



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: The first three weeks of my summer internship have been a whirlwind, and it has been very exciting to see the skills I've built in my first year of law school immediately become useful as I work on research and drafting tasks for litigation related to the kinds of issues that spurred me to pursue law school in the first place. In addition, contributing to ASAP's work related to helping asylum seekers secure work permits, including replying to members' emails, has also underscored to me the importance of facilitating access to high quality information. Dozens of members contact ASAP every week with questions about the application process, whether they are preparing to complete their own application or following up after submitting their materials to USCIS. I have been finding it very energizing to support people not by completing their civil legal needs on their behalf, but by empowering them to do it on their own by providing accessible, responsive and trustworthy information and resources. Importantly, this feels like a sustainable and efficient approach to meeting civil legal needs, and already one I hope to model in my career.

Update 2: Since my last update, I have been working on a new and different project: my task is to create a sort of "cheat sheet" resource about different discovery disputes that have come up during the course of certain litigation. The idea is that attorneys working on similar cases in the future will be able to more easily anticipate problems and come up with effective strategies to overcome the issues, to try and ensure they can access the information needed to support their clients' claims. This is not a project I would have expected to work on going into the summer, because I've never heard of anything like it. However, it has highlighted to me the importance of 1) collaboration and 2) working smarter, not harder in the civil legal services space. I feel very proud that my work will be used by other attorneys at different organizations to support future litigation efforts, and in my own future career, I will be looking out for opportunities to make similar resources. With the supply and demand for civil legal services so uneven, I can see how important it is to try and avoid duplicating efforts, and this has been a unique example of how to go about doing that.

Update 3: This week, I had the opportunity to participate in an exciting organization-wide activity. Since ASAP reached 350,000 members, the organization is doing the latest round of evaluating the members' policy



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priorities. When people sign up to be members of ASAP, one of the survey questions is what they would change about the asylum system. Then, the organization uses this information to guide its advocacy efforts and member resources. As a team, we have each been assigned comments to read through and categorize by topic (I have 1000 assigned so far). Meeting people where they're at is an important value I try to practice in my career, and reading members' priorities and concerns has been a very meaningful and inspiring activity. In particular, the members' policy priorities aren't always as related to complete systemic reform as the common policy priorities among prominent immigration advocates and organizations. This has reminded me that it's important to be mindful of how civil legal services providers can work to improve people's material conditions both in the short and long term.

Update 4: This week, I worked on a frustrating case: a client is eligible for immigration relief on the basis they were, sadly, the victim of a violent crime here in the US. In order to apply for that relief, though, the local police must certify that the client helped them in their investigation of a "qualifying" crime. Once the police have issued their certification, it is difficult, if not impossible, to change the certified crime. In this case, the police completed the form with a description of what is clearly a qualifying offense, but for some reason, only certified that the client helped them with respect to a similar, but less serious, non-qualifying offense.

One of the themes of my work this summer has been the heavy weight of bureaucracy, and this week was a perfect example. I think one of the challenges for my colleagues and I over the coming years will not only be to get legal services and/or knowledge into the hands of people who need it, but to also push for a system that safeguards against these situations where a person's future becomes dependent on individual officials who don't seem to truly appreciate the implications of their actions.

Update 5: It has only been 10 days since I finished my summer internship, but I can wholeheartedly say I already miss it! Working at ASAP was a challenging and gratifying experience: from the first day, my supervisors pushed me to hit the ground running with legal research and drafting related to litigation and direct client representation. As the summer progressed, I was also honored to be trusted with communicating directly with ASAP members to respond to their questions about work permits, social security numbers and drivers' licenses.

Speaking almost daily with ASAP members not only allowed me to develop some expertise in these relatively niche, but hugely important, topics, but also gave me vital experience explaining complicated regulations, procedures and the latest news from ongoing litigation in a concise and accessible way. Throughout 1L, our professors described learning the law as being like learning a new language, which is very true. However, this summer reminded me that it's essential to also learn how to translate that new language back into normal terms.

Spending the summer with ASAP also highlighted to me the huge potential for technology as a mechanism for facilitating access to legal knowledge in an efficient, effective and sustainable way. It was very energizing to see first hand how ASAP uses its membership/technical assistance model to help meet people's civil legal needs,



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through publishing accessible and constantly updated pro-se resources, facilitating online member communities and responding to members' questions through "help-desk"-style emails. Going forward in law school, I feel motivated to develop more technology-related skills, continue exploring the intersection of technology and legal services, and hopefully make this area an element of my own career.

Lastly, this summer underscored to me the importance of collaboration in the civil legal needs space. Over my ten weeks at ASAP, I was exposed to many different types of collaboration: from working with attorneys at other organizations on litigation-related projects to jumping on a call with my fellow 1L intern to figure out the best answer to a member's question. However, ASAP's structure also allows the organization to collaborate directly with members on areas such as setting policy priorities and building institutional knowledge through members' experiences of different processes. Being able to participate in this collaborative process offered me an invaluable, real-life example of confronting the power dynamics too often present between civil legal services providers and clients. With this experience in mind, I will continue to embed values of epistemic justice into my work with clients, and I am hopeful that through pooling knowledge and expertise with future clients, we can work towards change together.