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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: The Bronx Defenders

Update 1: I began working with The Bronx Defenders after the Memorial Day holiday. In my first two weeks, I was introduced to every part of the holistic defense model at The Bronx Defenders. In my work thus far, one thing has been very clear – through organizing around a client’s holistic needs, there is a real force for systemic change. The Bronx Defenders advocates for the variety of complex needs facing a client. Apart from legal representation, The Bronx Defenders harnesses the holistic model to provide leadership development and opportunities for real civic engagement, build power for communities and strengthen relationships between diverse communities and populations, and round out the motto of working 1-1 with clients as a community resource.

In the Immigration Practice, the holistic defense model is utilized to provide client-centered representation at various stages in immigration representation. By embedding immigration specialists on every team at The Bronx Defenders, clients are provided with informed legal advice about the immigration consequences of contact with criminal or family legal systems. I am extremely grateful to be under the wing of some of this country’s best immigration attorneys and criminal defense advocates. I’m looking forward to harnessing what I learned during orientation to help represent clients this summer.

Update 2: As an intern at The Bronx Defenders, I have had the opportunity to participate in their one-of-a-kind Trial Skills Training Program. Through this program, interns are exposed to a hypothetical client’s case as it progresses and intersects with the criminal, civil, family, and immigration legal systems. At the beginning of the program, we viewed arraignments which was accompanied by us delivering a bail application for our hypothetical client.

We then learned about theme and theory, and how they are paired with legal arguments to produce opening statements, cross examinations, direct examinations, and closings (all of which we will have crafted and delivered by the end of the internship). This program has been a natural complement to my participation in Brooklyn Law School’s Moot Court Honor Society. While the sets of facts in both Moot Court and in the Trial Skills Training Program exist in hypothetical factual universes, the possibility of a situation mirroring that of



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your hypothetical client's case is very possible—in fact, probable.

I discovered this when working with a client who is involved in both the criminal and immigration legal system. Luckily, this client had made it to the coveted Naturalization interview and was just a civics test and an interview away from becoming a United States citizen. As she explained the story of her involvement with the criminal legal system, which still weighed on her immigration status over 10 years later, she told me about how she wants to go to law school someday. She shared how she is working part-time while being a mom to her children and studying to be accepted into a law school someday.

I thought back to our factual universe in the Trial Skills Training Program and those that I saw during Moot Court. Working with clients has always been a highlight of my law school summers because no matter how many competitions, exams, or hypothetical case studies you encounter throughout law school, there is nothing like meeting real clients and preparing them for their next steps in the legal systems they are encountering.

Update 3: As my internship at The Bronx Defenders nears its end, I am reflecting on my path to public interest work. Despite being born in the United States, my upbringing was dictated by traditional tenants of Indian culture. As the eldest girl, my culture directed me to stay close to my parents and follow a career path that guarantees stability.

However, for my entire life, my parents have been aware and supportive of my interest in pursuing public interest law--specifically immigration law and policy reform. Nonetheless, they were not ignorant to how my decision would resonate within our family. To some in my family, females are expected to follow norms, not challenge them--and certainly not attempt to change them.

Instead of choosing to identify with the limitations that some attempted to impose on me, I choose to identify with the resilience that my parents, and many other immigrants I have worked with this summer, demonstrated when arriving from a different country and creating a new path for themselves.

I want to be an example to other Indian-American women, and show that we are free to follow our passions and speak our minds. Not because doing so is selfish, but because doing so is necessary for the next generation following in our footsteps.

Update 4: My internship at The Bronx Defenders ends this Friday. In my final week, I am reflecting on everything I learned during my time here. As a holistic public defense model, I learned an extraordinary amount about the importance of viewing each client as a human being – something The Bronx Defenders prides itself on. At the beginning of my internship, we learned about the differences between service, advocacy, and organizing. Service refers to an immediate need a client is facing. Advocacy is providing assistance on behalf of others. Organizing moves people to action as a collective on issues that matter most to the people who are impacted by that issue.



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I saw first-hand how The Bronx Defenders succeeds in each of these three areas to represent the human being that is their client. In order to ensure that community members and former clients have the tools and the power to advocate for themselves, BxD provides leadership development and opportunities for real civic engagement, builds power within communities, and strengthens relationships between diverse communities and populations. By doing this, BxD rounds out the motto of working 1-1 with clients as a community resource. I am more confident than ever that through organizing in this way, and representing clients in a holistic way, there is a real force for systemic change.

I am grateful for my time with The Bronx Defenders and look forward to any opportunity to support their work in the future.

Update 5: Two weeks ago, I completed my internship with The Bronx Defenders. It was an extremely rewarding experience that I will cherish greatly for many years to come. Working alongside immigration, criminal, family, and civil defense practitioners opened my eyes to the benefits of the holistic defense model. It also showed me that the work I wish to pursue is difficult but, will be extraordinarily rewarding in the long term.

My commitment to immigration developed from my parents' immigration story. My father is an immigrant from Kenya. My mother is an immigrant from India. I was born in the Bronx and am familiar with the incredible diversity of migrants that live in New York City. I have carried my parents' immigration story with me while navigating life as a first-generation American. As such, I am especially interested in the nexus between immigration and criminal law, which I saw first-hand during my time at The Bronx Defender this summer. I believe that my experiences this summer advocating for migrants in a variety of immigration relief cases has prepared me for future challenges in my legal career.

During my time at The Bronx Defenders, I helped clients and attorneys research the immigration consequences of state and federal criminal convictions. I conducted interviews with clients to draft prosecutorial discretion requests. I tracked the status of immigration decisions and pivoted legal arguments to adapt to these changes. I participated in the holistic defense model by researching and counseling immigration clients alongside criminal defense attorneys. Through all of this learning, I confirmed that public interest law is the path for me.

I am committed to ensuring fairness and due process for migrants of all backgrounds. I admire the varied and comprehensive approach of The Bronx Defenders and would be excited to support their work assisting migrants in a valuable and meaningful way in the future. My enormous thanks to EJA for sponsoring me this summer and giving public interest law students the ability to pursue their passions.

You can help future EJA Fellows like me by supporting Equal Justice America in their mission to shape the next generation of lawyers.