

## Law Student Perspective:

# Stetson University Students Intern to Help Homeless Clients

### **Kristen David Adams, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor of Law, Stetson University School of Law**

The Homeless Advocacy Internship at Stetson University College of Law is now marking its fifth year, with three very different placements at Gulfcoast Legal Services in St. Petersburg, Southern Legal Counsel in Gainesville, and the Office of the Public Defender's Homeless Outreach Team in Clearwater. This internship was designed to provide students with an opportunity to further the cause of homeless advocacy by assisting the efforts of public interest organizations engaged in work on behalf of the homeless, and I have been pleased with how it has served this purpose thus far. What has surprised and delighted me is the way in which the internship has

Pictured from left to right: Dean Adams,



Greg Barton, Chantal Marchessault, Hailey Lampert.

*Photo Credit by: Stetson Law School.*

helped students who may never have envisioned themselves as public-interest attorneys, much less activists, to discover

a passion within themselves for serving these most vulnerable members of our community. Although some students come to the internship with prior experience working with homeless individuals, this is a new and often transformative opportunity for many others. Student after student has told me how profoundly inspiring it has been to work with, and learn from, the outstanding supervising attorneys who have dedicated so much time, effort, and care to making the internship a valuable experience.

Special thanks to Pam Wiener Dubrule at Gulfcoast Legal Services, Kirsten Clanton at Southern Legal Counsel, and Raine Johns (and now Darren Waters) at the Public Defender's Office for all that they do for our students. •

## Interning at Pinellas County Public Defender's Office

By **Greg Barton**

*Guest Student Writer*

The Homeless Advocacy Internship was a very rewarding experience for me. I have felt passionate about the homeless cause for sometime now, and this internship allowed me to learn about the homeless, the challenges they face, the services available to them, and the deficiencies that still exist in the system today. My particular placement was in the Pinellas County Public Defender's Office. I worked under the supervision of Darren Waters and Dean Kristen Adams and most of my time was spent researching ways in which Pinellas County could secure more funding to help those in need.

Initially, I was amazed to find just how many people were homeless in Florida, and more specifically, the Tampa Bay area. I focused my attention on what was being done to deal with the problem of homelessness, and what I found was

both encouraging and frustrating at the same time. There are numerous organizations that are devoted to truly helping people dealing with homelessness, but there are also entities that are in a position to help but for whatever reasons take a different approach. The result, I was shocked to find, was the widespread practice of criminalizing the homeless by criminalizing their life-sustaining activities. Frustrated by this, I took a step back and decided that I did not know what kind of concerns and restraints that these entities dealt with and so I was not in a position to judge. What I was in a position to do was to try and figure out how to remedy the situation.

Ending homelessness is a complex and daunting task, but one that I definitely feel is achievable. I spent a great deal of time researching how to get federal funding through HUD and how to effectively spend that money to make a difference. My guide turned out to be the Mi-

ami Dade County Homeless Trust. The Miami-Dade Continuum of Care region blows every other region out of the water in terms of their ability to secure federal funding for their homeless programs. I was able to speak with some employees at the Trust and with their help and some of my own research I was able to find out how they were able to achieve such success. I spent the rest of the summer using their Continuum of Care model to learn not only what they have to done well, but also to learn from their admitted mistakes. The key point is that nothing will ever get done in a lasting way unless the community consciously decides to work together towards one goal and does so on the same page. There are a lot of people out there who work very hard to make a difference in the lives of the homeless and even after my internship I continue to educate myself to find ways to secure more funding and unite communities around the goal of ending homelessness. •