

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

By Anna Greczmiel

Being in law school is tough. 8 months of frantic learning, non-stop reading, and new ideas buzzing constantly around your head. If law school is a thing of the past for you, you probably remember this stressful time, but perhaps nostalgia has taken the edge off. If you are a current law school student, you can most likely relate to this exciting yet often overwhelming time.

I made it out of my first year alive and well, and for this I am very thankful. But then came the pesky business of summer, which all year felt like an oasis just beyond reach in the desert. When I finally arrived, walking free from my last exam, I collapsed and took a huge gulp of water. Then I looked at the calendar and realized that I had 4 months ahead of me before returning to school, and being that annoying law student stereotype who must always keep busy and stay keenly involved in a number of things, I set to work on finding summer employment that would be both interesting and fulfilling.

When looking for summer jobs I knew that the non-profit or public sector would be a good fit for my interests, and I was lucky enough to secure a job with the Alberta Lawyers' Assistance Society (Assist). This is the first year that Assist has hired a summer student, so I jumped at the opportunity to be involved with the organization.

Assist appealed to me because it brings together my two favourite future endeavours: being a lawyer and helping others. Working with Assist has allowed me to learn a great deal about the legal profession – practical things – that other experiences may not have afforded. Not only am I meeting lawyers who volunteer their time with Assist, but I am also researching and writing on the personal issues presently affecting lawyers in Alberta.

Historically, Assist's services (professional counselling, peer support, and a multitude of resources) have been available to lawyers, articling students, and their immediate families in Alberta. The more I learnt about the issues affecting lawyers, however, the more I saw a parallel with issues in law school: the stress, the long hours, the career-related decision making, the escapism, and the ongoing need to foster mental health. Not only is law school a stressful time, but it is also a time when habits are formed, coping mechanisms are learned, and our outlook on the legal profession is shaped.

Lawyers' assistance programs in the United States have done research

on their law students well-being and have come up with some startling statistics. Research shows that 30% of law students report they have abused alcohol, nearly 4% of law students feel they need help to control abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, and 17% to 40% of law students suffer from depression. Additionally, self-reports of anxiety and depression are significantly higher among law students than either the general population or medical students.*

Here at Assist we are working hard to break down stigmas surrounding mental health and addiction. Having lawyers' assistance programs available to law students can help achieve this goal, because the sooner we start talking about the real problems that are affecting you and I and surrounding colleagues, the sooner we may come to realize that there is help available, we do not need to be ashamed of our problems, and in some cases the issues we might experience are natural responses to the high degrees of stress we endure. Our ability to cope with these stresses is of the utmost importance, and if we do not have somewhere or someone to go to to ask for help, the problems may escalate and become catastrophic to our careers or personal lives.

Therefore, on behalf of Marian De Souza, Executive Director, Assist is proud to announce that its services are now also available to law students in Alberta. We look forward to working more closely with students this upcoming fall, and increasing awareness of Assist at both the University of Calgary and University of Alberta. Lawyers' assistance programs need to reach out to law students for the same reason they reach out to lawyers; sometimes seeking help is that much easier when it is provided by people who can relate to you. It is our hope that by expanding Assist's services to law students, professional guidance and support will be even more accessible by law students experiencing personal difficulties.

* Straight Talk About Law School at <http://illinoislap.org/law-students>



Alberta Lawyers'
Assistance Society

Assist offers professional, confidential help to lawyers and their immediate families. Assist is an independent, charitable society. For immediate access to professional help, call toll-free from anywhere in Alberta: 1-877-498-6898. To learn more about Assist, visit our website at www.albertalawyersassist.ca or contact our Executive Director toll free at 1-877-737-5508 / direct at 403-537-5508.



St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild of Northern Alberta

You are cordially invited to the
2011 Red Mass October 6, 2011 to take place at:
St. Joseph's Seminary Chapel, 9828 - 84 Street
with reception to follow
across the hall at Newman College at:
5:30 p.m. - Gowning; 6:00 p.m. - Mass; 7:00 p.m. - Reception

Ticket price: \$50.00 per person. Please R.S.V.P. if you are able to attend as soon as possible and by October 1, 2011 at latest to jkirwin@kirwinllp.com. Cheques are to be made payable to: "St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild of Northern Alberta" and addressed to: c/o Kirwin LLP #200, 10339 - 124 Street, Edmonton, AB T5N 3W1



Alberta Lawyers'
Assistance Society

Lunchtime Walk for Wellness

Wednesday, August 24th at Noon

Please join Assist and your fellow colleagues for a fun, brief walk around the courthouse!

Call 403-537-5508 for more information.