



Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



Name: Mary M Rincon

Law School: Temple

EJA Fellowship: Community Legal Services

Entry 1: Week of 6/11/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

These past two weeks I have had the opportunity to attend a wide array of trainings on the pro bono civil defense work Community Legal Services – from public benefits to property tax foreclosure. In the Intake Unit, I am working with clients to ascertain their legal needs and, when possible, pair them up with an attorney. It is eye-opening to see the different kinds of issues with which our applicants and clients are struggling.

I am grateful for the financial support from EJA that makes it feasible for me to do this important work.

Entry 2: Week of 6/25/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

I am loving my work at Community Legal Services. Through my work in Intake I am learning so much about the challenges that being “low income” presents to so many in Philadelphia. Because the intricacies of the legal system make it difficult for lay people to navigate and because legal representation is simply unaffordable for so many Philadelphians, I am disheartened to see people who are shut out of a favorable outcome for their situation simply because important deadlines have already passed. There is so much reform needed these days, and access to Justice is high on my list.



Entry 3: Week of 7/9/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

At CLS, like many legal services organizations, we have income thresholds based on the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Recently, a client, a single man, asked me what the FPL was and I told him that for a single adult in 2018, it is \$12,140 of annual income. He responded, "I make a little bit more than that, but I'm still poor!" He is right.

The Federal Poverty Line is well below the standard of actual poverty. For a family of four, it is \$31,380. That works out to \$21.50 per day to cover 100% of each person's housing, food, transportation, and other necessities. To have the federal line set so low feels like an insult to low-income people. Does the federal government really think that a person can raise a family on that kind of money?

I am proud to work with an organization that helps low-income Philadelphians maintain the critical things in their lives – their homes, their wages, their benefits, and their families. For more on what it's like to live below the poverty line, I highly encourage the book \$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America.

Entry 4: Week of 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

It's hard to believe, but my summer internship is coming to a close. Just a few more weeks. I am so grateful for this opportunity and for EJA's help in making it possible for me.

When I started law school, I had no doubt that I was in the right place, doing the right thing. But I wasn't sure where it was all heading. At orientation, then-Dean Epps talked about "dreaming on the other side of the mountain; believing in what you cannot see." For her, an african american child who went to kindergarten pre- Brown v Board of Ed, the idea that she could one day be the dean of a law school was unimaginable to her younger self. When I started law school, I wasn't sure what was on the other side of my mountain. But I believed in it fiercely. Being in law school has been a sacrifice for not only me, but for my boys too. Spending a summer at CLS has been inspiring on so many levels - and one of them is getting clarity on what my post-law school career will look like.

I hope that I can continue to do this kind of work - using my skills and my knowledge to help people navigate the complicated legal system and to represent low income residents to help them save what is precious to them. I also hope I am able to continue to work in such a great environment of dedicated professionals.

I am proud to work with an organization that helps low-income Philadelphians maintain the critical things in their lives – their homes, their wages, their benefits, and their families.



North Philadelphia Law Center
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Philadelphia, PA 19140
215.227.2400

August 7, 2018

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Mary Rincon, EJA Fellowship Recipient

Dear Mr. Ruben,

It was a pleasure to have Mary Rincon as a legal intern this summer in our North Philadelphia office of Community Legal Services. As one of 4 staff conducting intake sessions, Mary was a great help assisting clients with a wide variety of legal issues. I was Mary's direct supervisor during her time with us; and she has even asked to stay on with us for an extra week. Her main responsibilities have been in our general intake unit, which includes initial meetings with new clients to identify their issues, gathering documents, conducting follow up interviews when necessary, and referring the matter to the appropriate unit within CLS or one of our sister legal aid organizations or the private bar.

Our office typically encounters between 25 and 35 people per intake day and despite the whirlwind pace and high volume of contact with the public, Mary provided uncommonly courteous and thorough assistance to our clients. Her perceptive and congenial manner has been a comfort for some very distressed and anxious people in need of assistance for a panoply of legal issues. Mary is a highly intelligent, creative, and thoughtful individual who approaches her work with the utmost care, diligence, and concern for the well-being of our clients as well as her colleagues. She always volunteered for additional assignments, and she always produced outstanding work under sometimes very chaotic conditions. In addition to her work on our walk-in intake, Mary provided exceptional assistance on other legal matters, including preparing pro se petitions to postpone a sheriff's sale, drafting answers to complaints in ejectment and dispute letters for creditors, completing applications for property tax relief and water revenue abatement programs, and analyzing complex documents.

Mary is a natural leader who has been very responsible, professional, and thoughtful about her comments and reactions to her fellow staff -- attorneys, paralegals, social workers, support staff, and other interns -- and her insights and constructive assistance have always been very well-reasoned and skillfully crafted. These skills should aid Mary in any endeavor where team work and a collegial atmosphere are priorities. Mary has demonstrated the clear

commitment and intellectual acuity to make her a great advocate, and she has dedicated all of her professional efforts thus far to helping the poor and disenfranchised to better their lives.

We are very grateful to the foundation for providing the financial assistance that allowed Mary to spend her summer with us. This support from EJA was a critical factor that facilitated Mary being able to further develop her skills in serving the low income clients of Community Legal Services. If you would like additional information, please call me at 215-227-4740.

Thank you for providing this opportunity for Mary Rincon and for sharing her with Community Legal Services this summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Lukens", written over a horizontal line.

Robert Lukens
Intake Unit Supervisor