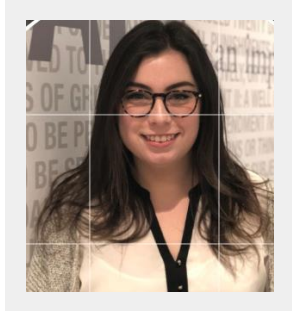




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: The Legal Aid Society

Update 1: My first two weeks at The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice have been very insightful. I've attended several trainings on immigration, child advocacy, and interview skills. During my time in-person, I was able to meet with a client and watch our team's attorney and social worker interview the client and his father. It was a great learning experience to sit in on an interview, and already helped me pick up some skills that I will use when communicating with my own clients in the future. I was also able to sit in on a virtual court appearance, which was my first time in court since the pandemic started. It was interesting to see the shift between in-person to virtual court, and it ran much more smoothly than I was expecting. I'm excited to continue the rest of this internship and learn/observe even more in the upcoming weeks.

Update 2: The past two weeks with the Juvenile Rights Practice have been very insightful. I've had the opportunity to dive into some legal research, attend virtual court, and meet clients in-person at intake. I have looked at several child protective cases and listened in on attorneys counseling the young children. Meeting with the children in-person has been so rewarding, knowing there are experienced people there and willing to help them.

Update 3: The past two weeks have been spent diving into the child welfare practice. I have learned about emergency removals, the foster care system, and supervised visitation. Most importantly, I learned that as attorneys for the children, we will sometimes have to do what we think might be against the child's best interest to accommodate their preferences, if they are old enough to make that choice for themselves. This was a hard lesson, but ultimately it makes sense that some children would want to return to their parents, even if it is an abusive or neglectful home. Most recently, I worked on a case digest for my supervising attorney that included almost two years of ACS notes. I then compared the information on the digest to a petition from the mother's attorney to conclude what information we will still need from ACS, and if there are any discrepancies in the facts alleged.

Update 4: I have learned a lot about child welfare lawyering in the past few weeks. Recently, I've been working on case digests composed of ACS reports. Going through these documents page by page gave me a lot of insight



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on the child's journey from the start, before we get them as a client. I've also used these case digests to fact check opposing counsel petitions, and spot discrepancies. This work has made me more detailed and instilled the importance of keeping thorough notes, especially when dealing with children who can't recount the stories themselves. I've also been helping a client with a name change petition. She insisted we work on it together, so walking her through the process and watching her succeed has been very rewarding. I am continuing to observe court appearances, which has also been an exciting part of the past few weeks.

Update 5: Ending my legal internship with The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice is bittersweet. This has been such an insightful learning experience, and I can't wait to take the skills and knowledge I gained from this summer with me to my fall clinic.

Going into this internship, I thought I wanted to pursue a career in family law. Now that my summer is complete, I know for sure that I want to pursue a career in family law. Working directly with children has been the best part of my summer by far. Interacting with kids in this setting combined my passions for legal justice and children's rights and autonomy. Although the work was emotional, I learned to put my personal feelings aside for the sake of my clients in cases of child abuse. Coming to terms that it was the attorney's job to argue what for the child wants, even if we believed it was not in their best interest, was a complicated journey. I've come to realize that there's no good solution in many of these cases, where it seems like the only options are for a child to be removed from their parents and forced to enter a new home or stay in a situation where the living conditions are not ideal. However, it was powerful to see the resilience of these children and their willingness to share their thoughts and advocates for themselves. Child protective work is by no means a perfect system and I am inspired to advocate for new laws and regulation to improve how the child protective services operate to serve both children and their parents and guardians.

I was also lucky to have the opportunity to observe juvenile delinquency hearings in the New York County Family Court. This cleared up so many misconceptions I had regarding juvenile delinquency, and I was glad to see the process is mostly separated from criminal court. I worked on one case in detail, in which a 16 year-old was unjustly arrested because he was jaywalking, and upon search, was found with a gun. I followed this case for the entirety of my internship, and I am eager to hear how it turns out. I prepared a few different documents for this case, including a Bill and Demand, Omni, and Motion to Dismiss for the Furtherance of Justice. The Motion to Dismiss was my favorite thing to work on this summer. It required a lot of research which meant I learned a lot about New York City traffic laws as well as the racial profiling of young black men by the NYPD. The edits from my supervising attorney on this motion taught me about legal writing and formatting, which are skills I know I'll be using all the time.

I am so grateful to both The Legal Aid Society and Equal Justice America for providing me with such an amazing legal internship experience this summer. I learned more as a legal intern than I did in two-semester worth of classes and deeply appreciate the hands-on learning approach, as well as interviewing tips that work well for trauma informed lawyering.