

Each year, the International Academy of Family Lawyers run a competition in which two winners are granted a funded Studentship at a family law firm anywhere in the world, hosted by a fellow of the Academy. I chose to write my essay on my dissertation topic of the problems faced by cohabitants on relationship breakdown and the viability of reform. I was thrilled to be awarded one of the Studentships, and was hosted by Fred Siegel, of Siegel Reilly and Kaufman LLC, located in Stamford, Connecticut. Fred's firm focuses on matrimonial law, and so most of the work I did focused around divorce proceedings and settlements.

On my first day of the Studentship, I spent time at the Connecticut Superior Court with another attorney from SRK, Ross Kaufman. This was my first time in any kind of court, and this was particularly interesting as I was able to see for myself the benefits and drawbacks of Connecticut's 'short calendar' system. I learnt a lot from Ross, particularly seeing how he interacted with the judge and dealt with clients during negotiation proceedings to respond and adapt quickly to changes in circumstances.

The following two days of my Studentship were spent in the New York Supreme Court shadowing Justice Lori Sattler in the Family Court. While I was there, I was able to read through case files before then witnessing the proceedings. It was particularly enlightening to view cases from a judge's, rather than an attorney's perspective, and see first-hand the dilemmas and value judgments inherent in making such personal orders and decisions.

The following week, I spent a day at Cohen Rabin Stine Schumann in Times Square. I shadowed partner Gretchen Beale Schumann, accompanying her to court and undertaking legal research for a case. I really enjoyed my time with Gretchen and loved spending time at the firm – made up of entirely female partners! – because it showed me that it is entirely possible to have a rewarding legal career as well as family life.

In my second week I spent time with Fred both in court and at his office. One of my main tasks was assisting in preparation for a deposition with the ex-husband of a client, which lasted over six hours! I feel that this really helped me understand in depth the role you would take on as a family practitioner – as Fred described it 'part time lawyer, part time therapist' – and yet how rewarding it can be to help people rebuild their lives during the most difficult times. Fred helped me understand that a good lawyer is responsive to their client's needs and feelings, and how important it is for a client to feel a sense of closure.

As well as the work I did on the internship, I was lucky enough to have some free time to explore New York City and parts of Connecticut. I have always dreamed of going to New York, and was delighted to get the opportunity to see it in person! I fitted in all the tourist sights – the Empire State Building, Central Park, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue - as well as going downtown and getting the real New York experience in areas like Soho and Brooklyn.

For me, the best thing about the scheme was how it helped me change my mindset about my future career. At university, I have found that family law as a potential career path tends

to get lost amid constant exposure from corporate law firms. Working with Fred, and gaining first-hand experience of clients and cases, allowed me to understand more about the realities of working as a family lawyer - and the courage to do something different. As a result, I am currently applying to law firms with family law departments for training contracts in the hope of being able to work in family law in future.

I would like to thank David Salter and the IAFL for organising the Studentship, along with Claire Fenton-Glynn and Jens Scherpe. Most of all, I would like to thank the wonderful Fred and his family for inviting me into their home and making me feel so welcome, as well as organising such a variety of opportunities for me – their kindness and generosity allowed me to have the experience of a lifetime.

