



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Annie Whitney

Law School: Harvard Law School

Organization: The Legal Aid Society of New York

Update 1: I started my internship with the Immigration Law Unit Youth Project of the Legal Aid Society of New York last week. After a few days of training, I began supporting an asylum case for a young Afghan woman. This week, I am also beginning to work on a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) case. SIJS is a pathway to immigration status for individuals under 21 who cannot be reunited with one or both of their parents. SIJS cases have two phases: one in family court, and one before US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Later today, I will meet with the client and my supervising attorney so that I can begin drafting the declaration for the client's case. While I have worked on asylum cases before, SIJS is new territory for me. I look forward to learning about a new field of law--family law--and its application in the realm of immigration law. Although my internship is mostly remote, I will be moving to New York this weekend and will remain there for the rest of the summer to take advantage of the few in-person work opportunities that exist. I am excited to experience direct legal services in-person!

Update 2: I am four weeks into my internship and have moved to New York City for the rest of the summer! I continue to work on asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases. Yesterday, I drafted country conditions documenting child abuse and failure of state protection in a Central American country. Country conditions are a compilation of think tank, government, and news reports submitted with asylum application corroborating individuals' stories. I observed an immigration court master calendar hearing last week. Many immigration judges continue to operate remotely, so the hearing was conducted on WebEx. About a clients and, if they had them, lawyers were in attendance. The hearing was a reminder of gaps in access to justice: the lawyers from the nonprofit sector were far and away more prepared and more zealously advocating for their clients than the for-profit lawyers, multiple of whom were noticeably unprepared. This is not the first time that I have seen how for-profit lawyers serving low-income clients extort money without providing adequate representation, and each time I witness this, I am saddened by the reminder that there is no right to counsel in



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immigration (and other civil) proceedings. Others yet were appearing pro se, a challenge compounded by the fact that immigration almost always entails a language barrier, so those without representation are often unable to express themselves to the court if there does not happen to be an interpreter.

Update 3: I recently finished a motion for special findings for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status case. This motion is submitted to family court, and if the family court finds that the juvenile is unmarried, under 21, cannot be reunited with one or both parents, has a suitable custodian or guardian in NY, and has in their best interest to stay in the US, the juvenile can be certified for SIJS. The file is then transferred to USCIS for a visa to be issued. It has been interesting for me to see how state law intersects with federal law to establish SIJS. Given that immigration is a congressional plenary power, immigration almost always falls to the federal domain. SIJS is an exception. This is my third immigration internship in law school and the first time I have worked on immigration matters in a state law context. Later this month, I will appear (remotely) in family court on behalf of this client in her SIJS case. It will be my first time appearing in court. Although I am a bit anxious, I look forward to the opportunity. I am also drafting an asylum brief for a client from Afghanistan. Earlier this year, I interned with another organization that focused specifically on helping women from Afghanistan apply for asylum. It is nice to be able to build on that previous experience and work on a case where I am familiar with the wider geopolitical context. I have another three weeks with LAS, and I am thankful for LAS and EJA making this summer possible!

Update 4: I've had a great summer with the Legal Aid Society's Immigration Law Unit Youth Project. My supervisor is on leave for the final weeks of my internship which means I get to take the lead on some tasks - an intimidating but welcome challenge. This includes meeting with clients on my own and appearing in family court later this month.