



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. aptly noted that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I don’t think the arc of the moral universe has to be long, but with the way our current legal system operates, it is.

I am overjoyed to be working at the East Bay Community Law Center’s Immigration Clinic as a legal intern this summer. EBCLC provides holistic, free legal services to low-income communities in an effort to work toward justice for communities living at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression.

Like most public interest/social justice internships, the position is unpaid. While the private sector is able to steeply pay law student interns, many nonprofits do not have the same capacity. I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for appointing me as a fellow this summer and financially supporting my work.

I want to fight for a world in which resources are redistributed so that law students don’t have to choose between pursuing their passion of fighting for justice and earning a competitive wage. I want to fight for a world in which there is no dearth of public interest lawyers so that those who need legal counsel most are able to receive it.

Update 2:

Sadly, this National Immigrant Heritage Month I’ve been feeling quite cynical about our complicated, unjust, and inaccessible immigration system. How can a government that forced the migration of enslaved people, that steals land from indigenous people, and that exploits and profits from the labor of migrant workers possibly have the authority to decide who may or may not come into this country?

At East Bay Community Law Center, I’ve been learning more about DACA as I’ve worked on assisting clients



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

with DACA Renewals. I've had to unlearn a lot of common misconceptions that I grew up hearing in the media. I think the most shocking information I've learned has been that:

1. DACA is not a pathway to citizenship unlike some other forms of immigration relief. It only temporarily protects recipients from deportation.
2. DACA guidelines have not been updated since the program was first started. So, only a finite group of people are eligible to receive DACA. For example, anyone born after 2007 is NOT eligible for DACA.

It's hard not to feel infuriated as active litigation puts the entire DACA program's existence into question.

Yet, even through all of this frustration and dejection, our clients and their stories give me a sense of hope for our nation's future. Helping just one more client attain or renew a protected status means there's one more person's story to add to the fabric of our nation. It means there's one more person to celebrate as part of National Immigrant Heritage Month. It means there's one more person who can rest a little more easily within our borders.

Update 3:

Over the course of my internship at East Bay Community Law Center, I've been learning a lot about the process of applying for asylum. What I've learned has been a roller coaster of emotions.

The stories that our clients have bravely shared with us have profoundly impacted me. The pain and suffering every client has endured is not something that anyone should ever have to go through. I find myself struggling to even write down their stories in briefs and applications because their experiences are so painful. I can only imagine how incredibly difficult it must be to have lived through (and to continue to live through) this pain.

I can't help but wonder what our immigration system would look like if every citizen in our country had to read the declaration of just one client applying for asylum? If every citizen had a little more empathy for the trauma and suffering endured by so many, perhaps the fates of many immigrants could be changed. So many voices are silenced in our immigration system because of longstanding systemic and institutionalized oppression. If folks applying for various immigration remedies (including asylum) didn't have to fear their undocumented status, I wonder how many more citizens in the United States would hear their stories? I wonder how many more immigrants would be able to process some of their traumas and find community and support?

Update 4:

From what I've experienced thus far this summer at East Bay Community Law Center, working in direct legal services can be tough. Working with clients within the confines of an extremely unjust system is frustrating at best. But, getting to meet clients, hear their stories, and experience triumphs with them has made every ounce of



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

frustration worth it.

Recently, I've been working on helping clients apply to become Lawful Permanent Residents, also known as "green card" holders. The clients I have been working with are currently "asylees," which means they were previously granted asylum.

Having been granted asylum, it is no surprise that the stories of these clients fleeing to the United States are wrought with terror, suffering, and pain.

But, the sense of home they have found in the United States and extreme excitement they feel in applying to become Lawful Permanent Residents has reminded me of the hope that still exists in our nation and systems.

For many years now, I've found it difficult to feel anything positive about the United States. And while I still think there is a boundless amount of change needed in our nation, I now feel a sense of gratitude for the peace, joy, and hope this country has brought to many immigrants, including my own family.

There is much work to be done to truly realize "justice for all." But in the meantime, we'll keep fighting for justice for the next client.

Update 5:

As we near the final days of summer break, I feel overwhelmed with gratitude for the experiences I had this summer at East Bay Community Law Center.

First, I have to extend a huge thank you to our clinical supervisors Abigail Rich, Daisy Felt, and Karla Cruz. Not only are they a wealth of knowledge when it comes to immigration law, but they are also the most patient, kind, and encouraging supervisors I could have asked for. They led us through multiple substantive law trainings, answered our endless questions about our cases, entrusted us with impactful work, gave us space to process and discuss the difficult emotions we were dealing with, and believed in us more than we believed in ourselves.

There are so many things our supervisors taught us that I will be taking into my future work. To highlight a few: first, our supervisors modeled for us what it means to be a client-centered and trauma-informed lawyer. Their dedication to their clients and their intentionality when speaking with them about difficult topics is critical to protecting the mental health of clients and effectively working on a case. Second, our supervisors honest when they didn't know the answer to something. They showed us how important it is to do legal research and check with colleagues if an answer is unclear in order to get the best results for clients. Finally, our supervisors taught us the importance of taking care of our own mental health. Feeling burnt out and not processing difficult emotions from work can only lead to worse outcomes for clients and ourselves in the long run.



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I wanted to extend another thank you to the amazing Clinic Program Coordinator, Katia Kiston, for setting up so many wonderful events for EBCLC interns to attend this summer. Getting exposure to all of the clinics outside of the immigration clinic was critical to holistically serving our clients.

Finally, the biggest thank you of all goes to the clients I worked with this summer. I am honored to have met them and so grateful that they allowed me to be a small part of their immigration process. Their kindness and bravery will forever inspire me.

Thank you for following along with me all summer!