



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** American University Washington College of Law

**Organization:** Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities

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**Update 1:** Honored to be serving Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities as a Legal Intern this summer. Here's some recent history about its origins: Quality Trust was founded as part of a settlement in the class action lawsuit *Evans v the District of Columbia* in 2001 (<https://lnkd.in/gmTSN7uy>). The court closed Forest Haven, D.C.'s institution for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, twenty-one years ago. The court formed Quality Trust to safeguard the constitutional rights of the more than 1,000 former residents and members of the community with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Disability rights advocacy is an integral part of my life. Part of my journey now is learning from some of the hardest working members in the field. I feel so grateful to be a member of this Legal Team.

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**Update 2:** Please feel free to check out the national map on Supported Decision Making that we have been updating (<https://lnkd.in/geUNjNRa>). I'm going state-by-state and reading about positive advancements in lawmaking that recognize the right of an adult with a disability to make independent decisions without a legal guardianship. Today, many are passing progressive legislation, but there is certainly more to be done in every jurisdiction.

I've been able to learn about client-centered lawyering at Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities. The lawyer is usually the authoritative party at the center of the formal legal experience, but it comes at the expense of different communication styles, attitudes, or even a readiness to engage in difficult conversations.

I'm excited to translate our services for Spanish-speaking families in Washington, D.C. Considering that about five percent of all attorneys are Latino/a, I feel ready to expand our work of providing high quality legal representation to an abundant community.

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**Update 3:** This past week I was thrilled to translate services at Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities for a potential client. I am someone who is always speaking Spanish at home, so it was both a comfortable and cathartic moment. Primarily because I was able to be an advocate for Support Decision-Making ("SDM") for a family that is very similar to my own.

SDMs grant people with intellectual and developmental disabilities the basic principle of remaining primary decision-makers for their own lives.



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SDM is a principle of client-centered counseling around the world. It receives recognition in "British Columbia, Canada, Sweden, parts of Australia, and Germany" and was adopted by the the U.N. General Assembly in 2008 as a fundamental human right (Robert Dinerstein, Tales from a Supportive Guardianship).

Given the legal context, the effort behind these agreements is extremely rewarding. It is the beginning of a vital change in lawyering for people with disabilities.

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**Update 4:** I'm near the end of my legal internship at Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities.

Quality Trust introduced me to a powerful community, it helped me help those in hard times and venture out to create new opportunities for others.

I'm very happy to have channeled temper into your experience. One thing is to detest certain laws and rules, another is to write about them. To argue for something much better. Public interest law does precisely that, imagines a system that includes "those in our society who traditionally have not been the clients of the legal profession."

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**Update 5:** I hope to champion disability rights law for the rest of my career. As I embark on that journey, I am thankful for Equal Justice America's support. My time at Quality Trust was a privilege. Thanks to their professional dedication to Washington, D.C.'s residents with developmental and intellectual disabilities, the District is a more lively, rich, and accessible hub for the world to revere.

I hope that I was able to serve my Legal Team at Quality Trust. I drafted a brief to challenge an overly restricted guardianship, updated a national map on supported decision-making laws, live-translated legal service options into Spanish for a Spanish-speaking client, and researched D.C. cases on the ethics of representing clients with disabilities.

Growing up, I did not know how much positive work was possible. Most people I knew dared not dream of something more, and I did not realize the possibilities of disability justice. At six years old, I saw my classmates mocking or ridiculing other students with disabilities. I also witnessed abject pity from the adults in the room, from parents, teachers, and doctors. Even at that age, it was uncanny to know my peers thought it impossible to integrate a community spanning millions of people into society.

My introduction to public service work began as camp counselor in middle school. I volunteered for a charter school that operated a summer camp for children with disabilities. It was run by parents of children with disabilities who scheduled the program by leading field trips, operating lunch, and teaching classes. Those ten weeks felt like a solution! I started to believe that people with disabilities needed to be protected. To believe the adults who cared for them were their best advocates. I felt that people with disabilities could thrive in this little space.

Clearly, my perception was wrong, and the ambitions of the disability rights movement has long surpassed that small charter school. But stagnation looms when public service lacks representatives from the population it attempts to serve. As someone without a disability working for a disability rights organization, my work was as much about listening and learning as it was about legal research and advocacy. That is how it will always be.