



## Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** Boston University School of Law

**Organization:** New Haven Legal Assistance Association

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### Update 1:

I am a rising 2L at Boston University School of Law, and today marks the start of my third week as an Equal Justice America Fellow with the Immigration Unit at New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.

The rhythm into which I have settled is an improvisational interpretation of the standard 9-5. Client work schedules change, detained clients wait in line to use the phone, calls disconnect, meetings get moved up or back without warning, and my supervisor apologizes profusely through it all. It's okay, I say. I wanted to know what it was like, and this is what it's like.

These few weeks have consisted of long stretches of phone interpretation, a smattering of check-ins, a few days of poring over voluntary departure resources, one exhaustive visit to a client in ICE detention, another day reviewing asylum case law, a handful of mock interviews, and a statewide meeting on public benefits for immigrant clients. When I ask about formatting my first research assignment, my supervising attorney laughs. I should probably ask you to practice doing a fancy memo, but honestly no one here has time for that, she says. Just put it in an email and paste links to your sources. Another attorney asks whether it would bother us if she cursed a lot. A third still uses a flip phone. My kind of people, I think to myself.

I care profoundly about this work, and I am profoundly angry it continues to be necessary. I am angry that the government so carelessly and casually retraumatizes clients whom we must steel to have the worst days, months, and years of their lives picked apart by people wielding terms like "socially distinct" and "crimes of moral turpitude" as if they were nothing more than an abstraction, a euphemism, a gate-shaped barrier to entry.

If the care and the anger are two sides of a spinning coin, its axis is the conviction there's a better way. This summer I have been granted unearnable access to the innermost lives and experiences of our clients, who continue to show up for themselves and their families while bearing the heaviest of loads, and who know far



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more about the ins and outs of this system than I could ever hope to understand. I am learning from effective and empathetic advocates, alongside whom I would love nothing more than to work myself out of a future job. As we all spin towards a different way of being, I feel deeply grateful to have these as my guides.

My deepest appreciation goes to EJA for helping to make this summer work financially feasible for my employer and me.

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### Update 2:

Rising 2L at Boston University School of Law here, on my fourth week of interning for the Immigration Unit at New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.

It's deliriously hot out, and I have a half-baked memo taking up most of my working headspace. But I've been turning this piece over in my mind for weeks, during those moments in which I am able to step back from the minutiae of my Russian doll-esque case files and ponder the big questions. It is far more coherent and insightful than anything I could hope to say, and I hope you give it a read.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/07/us-border-immigration-harsha-walia>

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### Update 3:

I was going to start this off with a rant about how un-trauma-informed the entire immigration system is, but looking back at my previous two posts, I realized it may be time for me to express an emotion that is not abject rage. There are more enduring and deeply held ideals that anchor anger, and in whose absence this work cannot be sustained.

So, this is where I spontaneously pivot to reflect on the incredible feats of love, mutual support, humanity, vulnerability, and trust I get to hold and witness, day in and day out. I don't know if there's anything I can say about those with and for whom I work (clients? collaborators, really) that won't sound corny, or trite. But I think of the incredible advocacy of those detained on behalf of one another, the internal networks and support systems I have glimpsed, emerging and shifting as a means of collective survival in the most hostile of places. And I think how the only ones rendered less human by their confinement are us, on whose behalf the most unspeakable things are always labeled just.

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### Entry 4:

I'm a doodler. I doodle when I'm listening or digesting information. I doodle when I'm stressed or sitting with something heavy. And I doodle most while talking on the phone, like my mom, whose absentminded crows and curling vines creep across each week's junk mail.



This summer of intent listening, heavy processing, and long phone conversations inevitably led to a lot of doodling. Amid the senselessness that seems endemic to immigration law, it helped me stay grounded in myself and in my senses. For that I feel thankful, and hopeful, and human.

