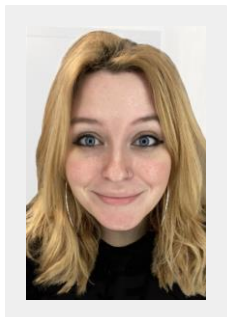




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: Last week was focused on training in the Civil Practice of Legal Aid Society. We heard from people from a wide range of departments including Immigration and Housing. Learning about the different areas of work was beneficial to getting a greater understanding of the role of Legal Aid Society. Then we essentially got a crash course in various skills we would need during our internship including working with interpreters, best practice for zoom, self-care and client intake. I, additionally, have started sitting in on team meetings and supervisor meetings in my department and shadowing paralegals on calls to provide assistance with housing issues. I have definitely been learning a lot more about how housing works in NYC and the resources available to help tenants, as well as the roadblocks that impact people's lives

Update 2: The past two weeks I have been able to build on the trainings that I did and do more tangible contributing work. I've created resources to distribute to other offices to help clients access rent assistance and financial support. I've also sat in on client intake in preparation for a court hearing - which I also got to attend. It was interesting to see how these processes work and how things come to fruition (even from zoom court!). I have also been able to listen to paralegals returning calls from clients reaching out to the helpline for assistance with renting issues, landlord disputes, and those seeking representation, financial support, or just answers to their legal questions. It is certainly a combination of feeling badly for the situations that people are in and being glad that there is some resources and level of support for them coming from us. I had heard conceptually about Right to Counsel in NYC and different housing issues on the rise, but it is very different to experience being in that system and meeting people directly impacted.

Update 3: Over the past two weeks, I've continued shadowing calls on the housing helpline. It is a good way to be exposed to a wide range of issues and types of help that potential clients may need to access. I also enjoy seeing all the different tactics used by the paralegals on the call to do intake and assist clients. I have also continued working on resources for different offices to be able to distribute to their clients or use themselves. This involves researching charities and seeing what is still operating and what has been closed (sometimes for over a decade). I am also working on a legal memo that explains what constitutes abandonment in a landlord-tenant situation. Essentially, that boils down to affirmative actions taken to relinquish the apartments, like giving up the keys. Throughout the week I also sit in on meetings, attend trainings that go over all aspects of the



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civil practice at Legal Aid Society, and write documents for submission to court and call clients with updates on their cases.

Update 4: I have recently been working on creating a memo on what constitutes abandonment of property - in short, it requires an positive act to establish that a person intends to leave the property forever. This may look like giving the keys in or something to that effect. I am also working on putting together a list of online resources that can be distributed to individuals who are representing themselves in housing court. There are a lot of scattered sources available - DIY court forms, videos, legal glossaries - but no collective place with all of these that we can point clients to at the moment. This should fill that need and can either be distributed as a whole or paralegals can direct callers to a specific site. At the same time, I am shadowing paralegals taking phone calls from individuals with questions about housing situations. They may have issues with their landlords, need repairs, have fallen behind on rent, or face roommate disputes. Sometimes, we are able to provide representation. Always, however, we can offer resources that connect them to a solution and follow up over voicemail or a secondary call. I am also the first line of contact with several of our clients and am following up with them in order to settle their cases, drafting stipulations, and ensuring things run smoothly.

Update 5: This week, I have focused on creating more documents that can be distributed to clients in all the boroughs. I do this by researching topics, figuring out questions that someone might have about them, and then, of course, answering them. I then compile lists of resources available and make it into digestible links and descriptions. We have a template we use to make them more visually appealing, as well. I like being able to do research that feels relevant to someone's life. I also finished writing a memorandum on what consists abandonment of a rented apartment and what are the obligations and responsibilities resulting from a vacated unit. Abandonment is very similar to surrendering a unit, as both require a conscious and active act to instigate. Surrendering typically involves giving over a key - the landlord then accepts the surrender and relets for their benefit or the former tenants benefit, or the landlord does not accept the surrender. Abandonment is very difficult for a landlord to prove, given that a person is entitled to use or not use their rented space however they wish. If they are renting a commercial space, for example, and only leave some supplies there rather than running their business - that is their prerogative. Most cases are brought by tenants or former tenants who were illegally locked out by a landlord who incorrectly claimed they abandoned the premises. The fact that the tenant is actively pursuing the case tends to negate the landlord's claim that they no longer have any interest in the unit. The rare case in which abandonment was proven involves people who not only moved all of their belongings out, but ceased utility payments and rent payments, and set up residence in a new place in a new state for over a year. It was an interesting topic to look at it and very reminiscent of my 1L property class. I have also been responding to voicemails left for the Housing Helpline. This consists of just calling people back and either connecting them with resources or people who may be able to further assist them, or, hopefully, giving them guidance on whatever issue they are dealing with. It is a very tangible way to realize how much information I've accumulated throughout this summer experience when I can confidently guide them. This is another way to act as a resource for people and I really appreciate my ability to be in a position to do that. Overall, this has been a fantastic summer. I learned a great deal not just about housing law, but about approaches to public interest lawyering, and the vast multitude of interconnected issues that impact people's abilities to thrive. Something I thought about a lot while doing this work is, in this field in particular, but the same is true for many public interest internships and jobs, if someone is coming to you for help - they are already having a stressful and upsetting time. What is a day of work for you is an extremely rough experience for them. I think that is an important thing to carry with you and make sure you treat people with empathy for their experiences.