



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Update 1: This summer, I'm so thrilled to be working as an Equal Justice America fellow at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)! As a legal intern with KIND's Family Separation Response Team, I am helping provide critical legal support to immigrant families who the U.S. government separated under the Trump administration's Zero Tolerance Policy. As a result of this cruel policy, parents and children were torn apart upon asking for safety in the U.S., and some parents were even deported without their children. While most families have since been reunified, many are still fighting for much-needed immigration relief. In my first weeks at KIND, I have learned more about the profound and lasting trauma family separation has caused, as well as the creative ways in which immigration attorneys are fighting for justice for these families. I'm excited to continue learning about and contributing to these efforts this summer.

Update 2: I'm about halfway through my summer with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) (hard to believe- it's going by so quickly!), and I'm continuing to learn so much about how to collaborate with and help seek justice for immigrant children and families. I've been fortunate to engage in comprehensive trainings on trauma-informed lawyering with children and youth, and I've gotten to put these new skills to work in speaking with clients and helping prepare applications for immigration relief. I've also had the opportunity to learn more about litigation as an additional tool to complement the critical direct service work I've always been passionate about.

Even now, years after the Zero Tolerance Policy was officially put to a stop, efforts at family reunification continue. Many of the folks I've worked with this summer remain far away from parents, children, siblings, and grandparents in their home countries, many of whom continue to face the same persecution that caused their family members to flee. The complex maze of immigration law presents a formidable barrier to safety and reunification, but I'm feeling so lucky to be at an organization where we're striving every day to use the tools available to us to bring families together and help them live without fear.

Update 3: In my summer internship at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), I'm continuing to learn so much about being a trauma-informed advocate for children, youth, and their families. In addition to gaining more experience with the everyday tasks of an immigration attorney- screening clients for potential relief, filing applications, and preparing for interviews and court appearances- I'm also learning about legal strategies outside of immigration law that creative advocates are using to seek justice for families. The law often fails to provide protection, opportunity, and even basic dignity to immigrants and asylum seekers, so it's encouraging to see the ways in which KIND and its partners are committed to exploring and utilizing every tool available to advocate



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for their clients. This work reminds me why I chose to go to law school, and I'm so grateful to play a small part in it this summer.

Update 4: I'm heading into my last week at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), and these final weeks have been busy! I'm filing applications for immigration relief I've been working on all summer, helping shield folks from deportation, receive permission to work in the U.S., and in some cases, take the first step towards permanent residency and citizenship. At the same time, I'm helping families previously separated by the Trump Administration's Zero Tolerance Policy navigate the challenging (but exciting) process of reuniting in safety in the U.S. And finally, I'm helping parents and children hold the U.S. government accountable for the immense harm caused by family separation by filing claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA). Throughout the summer- but especially lately- I've had incredibly impactful conversations with KIND clients. Folks have bravely and generously shared so much with me about the trauma of family separation. Bearing witness to these stories has been an unforgettable experience, and I'm grateful to have played a small part in helping folks find protection, justice, and healing.

Update 5: Just days after I wrapped up my internship at KIND, *The Atlantic* published an extensive- and unflinching- history of the Trump Administration's Zero Tolerance Policy. As I listened to a radio interview with the article's author, veteran immigration reporter Caitlin Dickerson, all I could think about were the families I worked with this summer.

On some days, my internship at KIND felt like any other work experience I've had in immigration law. I conducted interviews with clients, helped them gather evidence, and filled out application after application for immigration benefits. Some days, though, my role involved speaking with clients about the moment they were separated from their parent or child. Although four (or more) years have passed since that terrible moment- and thankfully, almost all the families I worked with were ultimately reunited in the U.S.- these conversations were incredibly heavy. I'd worked on asylum cases before, so I was somewhat used to the strange rhythm of humanitarian immigration law- alternating between asking a client for something mundane, like tracking down civil documents, and asking a client to recount the very worst moments of their life. But still, interviewing separated parents and children was one of the most difficult and impactful things I've done as a law student. So, when I heard about, and later read, Dickerson's *Atlantic* article, the horror felt so much more personal.

I feel incredibly honored to have had the opportunity to get to know these families, even for a brief time. I'm humbled that folks chose to trust me and work with KIND's team to demand justice and accountability from the U.S. government. Clients often told me that they didn't like to talk about the separation and that they only wanted to move forward, so I know how much courage it took to share their stories.

My time at KIND undoubtedly prepared me to be a more competent and empathetic immigration attorney. I was fortunate to have an incredible team and great supervision, and I learned so much about how to be a good lawyer- and how to find balance in a difficult job. I was reminded of my passion for working with kids and families, and I had the invaluable experience of tackling some of the legal and ethical issues that arise when family dynamics affect legal representation. Going into my 3L year, I feel absolutely prepared for whatever work and academic experiences await. I know I'll take the lessons I learned from the team at KIND- and most importantly, from KIND's clients- with me wherever I go next. I'm so grateful to Equal Justice America for helping support me in this life-changing work!