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3-9-2015

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Tom and Travers, Tom, "Trending@RWU Law: Tom Peterson, 2L's Post: Alternative Spring Break is Here" (2015). *Law School Blogs*. 393.

https://docs.rwu.edu/law_pubs_blogs/393

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Tom Peterson, 2L's Post

Alternative Spring Break is Here!

Posted by Tom Peterson on 03/09/2015 at 11:44 AM



Members of the RWU Law's Association for Public Interest Law (APIL) started **Alternative Spring Break (ASB)** during spring break 2006, as an opportunity to assist those recovering from the devastation caused when Hurricane Katrina made landfall in August 2005. Since its inception, ASB has continued to grow every year. In its first year, there was just one placement and a handful of dedicated students. Now, in 2015, it has grown to 17 placements in eight different states with 58 student participants. Many of our supervising attorneys are RWU Law alumni. The program is funded by a Student Bar Association allocation to APIL, funding from the law school administration, support from the law school community, and student participation fees.



Even though ASB started as a response to a devastating national emergency, the program has since provided thousands of pro bono hours to indigent clients in Rhode Island and southeast Massachusetts in organizations such as the Conservation Law Foundation and the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS) in Fall River; with the Brooklyn Defenders and the Bronx Defenders in New York City; and even in such places as Pittsburgh and New Haven, CT. At the same time, the program has stayed true to its roots, returning to Southeast Louisiana Legal Services every year.



ASB has also responded to other national emergencies. Students volunteered at Legal Services of New Jersey during Spring Break 2014 following Hurricane Sandy; and this year, we are sending three highly motivated students along with RWU Law alumna Deborah Gonzalez to Dilley, Texas, to help immigrant families detained at the border.

Students who volunteer for ASB are a special group. Instead of recharging their batteries and catching up on sleep during Spring Break, these students dive into public interest lawyering in some of the most underserved communities in the country. Most of them do it because they are dedicated to public service and because the work they do changes lives. It also gives students an opportunity to see how the law works in practice, often giving the first-year law students their first exposure to day-to-day life in a law office. This exposure has been mutually beneficial for the students, the host organizations, the law school, and, most of all, the clients. One student who worked with the Pittsburgh Federal Defenders last year remarked,

“
I was able to do what I came to law school to do: to fight for those who aren't equipped to fight for themselves. ASB is an excellent way to get out there and make a difference.
”

Every year this program continues to grow and touch more people thanks to the students, faculty, alumni and organizations who support the program. Specifically, ASB wouldn't be possible without the support of RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky; Laurie Barron, Eliza Vorenberg and Lisa Quinn from the Feinstein Center at RWU Law; and Joanne Fernandes and Susan Principe from the law school's administration.

Additionally, many thanks to the following organizations who have offered placements for our students over Spring Break 2015; we really appreciate your support!

- The Bronx Defenders, The Bronx, N.Y.
- Brooklyn Defender Services, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- City of Central Falls, Solicitor's Office, Central Falls, R.I.
- Conservation Law Foundation, Providence, R.I.
- Committee for Public Counsel Services, Fall River and New Bedford, Mass.
- Connecticut Veterans Center, New Haven, Conn.
- Immigration Law Education and Advocacy Project, Fall River, Mass.
- Immigration Assistance Project, Dilley, Texas
- The Island Institute, Rockland, Maine
- Juvenile Rights Practice, Brooklyn and Manhattan, N.Y.
- Pittsburgh Public Defenders, Pittsburgh, Penn.
- Police Misconduct Project, Providence, R.I.
- Rhode Island Center for Justice, Providence, R.I.
- Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, New Orleans, La.
- Victim Rights Law Center, Boston, Mass.
- Women in Prison Project, Providence, R.I.

(Tom Peterson co-wrote this blog with 2L Tom Travers. Both are Student Coordinators for ASB.)