

# Legal Aid's Social Work Assistance Program

## Who are we?

Legal Aid of Western Missouri provides free civil (non-criminal) legal assistance to people who need it most and can afford it least. Legal Aid's Social Work Assistance Program (SWAP) assists clients in accessing basic needs to support greater success in legal proceedings.

SWAP is comprised of a project director, two attorney/social workers with MSWs, and a housing social worker. The team members have expertise working with individuals experiencing domestic violence, serious behavioral health challenges, and the juvenile and foster care systems.

## What do former students have to say about us?

*"This internship provided me the benefits of a supportive, caring environment where I could practice my skills, contribute to the work of the agency, and collaborate with other professionals."*

*"My internship at Legal Aid instilled confidence in me to be an ethical, empowering, and dynamic social worker."*

*"Interning at Legal Aid provided me with hands-on experience in helping clients secure needs and effective social work practice under the guidance of a supportive supervisor."*

## What do Legal Aid's SWAP students do?

SWAP students provide short-term case management, fulfill resource requests for clients not in need of a case manager, build on resource lists for rural areas, and develop a self-care proposal for presentation to Legal Aid staff. Students typically can work with Limited English Proficient clients, which provides an opportunity to become familiar with interpretation/translation services. SWAP students have navigated the housing crisis, which included helping clients access rental and utility assistance. Students regularly help clients submit applications for Medicaid, SNAP, TA and Disability.

SWAP places a heavy emphasis on strengths-based, task-centered, practice. Students are assigned a caseload based on their level of expertise, work hours, and complexity of client needs. Students with a particular area of interest are offered opportunities to engage in that area and are encouraged to develop a proposal to enable that. (We do not offer the ability to do therapy/clinical hours, as employees of a law firm.)

## How are students supported?

Legal Aid of Western Missouri provides a \$5,000 stipend to each SWAP student. We train and orient students with a weekly SWAP group meeting, and students will attend one-on-one instruction with Jamie Matarazzo, SWAP's Project Director, but all SWAP staff are available to help and guide as needed. Practicum hours should primarily take place during normal business hours, but we offer flexibility and allow some evening or weekend hours to accommodate non-traditional students' schedules.