people hoping to receive assistance.

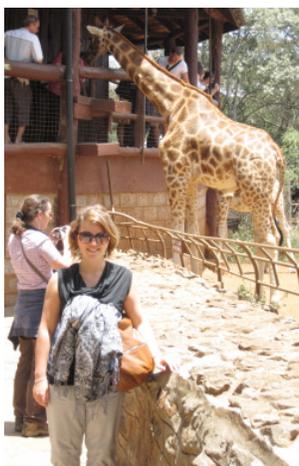
"I help clients from the moment they enter the clinic, up to and including launching court actions where necessary," says Love. "Roughly half my practice is devoted to client consultation, while 30 per cent of the time, I draft legal documents, including submissions to United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and the Refugee Appeal Board. My remaining time is spent conducting legal research to support litigation."

Love says his biggest frustration has been developing an ear for the 11 official languages spoken in South Africa. "Luckily, most South Africans speak English so my transition has been an easy one."

Like Kyluik, Love says he cannot easily list his accomplishments. "It is the aggregate of the work that I have accomplished that I am most proud of. LHR serves a very high volume of clients on a daily basis. In only five months, I have assisted over 100 clients facing various legal issues."



When Roger Love arrives in the morning at his office at Lawyers for Human Rights in Sunnyside, Pretoria, the place is already packed with people hoping to receive assistance: "Much work needs to be done to ensure that the values enshrined in South Africa's constitution are enjoyed by those who are most in need of its protection."



Emilie Simard, a 2009 Quebec Bar call: "Long before entering law school, at Laval University, I wanted to work abroad. Then the Canadian Bar Association and CIDA offered me the chance."

Emilie Simard has been posted to the Law Society of Kenya. Called to the Bar in 2009 after earning her Civil Law degree at Laval University in Quebec City, Simard she has wanted to work abroad for as long as she can remember. "I met Pascal Paradis, the executive director of Lawyers Without Borders Canada, when I was in the second year of my degree. I knew right away that was the kind of mission for me. And then the Canadian Bar Association and CIDA offered me the chance."

Similar to the other interns, Simard has worked on a wide variety of projects. "For the first three months, at the Law Society of Kenya, I worked on a report on children's rights in Canada, the United Kingdom and Ethiopia. I also helped in the continuing education department for lawyers, worked on conferences, and conducted research."

Simard had the most trouble adapting to the laid-back Kenyan lifestyle. A very punctual person back in Canada, it took her awhile to get used to scheduled appointments taking place whenever. "It is more a question of adaptation than frustration. I am someone who is very punctual, even too punctual. Here in Kenya, punctuality is a relative

concept. I have seen press conferences begin one or two hours late.”

Asked what she hopes to gain from the experience, Simard says, “I had a lot of questions regarding my future and I came here seeking some answers. I can say that I have already found some answers and hope to find some more.”

Closing dates for YLIP applications: April 18, 2011 (2011-2012 program) and April 16, 2012 (2012-2013 program).

Ava Chisling (avachisling.com) is a media lawyer based in Montreal.

Copyright/Droit d'auteur © 2011 The Canadian Bar Association/L'Association du Barreau canadien