Working for the CRA in the Central Deskside Support Division has proved to be a very rewarding experience. I was able to work with my supervisor Jonathan Blaszczak for 12 weeks, starting on May 29th and finishing August 18th. Every member of this team cheerfully assisted in training me, answering my questions and giving me a variety of projects to work on. This division is responsible for providing technical support to clients, keeping track of company assets, and making use of Remedy, the primary IT ticketing software.

Rather than taking phone calls (which another branch, NITSD, is responsible for), my role consisted of using all the tools at my disposal to resolve tickets in the Deskside bin, assigned by the case manager. The majority of these were software install requests, hardware incidents for laptops and docking stations, deployments, EURs, return equipment requests, update CI requests, and many more. For software installations, we needed to make sure that the client has approval to use the program before using PowerShell tools to push the install. If those tools wouldn’t work, we would remote into the client’s device and manually run the .cmd files. For hardware incidents, we would troubleshoot the issue physically with the client and come to a solution, which sometimes involved replacing equipment.

Deployments and EURs (End User Renewals) consisted of offering clients a new laptop, backing up everything from the old one, and making sure that the proper devices are in Active Directory. Updating CIs (Configuration Items) was the process of keeping a client’s profile and their assets up to date. Whenever I wasn’t resolving tickets, I was configuring the BIOS for new laptops and building them according to CRA standards. I was also wiping hard drives from old devices that are to be shipped to schools. Asset management is an important part of this role, which is why we were given a few projects like scanning all the IT equipment on a certain floor and updating the CIs in Remedy. Moving equipment around was also not uncommon during my work term.

For each of the tickets I previously mentioned, I would update a OneNote I created with documentation on what procedure to follow. As soon as I was done shadowing a colleague, I would jot down the step-by-step process of resolving that ticket and list the helpful links that were used. For example, CREAM is a website we often used to check if a software is licensed, and how to download it. I’ve left my documentation with the team in case a future co-op student could benefit from using it.

Other kinds of tickets were sometimes assigned to me, like performing a BitLocker re-key through the command prompt or updating failed devices. On many occasions, I would take a co-worker’s ticket due to their absence, and found myself learning something new. There was always something that could be done, which kept me busy and productive.

The common denominator in all of these tasks is the teamwork involved. Deskside Support is a collaborative environment, where everybody has a specific role and can offer their insight. For example, if I had any questions about asset management, I knew to go to a certain team of people (like Craig, Abul, Yang, Tenzin and Mo). For Remedy-related questions, I often asked Brandon. For software inquiries, Amy or Ryan. For more abnormal or uncommon issues, Alexis or Abdullah, since they’ve worked here for longer. For help with Adaptive Technology, Nate BD. The list goes on…

Throughout the work term, I acquired valuable technical skills like troubleshooting hardware & operating systems. On multiple occasions I had to pick apart a laptop and put it back together to identify or solve an issue. I often had to tinker with the BIOS of different kinds of devices (Lenovo, Dell, Toshiba, HP), so I grew pretty comfortable with it. In addition, I had the opportunity to deepen my programming knowledge in my free time by learning PowerShell and working on a practice script that performs backups for EURs.

One crucial skill I had many opportunities to refine was communicating in a professional manner through the many appointments, calls and email conversations I had with clients. Most of my days were booked with appointments and visits. Being part of CDSD involves a lot of interaction, which was no surprise. I realized that this was one of my favourite aspects of the job, getting to meet new people and provide a service.

When it comes to the overall co-op experience, I went into it not knowing what to expect. I found that much of the work was reminiscent of the courses I took in my first year, but experience will always be the best teacher. I was always encouraged to learn and ask questions on the job. On my first day, Jonathan gave me permission to be as annoying as possible with my questions so that I could learn as much as I can. He also urged the students to get familiar with every team member, not just sticking to the same few, which is excellent advice. I have no particular suggestions on how to improve the co-op experience, except to keep up what’s already in effect. Anybody could learn the things I have learned this summer, if they put in the effort and aren’t afraid to seek out challenges.

In conclusion, I’m incredibly grateful for the experience I gained at the CRA, and I’m grieved about leaving this team behind. If my schedule allowed it, I would work part-time without a second thought. I’d recommend working at the CRA (more specifically with Jonathan) to anyone in the program. There are so many opportunities to learn and grow in the field in this position.