



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: The decision to choose law school as my form of social justice advocacy was a difficult and conflicting process. In part because U.S. jurisprudence can, and has, perpetuated injustices as much as it has combatted inequities. But also, because legal representation is largely inaccessible.

These first few weeks working with the Bronx Legal Services has shown me the side of the law that I can and want to be on. Witnessing the dedication, care, and virtue with which the LSNYC public service lawyers approach their work has rejuvenated my enthusiasm towards achieving my law school degree.

If there is one overarching emotion that has grown throughout this internship, it's hope— stepping more into the world of public legal services has allowed me to witness first-hand the complex network of support systems: from dedicated legal advocates to non-profit organization funds, to fellowships for public interest students. These resources, their interdependency and dedication to social justice, are built in pursuit of a transformative network which looks to cater to everyone. I'm eager to continue working alongside these brilliant lawyers and I am honored to have been given this opportunity to work with such driven and inspiring individuals— coworkers and clients alike.

Update 2: This past week I met a client whose case I had done some work on a few weeks back. I knew her story, I knew the intimate details of her most traumatic moments, and here I was shaking hands with someone who was so much more than any of those hardships.

She carried a resolve and strength that garnered respect. I felt honored, and at the same time, out of place. I was observing her hearing prep. It was strange and informative—this process of coaching someone on how to tell their story in a way that was more suited for the courtroom. She remained calm and collected. She explained how unnatural it was for her to share in such a fashion. It is unnatural. The events that have led her to seeking



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asylum in the U.S. are events I could never begin to relate to, and I'm sure most, if not all, the attendees of her hearing will also lack this ability to relate. Yet, there are guideposts in a courtroom, as inauthentic as they may seem, they are important in achieving the desired outcome, for now.

It is for this reason that I am drawn to this work. To encounter individuals who possess a complexity and wisdom that, by virtue of their experiences, have a unique insight into how to heal the state of the world. I hope for someday she may be able to tell her story as she wishes, or to remain silent, if that is what she chooses to do.

Thank you to Bronx Legal Services and Equal Justice America for experiences I will cherish as my foundation in the legal field.

Update 3: I attended an asylum hearing for our client today. It was short, maybe 39 minutes or so. "Please tell the client," the Judge said, "congratulations, you have been granted asylum in the United States." The emotion that pulsed through me upon hearing those words, and the feeling I was left with once the Zoom had ended was something close to unparalleled.²

Upon reflection I could not stop thinking about the amount of work that went into our client's claim, about the hours spent asking her to retell the most traumatizing moments of her life, about the hundreds of pages that were filed with the court, about the hours my supervisor spent on drafting affidavits and memos. But on this specific occasion none of that seemed to matter— the Judge found one glaring fact in her case that made it "open-and-shut."

My supervisor was amazed as well: she told me she heard this was a good Judge, but was equally surprised. I'm learning so much about what it means to prepare. It very well might be an "open-and-shut" case, but that is, at the end of the day, contingent on whether the judge perceives it as such. And in this case, I am honored I was able to encounter a judge who did indeed see how open and shut our client's case was.

I am, as always, eternally grateful for these enriching experiences. I am grateful to have the opportunity to encounter lawyers and judges alike who are working in the system in new and unusual ways. Today has simply been, inspiring.

Update 4: As I am finishing up my last couple of weeks with the Bronx Legal Services, I am finding it difficult to fathom that I won't be able to continue working with the clients I have gotten to know over this summer.

The vast majority of my internship has been spent researching particular aspects of our clients' home countries, conversing with them and their families, and synthesizing their experiences with the greater social context. I had never fully understood the various elements that go into building an asylum claim prior to this internship, and I must say, the process has truly been such a fulfilling experience.



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I think the biggest challenge I have faced is knowing when to stop. I've found difficulty in being handed an assignment to research police corruption in X country without delving into the history of that nation. Because it is, of course, all relevant. But there has to be a stopping point, and that stopping point is arbitrary. It's also subjective, which is to say, I hope I've been drawing the line in the "right" spot. I don't have nearly enough experience to determine the quality of my work, but I have tried my best to understand, capture, and relay the integrity of each client's story in a way that will hopefully achieve the intended outcome: a grant of asylum.

So, I guess my initial statement would be better articulated as: I'm sad that I won't have the opportunity to see these cases unfold in the courtroom.

To the clients I have had the honor to work with, I will be rooting for you.

Update 5: I finished my internship with the Bronx Legal Services this past Friday. This summer was truly an impactful experience. I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Legal Services of NYC for offering me my first law school internship. I also want to thank Equal Justice America for their assistance in enabling me to work with LSNYC.

This summer I worked primarily with three clients. Growing to know each of them and their stories, as well as collaborating to draft their claim in a way that was authentic to who they were, was a wonderful and equally difficult task.

My last day of work was spent compiling a document for my supervisor on the status of each case: what needed to be done, what already had been done, and potential paths of inquiry to go down. As the hours strolled past 5 o'clock I realized how attached I'd become to seeing each case through.

For example, I had finally made contact with a source in the home country of one of our client's. This source was (hopefully) going to provide us with a missing piece in his claim. A part of me was fixated on wanting to conduct the interview, having read this source's work and knowing what I wanted to ask, but I knew that this was as far as my work went. For now.

I am honored that my supervisor has given me the opportunity to return in the form of an externship in the spring semester, and has also made it known to me that I can attend the hearing for one of my main clients regardless of my decision to return or not.

This internship has left me eager to continue working on an interpersonal level with individuals throughout the course of my career and I am grateful to have these posts to be able to reflect on the early stages of my professional development.



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I remain deeply grateful and progressively optimistic about the future. My optimism has been given fuel through having witnessed and connected with the expansive and intricate network of social justice/public interest legal advocates. The continued dedication towards addressing systemic injustices has been refreshing to observe. I am excited to continue my legal career knowing that this work is being done.

Equal Justice America has been an incredible pillar of support for individuals dedicated to public interest work, and it continues to enable young legal advocates to collaborate and pursue their activism. If anyone is interested in supporting their organization, and in turn supporting aspiring public interest lawyers, again, here is a link to their fundraising page. If you feel so inclined to contribute to the work that they have done, and continue to do, please know you will, in turn, be supporting students like myself, organizations like the Legal Services of NYC, and the incredible clients I was able to work with this summer.

Thank you again to everyone who has chosen to commit themselves to this work and for everyone who has participated in some capacity to making life in America a little more just.

It has been my greatest honor to be a part of LSNYC as an EJA Fellow.