

Scott Boyer
Wayne State University Law School
EJA Summer Fellowship Memo
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I was fortunate enough this summer to spend time as an intern for the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center based in Kalamazoo, MI. MIRC's goals are to help low-income immigrants obtain the rights and privileges that they are entitled to, as well as helping non-immigrants achieve status as legal permanent residents and eventually to help them become citizens. During my internship I was able to gain experience and exposure in a wide range of tasks and activities that MIRC performs. The attorneys at MIRC did a great job of making sure I was involved and participating in some very important cases. For instance, during my first week at MIRC, the attorneys had taken on a client who was seeking asylum in the United States. Although the attorneys themselves spoke with the client and met with him most often, I was able to help conduct country conditions research to help show the future immigration judge the probable persecution our client would encounter if he were to return to his home country.

Other tasks I performed included interviewing clients to fill out naturalization applications, calling prospective clients, conducting legal research, and helping to organize a class action lawsuit against in coordination with another public interest group to help otherwise eligible immigrants obtain health benefits. I found that having a wide variety of tasks to perform gave me the chance to become a better researcher and writer and advocate. I was also given the opportunity to travel to meet with clients remotely who had been assigned to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody. Performing these tasks taught me to better appreciate different cultures and family histories. One client in particular that I helped was a young woman who was seeking to become the first American citizen in her family, even before her parents who were both legal permanent residents (LPRs). Helping LPRs through the naturalization process showed me how so many people (including myself) took for granted the privilege of being a US citizen when so many had to toil for years for a chance to call themselves citizens. Overall, the tasks that I performed at MIRC gave me a greater understanding of the immigration process and how I, as a potential future immigration attorney, could help clients looking to navigate it and one day possibly improve the system.

The internship gave me an additional opportunity to do outreach work with migrant farmworkers in nearby rural communities. MIRC's offices are shared with Farmworker Legal Services (FLS), a non-profit that represented migrant and seasonal farmworkers with legal matters. As part of FLS duties, FLS staff conducted outreach trips and I was fortunate enough to go on a few trips. I was able to visit migrant farm camps and converse (mostly in Spanish) with the workers and their families about their rights, any questions they might have, and their daily lives. It was truly an eye-opening experience. I gained a greater appreciation for migrant farmworkers' struggles, concerns, and overall difficult lifestyle. I strongly believe that the experience will help me be a better advocate for not only migrant workers but also for low-income clients in general.

As a law student thinking of practicing in immigration law upon graduation, this internship helped solidify my commitment and desire to help immigrants in a variety of contexts. None of this would have been possible without the support of organizations like EJA, and I sincerely thank all involved for giving me the opportunity to expand my intellectual horizons and gain a greater appreciation for work that I had not had prior experience performing.