

Bar Talk

PEOPLE AND PRACTICES

Recruiting on a shoestring

Some of the job “perks” don’t sound too enticing: no pay, and a field trip to the California Youth Authority in Stockton. But every year the National Center for Youth Law still gets deluged with applicants seeking summer clerkships at the Oakland nonprofit.

This year was no different. One undergraduate and eight law students from schools like Boalt, Stanford and Michigan beat out more than 150 applicants to earn one of the coveted summer jobs that end

Sidebar

this week.

They work long hours without the imprimatur of a big-name firm – and without any salary. Although NCYL helps its clerks find outside stipends and fellowships, it doesn’t add up to much compared to the \$25,000 or more that fellow debt-ridden students can earn at some private-sector firms.

Still, second-year Boalt Hall School of Law student Robyn Gould said, “My summer experience has exceeded all my expectations.”

Gould worked firsthand on a class action, *Katie A. v. Bonta*, where NCYL won a court order that will require the state to expand mental health services for foster children.

“From the moment we walked into the door we’ve been treated as colleagues,” Gould said. “There was nothing that we were left out of, and it provides a sense of ownership. It’s different from typical internships where you’re doing somebody else’s work.”

NCYL has competed successfully — and on the cheap — with top law firms by combining creativity and the promise of work on high-profile cases “with real significance,” said director John O’Toole.

“These are not people who are coming here because they have nowhere else to go,” O’Toole said. “They come here because they want to be child advocates and poverty lawyers. But they’re also attracted because they know we have a really organized program and they’re going to learn something.”

This summer’s clerks got to meet with Senior U.S. District Judge Thelton Henderson and quiz him about California’s prison reform case, and have lunch with the presiding judge in Alameda County.

NCYL staff also hosted the occasional after-work social hour,



COURTESY PHOTO

BIG RAPIDS, BIG RETURNS: A whitewater rafting excursion is the biggest-ticket item in the National Center for Youth Law’s \$2,500 budget for summer clerks. And with that, the Oakland nonprofit still attracted more than 150 applicants.

karaoke night, wine-tasting trip and whitewater rafting.

In exchange, O’Toole said, the center receives a burst of energy. “We have 11 lawyers here and all of a sudden we bring in nine very enthusiastic, energetic people, and we get almost twice as much done.”

Total cost for NCYL’s summer program? About \$2,500, O’Toole said — with most of the cost coming from the rafting excursion.

— Cheryl Miller