

PBF Solidarity Series

PBF 2009 Summer Fellow Charlotte Noss



Charlotte is a graduate of Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, MA and has worked for over two decades with multiple workers' rights organizations both before and after law school. Her PBF Summer Fellowship was working in San Francisco, CA at La Raza Centro Legal/San Francisco Day Labor Project, a community-based worker center dedicated to empowering Latino, immigrant and low-income communities in the Mission and throughout the Bay area advocating for their civil and human rights. She is now the Worker Center Program Director with the National Employment Law Project (NELP) in Washington, DC.

What has been your career path since your Peggy Browning Summer Fellowship?

"I was introduced to the workers' rights community in California during my Peggy Browning Fellowship. Relationships resulting from that summer advocacy led me to a successful fellowship application, and I started my career as a Skadden Fellow at Legal Aid at Work (LAAW) in San Francisco. I served as legal counsel to the California Domestic Workers Alliance, assisting with drafting and advocating with domestic workers for the Bill of Rights that was ultimately passed into law. I served as co-chair of the San Francisco Wage Theft Task Force, and supported numerous law and organizing campaigns through the Progressive Workers Alliance in San Francisco.

After several years at LAAW, I decided that I wanted to work more directly with a network of worker centers, so I founded the Workplace Rights Initiative to provide legal support and advocacy to worker centers around the Bay. Much of my work focused in the South Bay, where I was part of creating the Santa Clara County Wage Theft Coalition among other advocacy efforts.

I took a couple years off from full-time work to become a parent. During that time, family considerations led me to relocate to Washington, DC. I went back to work, part-time, for the First Shift Justice Project, providing legal education and representation to Spanish-speaking workers on issues relating to pregnancy, family leave, and breastfeeding accommodations.

In 2017, NELP hired me to create a Worker Center Program to provide capacity-building and organizational support to worker centers nationally. Much of the capacity building support has focused on supporting direct worksite organizing that is compliant with all labor and nonprofit tax law requirements. I co-coordinate a network of worker center lawyers, providing resources and a

community of support to advocates engaged in law and organizing campaigns across the country. I also co-coordinate a network of worker centers engaging in federal administrative advocacy, seeking to increase collaboration between agencies and community-based partners.”

Did your Peggy Browning Summer Fellowship affect your course of study in law school?

“My Summer Fellowship reinforced my interest in and commitment to labor and employment law. I had been a union and community organizer before going to law school, and knew that I wanted to work in the field of workers’ rights – and my experience at the worker center during my PBF Summer Fellowship cemented that. Interestingly, because I had to alter my course schedule to do the fellowship over the summer (since I was usually in school during the summer quarter), my fall quarter courses were changed and my school offered fewer “public interest” courses. I then took other courses like traditional nonprofit law and corporations – which have ultimately helped me be a better workers’ rights advocate.”

Did it help you to obtain employment in labor law?

“Being awarded a Peggy Browning Summer Fellowship is helpful to include on your resume for the recognition that many organizations and hiring attorneys have for the PBF Summer Fellowship Program specifically. Many prospective employers know about PBF, and it’s a mark in an applicant’s favor to have participated in the program – both because PBF Summer Fellows are exceptional candidates chosen through a rigorous process and because it shows an interest in labor and employment law.”

What is one unique aspect about your fellowship that you would like to share with students interested in applying for a Peggy Browning Fellowship?

“My Peggy Browning Summer Fellowship, working at La Raza Centro Legal, was a unique opportunity. It turned out that the main legal advocate who worked at the day labor center was on sabbatical during the beginning of my Fellowship, which created a genuine need for legal advocacy skills at the center. There were incredible opportunities for me to practice being a legal advocate: leading know-your-rights trainings, doing intake interviews with workers who had experienced wage theft, being involved in strategic campaign decisions with the day laborers who were interested in doing direct actions to resolve workplace issues, and representing day laborers in administrative proceedings. The Fellowship gave me a very realistic perspective on what it would be like to work as a workers’ rights attorney at a worker center.”

Has the interests or goals of today’s law students changed from your years in school?

“It’s hard to tell, really. Most of the law students that I interact with seem just as dedicated to social justice causes and practicing public interest law as my classmates. I interact with students who reach out because I went to Northeastern, and they are either considering law school or interested in networking as they are in law school. I usually interact with some of the Peggy Browning Fellows during their summer internships at worker centers, and I interact with law students who apply to or intern with NELP. All of those law students appear to approach a career in workers’ rights with similar enthusiasm and dedication.”

Are you connected to other PBF alumni? Are you active in your area’s Alumni Association Chapter?

“Many of the lawyers in my network are PBF alumni, who went on to a career in workers’ rights with worker centers or worker advocacy organizations. When I am looking to connect with an

attorney in a particular region or working for a specific kind of organization, I often look through the Alumni Directory and start with outreach to other Fellows. I am variably active with my area's Alumni chapter. Prior to the pandemic I participated in some events and I did manage to attend one virtual lunch event. I have mentored PBF students in the past, and look forward to doing so again in the future."

What advice would you give to today's students who are considering a career in labor or public interest law?

"Go for it! There are always job postings coming across my desk looking for workers' rights lawyers – so I know that there are employment opportunities to work with incredible organizations, doing labor and employment law and so much more. You can find a way to be paid to do movement lawyering.

I would encourage law students to reach out to practicing attorneys and advocates for mentorship and guidance, to make connections in an area of law or a geographic region that interests you. I always make time to talk to law students who are interested in talking to me about a career in social justice."