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LOYOLA UNDERGRAD ACTS AS COURT ADVOCATE FOR BATTERED WOMEN

It is an internship of intensity. Djuana O'Connor is a Loyola University Senior who acts as a Court Advocate in the Battered Women's Project of the Uptown Center Hull House, 4520 N. Beacon. She speaks on behalf of battered women at the Circuit Centralized Court of Cook County at 1340 S. Michigan Ave.

"Many of these women have never been to court before, or they've had a bad experience in court," O'Connor explained. "As a Court Advocate, I prepare them for court and tell them what to expect."

O'Connor's duties include interviewing the women to learn their personal histories and their relationships with the men who beat them. If a battered woman bears physical marks and bruises, O'Connor photographs the injuries. She provides referrals for information about women's shelters, counseling, child custody and divorce.

In preparation for a court appearance, O'Connor will tell a battered woman what types of questions she may expect and what answers are appropriate, as well as how to act when the accused batterer appears. In court, O'Connor may speak on behalf of a battered woman, and she often speaks directly with the states attorney to clarify information.

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Twenty-one-year-old O'Connor became interested in a Court Advocate internship, offered through Loyola's Department of Sociology, after meeting a battered women's counselor in a sociology class. O'Connor, who is a communication major with a concentration in sociology, had applied to law school and realized court background would prove beneficial to her future plans.

"Working in the Circuit Centralized Court has given me insight into how courts and attorneys work," she said. "This internship has helped me get my life goals together. I know now that I will use my legal career to help women and children.

"I have always been sensitive to other people's needs," O'Connor continued, "but until I worked here, I never realized how lucky I am. My problems are nothing compared to the problems of these women."

O'Connor noted that the phenomenon of battered women is much more wide-spread than is realized. "We have ten-to-fifteen women report their abuse every day. That's only in Chicago--and that's only the women who actually make a report," she said.

O'Connor has put in a minimum of 15 hours per week as a Court Advocate since she began her internship in January. Her internship ends April 24, but she hopes state funding will enable her to continue working as a Court Advocate through the summer.

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(Editors' Note: Djuana resides in Hazelcrest.)

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