



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Tuhfa Begum

Law School: New York Law School

Organization: Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

Update 1:

I am grateful to have been selected as an Equal Justice America fellow this summer. Equal Justice America is supporting my work at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem's Civil Defense Practice. Within the Civil Defense Practice, I work as a Legal Intern for the Collateral Consequences Team, which works to prevent the destabilization that befalls clients and their families due to the harsh civil consequences of contact with the criminal justice and family court systems. My past experience working in the Housing Rights Clinic at New York Law School ignited a passion to work in eviction defense, which I will continue to do this summer, while also providing representation to clients in other matters such as employment, forfeiture, reentry, and more.

I began my internship this week and was thrust into the world of holistic defense through an intensive orientation program that covered a wide range of topics, from an introduction to defending clients in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Termination Hearings, to the ethical considerations that go into plea and Padilla consultations. I am looking forward to learning more this summer while serving my community.

Update 2:

After a week of orientation and training, I am now working on cases at the at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem's Civil Defense Practice. My work ranges from conducting research, to drafting memos and appeals. I am also preparing to co-counsel a case that will be heard before an administrative court. This past week, I have also had the opportunity to work on NDS's intake hotline and have had the opportunity to provide advice to people facing housing-related issues. I am looking forward to working on my cases further and learning more about holistic defense work throughout the rest of this summer.

Update 3:

This week, I had the opportunity to work the intake line and field calls from Harlem community members seeking legal advice and representation. I have also had the opportunity to draft an appeal and put together a guide on preparing for a Krimstock hearing. As an intern working in the Collateral Consequences Team, I have



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seen firsthand how many of my clients risk losing the essentials of life due to contact with the criminal justice system or child welfare systems. By providing holistic defense services in housing, employment, forfeiture, and other civil matters, NDS is radically transforming public defense work and transforming the lives of its clients.

Update 4:

This week, I had the opportunity to shadow a criminal defense attorney in our practice and observe arraignments and a criminal trial. Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem is a holistic defense organization and learning more other practice areas, such as criminal defense, immigration, and family defense, has strengthened my skills as a legal advocate. Holistic defense work is a commitment to addressing the most urgent legal and social needs a client may have and it requires approaching those needs with empathy and a wide range of skill sets. By learning more about the criminal legal system in New York, I am also more cognizant of other issues in the criminal, family, and immigration legal systems that our clients may be facing as they are battling their civil issues.

Update 5:

I am so grateful to NDS Harlem and Equal Justice America for providing me with the opportunity to learn more about holistic and civil defense work this summer. As an intern with NDS Harlem's Civil Defense Practice and Collateral Consequences Team, I have had the opportunity to draft countless motions and appeals, shadow court proceedings in NYC Housing Court, meet with clients, operate our civil legal hotline, and even learn from other practices (thank you to the NDS Criminal Defense team for allowing me to shadow some of your work!)

The Collateral Consequences Team at NDS Harlem's Civil Defense Practice was there with me every step of the way during my internship and offered me countless advice and opportunities to grow as a legal advocate. I learned so many skills during my time at NDS that I am excited to put to use during my final year of law school and as I begin my legal career.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible!