



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: My assigned job is in the Undocumented Students Program, within the Immigration Unit, itself within the East Bay Community Law Center. Here, my role is to provide intake for undocumented UC Berkeley students and find out if they qualify for relief (i.e., lawful immigrant status). If a student does qualify, then we provide free legal assistance from the first consultation to the moment they receive their intended benefit. Benefits include visas, work permits, green cards, and naturalization.

The culture at my externship is extremely hands-on with preventative measures to avoid exhaustion and other effects on mental health. My supervisor always incorporates wellness check-ins during our meetings, as do the other seven supervisors who work one-on-one with my cohort members. I had never heard of this level of support and mentoring until now. Although the externship is primarily on Zoom, I haven't observed an effect on the quality of my experience. The work does come at a fast pace, but there are enough guardrails to help keep us on the right path.

This externship's structure is a powerful testament to the importance of mental health in our chosen profession. We need time to decompress to stay sharp between the ears. To quote one of the classics, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop to look around once in a while, you could miss it."

Update 2: The ebb and flow of change in our immigration laws was on full display these past few days. Another District Court in Texas went after reform and limited the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. Oral arguments are set for litigation on DACA in the Fifth Circuit. The Supreme Court affirmed the Biden administration's authority to end the "Remain in Mexico" policy. Of course, this affected my work schedule. My cases for prosecutorial discretion are now severely limited because Immigration Judges are hesitant to use authority that is now up in the air. Unsurprisingly, these events have not affected our rhetoric. News media, rightfully, calls anyone fleeing war "refugees." Yet, when 50 people from Mexico and Central America, including children, suffocated in a semi-truck, they remained part of a "caravan" that recklessly made the "dangerous journey" to the U.S. Come what may, change in the right or wrong direction, is motivation to dive further into my work.



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Update 3: I've been on a Star Wars kick lately. I'm not a rabid fan of the beloved B-movies, but I did enjoy revisiting some of the dialogue from my youth (and the memes from my adulthood). Surprisingly, a line from the sequel trilogy jumped out at me. "The greatest teacher, failure is." Maybe it was Rian Johnson's wise decision to use puppet Yoda over CGI Yoda that added gravitas to the advice. Either way, I much prefer Yoda's acceptance of failure's value over the glib throwaway joke attributed to Edison, or "I found 2,000 ways to not make a lightbulb." Failure, I've found, is much more pronounced when you have a few years of experience behind you. You feel as though failure shouldn't happen with the time, effort, and energy that you've expended to carry you this far. My clinic encourages us to embrace discomfort about race, gender, and class to be effective advocates. I must apply this lesson to failure, too. Yet, we should not strive for failure. Rather, when failure does inevitably occur, we should strive to embrace its lessons. The lessons from failure this week? No one is above it, and no one is above showing kindness and graciousness when confronted with someone's mistake or their own mistake.

Update 4: Patience is a virtue--a remark that borders on cliché. For those who choose a life in service, it should be in bold print on page one of the onboarding manual. A life in service requires patience not just for the client's sake, but for the sake of the practitioner. There are many sources of frustration in a life of service. In immigration non-profits, for example, practitioners deal with mismanaged federal agencies, unrealistic organizational goals, and difficult clients. Everyone demands answers. This constant tug-of-war taxes the mind and spirit quite easily. If the advocate doesn't part with their daily frustration on a regular basis, then it affects everything around them. I think that's why it's important to maintain a support system before entering a life of service. I'm grateful for my family, a support system that helps me contend with this endless supply of frustration. Without my family, I wouldn't be able to vent my stress and resupply my patience every day. This patience helps me respond to aggravations with kindness, and, at times, a firm demeanor. No matter what your support system looks like, it's a good idea to have one.

Update 5: At the end of my summer experience, and at the end of my 10-day isolation, I'm ready to move forward. I'm grateful for all of the kindness and support that I have received throughout these experiences. My only hope is that the clients that I served during this time go on to lead happy and fulfilling lives.