



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Joshua Wilkinson

Law School: University of Michigan

Organization: Human Trafficking Clinic

Update 1: This summer I'm working with the Human Trafficking Clinic at the University of Michigan. We provide legal services for human trafficking survivors. So far, I've written memos and cover letters to USCIS to advocate for these survivors, have helped clients with the last steps on receiving their green cards, and have even had the chance to expunge people's criminal records. I'm excited to continue working and learning this summer with gifted supervisors and clients that have taught me so much already.

Update 2: As this summer flies by, I continue to learn from my experiences as a student attorney for the Human Trafficking Clinic in Ann Arbor. I've also written legal memos and communication to the USCIS. And yesterday, I even participated in a round table discussion with lawyers from around the country who discussed recent developments in getting visas for human trafficking survivors.

But my favorite part has been working with my clients from around the country. Within this last week, I've had meaningful conversations with clients, walked them through tough situations and emergency phone calls, and helped some of them receive their green cards. Working as a student attorney and as an Equal Justice America Fellow has given me a chance to have a meaningful, positive impact on my community—even if that community is the country as a whole!

Update 3: One of the coolest parts of working at a legal clinic is learning about clients' unique needs and figuring out how to meet them. And in the last week, my coworkers at the clinic and I have had the chance to figure out how to meet a new challenge that we have not yet tackled at the clinic. We have been working on an asylum case. The case is exciting; we have combed through mountains of evidence and documents, and we have a compelling story to tell for our client.

What makes this case unique for us as well, is the fact that we have been working on it together. Throughout



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

this summer, we have discussed cases together and offered suggestions, but for the most part, each of us has worked separately to address our clients' needs. But being able to work closely with other student attorneys, figuring out how to divvy up the work, and complimenting each of our abilities has been a major development in my legal education this summer.

Update 4: I am coming into the home stretch now for my internship. The weeks have flown by. And I know that the last few weeks will feel like they are going by even faster. These past few weeks my coworkers and I have started putting the finishing touches on our asylum case and have started contacting our clients to let them know that our time at the clinic will quickly be coming to a close. It is a bittersweet feeling. I have helped clients during some of the most volatile moments in their lives, and they in turn have helped me to develop skills as an advocate.

These are experiences that I will be able to point to when talking with future employers. I have represented real people this summer and I have helped to make substantial changes in their lives. Funding from Equal Justice America has helped to make these experiences possible. The need for civil legal aid is urgent, as 80% of those living in poverty who require civil legal services don't have access to it. Please consider donating to Equal Justice America so they can continue to help provide legal services to under-served communities.

And as the end of the internship races closer, I am going to do everything in my power to help these clients end up in a better place than I found them.

Update 5:

I have had a busy final couple of weeks at my summer job. It is an odd feeling. It is a mixture of closure and... something else. Closure's opposite. With some of our clients' cases, it's easy to get a clear sense of accomplishment; we have worked and watched as our clients have received visas and permanent status. These moments have probably been the easiest to spot this clear sense of accomplishment.

But there have been other moments. Even within the last week, my coworkers and I finished putting the final touches on an asylum packet. The thing was a beast. The packet ended up weighing over 40 pounds. We had to shove it sideways into one of those boxes originally built to house printing paper. And even still, we had to bind the pages with rubber bands to condense them enough to fit. We will still have to wait months until our client hears back from immigration services about the application. But seeing that application put together—and the over a thousand pages of evidence and argument bound together and waiting for some poor UPS worker to try hefting it into the back of their truck—was a similar moment where it was easy to get a sense of accomplishment. Seeing the physical product of our work this summer was gratifying and humbling.

In other moments, however, that same sense of accomplishment is much more difficult to find. We have worked hard to get our clients' cases into a good spot, especially for the next student attorneys who are going to



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

take over these cases. But this often means that our work is going to have to shine through the little details and additions that we have made to the cases. Often the name of the game when handling cases that deal with immigration is waiting. And sometimes the name of the game is prepping and researching. Many of the cases we have worked on have been complicated. And these cases are going to live on past our time at the clinic, and probably past the next student attorneys' time there, too. Our accomplishments here are more hidden, but they are there. We have pushed these cases forward and helped get our clients to a better place. Even if there is no sense of closure yet for our clients, we can be happy knowing that we have helped push them closer toward a future closure.

And so, as I finish my job as a student attorney at the Human Trafficking Clinic at the University of Michigan, I am grateful for great supervisors/mentors, and coworkers who have lifted and pushed me to become a better advocate for my clients this summer. They have helped me to continue to develop both hard and soft skills that I can take with me as I serve my future clients. They have helped show me the ropes and teach me how to best serve a group of clients that is frequently underserved.