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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:

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Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1: This summer for my law school internship I am working with Legal Aid Chicago and their Medical Legal Partnership program to expand access and address the barriers that stand between public benefits and those who need them most.

The funding I received as both a Jaharis HLI DePaul College of Law Summer Scholar and an Equal Justice America Fellow allows me to focus on this amazing work for 10 weeks.

I have participated in SOAR training which facilitates access to Social Security benefits for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, completed trauma informed communication training to better communicate with those we are helping without furthering their trauma, worked directly with clients for screening and intake, assisted with applications for public benefits, and listened in on appeals and administrative hearings.

Each step of the way, I am gaining valuable tools, perspective, and advice from Legal Aid Chicago's wonderful mentors. With these tools moving forward, my larger research projects include Medicaid Waiver options for medically fragile and technology dependent children, exploring options for DHS Failure to Evaluate claims, and reviewing cases which address access to Medication-Assisted Treatment for recovery from opioid use. There are endless opportunities to help, to learn, to do more. I'm excited to have eight more weeks to make a difference. We are just getting started!

You can support this work and future fellows advocating for justice by donating to Equal Justice America.

Update 2: Headed into July 4th weekend and my second, I'm reminded of some important statistics:

- 1) Chicago has seen a 139% increase in monthly homicides in the last two years.
- 2) 90% of Chicagoans impacted by gun violence were BIPOC.

Important to my work, I'm also reminded of solutions:

- 1) Access to Medicaid has been shown to reduce crime and prevent criminal justice cycling overall.
- 2) Individuals receiving emergency financial assistance were 51% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime.
- 3) The decline in crime is causally connected to greater housing stability.



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These statistics are at the heart of an upcoming Medical Legal Partnership between Legal Aid Chicago and University of Chicago Medicine designed to meet these unaddressed needs by providing civil legal services to BIPOC survivors of intentional violence.

Thank you to Equal Justice America, Legal Aid Chicago, Fellow Carly Loughran for this amazing work, and Jaharis HLI DePaul College of Law for my summer placement.

Update 3: The past two weeks have seen a lot of client interaction and research on their respective and most pressing legal issues. I did a small research assignment to learn more about Illinois' Medicaid expansion, including a new Immigrant Adult program effective July 1, 2022. This program lowers Medicaid eligibility age to 42 for individuals under a certain income, regardless of immigration status.

I also had the opportunity to talk to a client in an inpatient setting. Legal Aid Chicago has a strong working relationship with Stroger / Cook County Hospital, and we were able to begin the benefits application process for someone very much in need – weeks before they would otherwise be out of the hospital and ready to take on the task themselves.

Ongoing training has been a critical part of my internship from day one. And this week was no different. I attended training on SNAP overpayment defenses, learned more about the structure and benefits of medical legal partnerships, and sat in on a remarkable session on legal issues surrounding immigration and access to public benefits. As always, the more I learn, the more there is to learn. And I love every moment of it.

Update 4: My fourth EJA Fellow Update is just as much about client interaction as it is about in depth research. The past two weeks have been filled with hours of researching Policy Manuals, the Code of Federal Regulations, Medicaid Waivers for disabled youth in Illinois, and the back and forth changes to the Public Charge rule over the past 6 years. This was a solid reminder of how much I really do love research. And what I enjoyed about my work on this project was not only that we were directly able to help a family expand the resources available in caring for their disabled child, but also that everyone I spoke to, called, or emailed, was willing to learn a little something new. I am pretty sure we all walked away more knowledgeable, and better equipped to serve our clients.

An invitation to shadow my supervisor on an in home client visit afforded an opportunity to reach outside my comfort zone and work on new and developing skills. This particular visit involved over the phone translation services and some pretty tough questions. What was remarkable was the warmth, kindness, and patience we were shown. We were able to dispel some concerns we had and uncover what may prove to be a strong opportunity to help a refugee receive significant back owed benefits.

As always, thank you Equal Justice America, Legal Aid Chicago, and Jaharis HLI DePaul College of Law. You can support this work and future fellows advocating for justice by donating to Equal Justice America.



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Update 5: I am rarely at a loss for words. However, I do find myself lacking ways to adequately capture the difference my summer internship has made. I had direct contact with more than 16 clients spanning issues of employment, immigration, public benefits, and housing. Each client came to us with a story and I had the privilege of time to both listen and learn before offering advice. Often, advice was all I could offer. There are other practice groups within Legal Aid Chicago who are experts at many of the matters I encountered. When this was the case, I did a little research and made a referral. But then there were the clients whom I could help directly. Maybe I could assist with their benefits application, or help do a calculation to determine back pay. Sometimes, I could make a call or two and the fact that someone had their back made all the difference.

If anything, the complexities that make up our health and legal systems were highlighted and amplified by seeing the individuals and stories behind the process. We don't just have a healthcare system, we have people struggling to achieve or maintain health while life continues to go on. How can you get a doctor's appointment if your car broke down and you can't afford the repairs? How do you afford your medication if your employer has let you go because you missed work due to a chronic health condition that needs that same medication? Will your child's asthma ever improve if your landlord won't fix the mold problem from the upstairs neighbor's leak?

The Medical Legal Partnership (MLP) structure approaches the questions and issues in a unique and impactful way. By placing access to legal help in the hands of healthcare providers, patients are afforded the opportunity to receive free legal assistance in a far more efficient manner. Without making an additional phone call or trip to town, without the need to research through a sea of advertisements, and with the confidence that comes from a doctor's recommendation, MLP clients are able to connect with legal aid on the issues that have a deep and lasting impact on their health and wellbeing. Because of the support I received from Equal Justice America, I was able to play a role in this amazing work. I made a difference in the lives of 16 clients and forever changed my understanding of access to justice. Yes, the issues are complicated, but the solutions need not be beyond reach. We are part of the solution. I am part of the solution. I am not certain which path my career will take, but the path is different, and better, because of this experience. I will take these stories with me and treasure them always.