

Working for the Eviction Defense Collaborative

Foreword by Dora J. L. Dye and Article by Jan Branger

***FOREWORD:** The Eviction Defense Collaborative ("EDC"), a non-profit, legal clinic, assists tenants facing possible eviction by preparing pleadings for these tenants to file in pro. per. In Spring 2001, members of the EDC invited students in the Paralegal/Legal Studies Program at City College of San Francisco to serve as interns in its office. During Summer 2001, Dora Dye, Program Coordinator AND students, Les Bender, Jan Branger, Myrna Britton, Maria Chamorro, and Susan Chen each volunteered 3 hours per week at the EDC. We all learned a great deal about the legal system and about life in public interest law. Below is an article written by **Jan Branger** regarding his experience at the EDC:*

The Eviction Defense Collaborative ("EDC") is located in a converted Victorian on South Van Ness Avenue. EDC provides legal services to tenants who are in eviction proceedings and is often the only resource available to clients who lack the financial wherewithal to retain an attorney.

I had volunteered previously with the San Francisco Tenants Union, so I had some familiarity with Tenant/Landlord problems. After attending the initial orientation seminar, I signed up to volunteer the minimum amount of time required, which is 3 hours per week. After sitting in on a couple of routine interviews, I felt comfortable enough to do an intake by myself. Of course, things are never quite as simple as anticipated.

My first interview was a tenant who was beyond the 5-day limit to file an answer and thus, was technically in default. The professional staff at the EDC immediately went into action. A quick telephone call was made to the court to check if a default had been requested (it had not). Papers were copied; fee waivers and other documents were readied while I continued through a checklist with the client in order to assess his situation. After about 30 minutes, the client was on his way to the court to file his answer and keep his case alive.

In routine cases it takes about one hour to conduct an interview with a client. I expected the main reason for evictions to be non-payment of rent, but in practice it has been quite different. I continue to volunteer at the EDC because each new case is different and adds a new dimension to my experience. I value this experience because I can put into practice what I have learned in the CCSF Paralegal/Legal Studies Program. Losing one's home, no matter how humble, is a traumatic event and not all evictions are simple and straightforward. A legal review can often remedy a wrongful eviction or mitigate a lawful one, and give the tenant more time to make other living arrangements.

If you are currently enrolled or have completed the Paralegal/Legal Studies Program at City College of San Francisco and would like to volunteer at the EDC, please contact Dora Dye at 415/239-3508 or at ddye@ccsf.org for more information.