



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: The past few weeks, I have been assisting with filling out forms for several of GCLC's immigration clients.

Update 2: Over the past two weeks at the Greater Chicago Legal Clinic, I have been conducting several research projects for attorneys (including recommendations for filing N-648 forms and requesting stays for deportation). I have also been continuing to support the GCLC staff through intake screenings as well as prepping documents for client meetings with attorneys.

Throughout this experience, it has become increasingly clear how complex immigration law is and how difficult it would be to navigate without the assistance of an attorney, especially as the law constantly changes as a reflection of its surrounding environment. In light of some of the most recent Supreme Court rulings that drastically changed previous precedent, it is clear that it is so important that people have access to legal assistance no matter what income or background. I'm honored to be working with an organization like GCLC that makes legal aid more widely accessible to people in the Chicago area and am excited to continue working with the attorneys and some of my fellow interns over the rest of my internship.

Update 3: I'm currently around the halfway point of my time at the Greater Chicago Legal Clinic and have been reflecting a little bit on everything that I've been able to experience thus far. Throughout my time here, I've been able to work on my communication skills when it comes to interacting with clients during intake calls. I also came to the clinic with little to no experience in immigration law, so it has absolutely been an upward learning curve when learning about the various documents used in immigration proceedings. During this time, I have also become more familiar with translating identification documents and affidavits to be used as evidence for different cases down the line.

I am also amazed by the amount of client intake that needs to be sorted through on a daily basis. When we assist the paralegals with intake calls, there are often at least 50 a day that require calling back and performing intake questionnaires that take 20 minutes per client. Despite completing the intake calls, often we cannot even take the cases due to lack of attorneys in that practice area or time limits on the case matter. I have also noticed that people often will have already called multiple legal aid organizations before even contacting GCLC. These multiple contact attempts once again demonstrate that there is an immense need for greater levels of legal assistance so potential clients don't get turned away due to lack of resources.



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Update 4: I'm currently nearing the end of my time at the Greater Chicago Legal Clinic and have been able to gradually take on more responsibility as I've become more familiar with different immigration processes. Lately, I've been working on compiling several I-130 packets as well as working on I-90 and I-912 forms. I've also been spending time researching several issue areas including how the persecutor bar can influence asylum proceedings and different restrictions to filing for EAD.

I have also been working with groups outside of our clients such as social workers who can assist our clients with the expenses of filing different background forms. It is amazing how different public service sectors are so interconnected and how people must rely on various resources to get aid. It demonstrates how lawyers must look beyond the legal profession to fully assist their clients and realize that truly helping them extends beyond legal assistance. Overall, I have been really grateful for the experience and while it has definitely been a vertical learning curve, I have been able to learn a ton over such a short period.

Update 5: I officially wrapped up my time with Greater Chicago Legal Clinic on August 12th and have had some time since to reflect back on the experience. When I first started with the clinic, my main duties consisted of legal research for specific issues within a client's case. As I gained more experience and familiarity with immigration law, my duties began expanding into compiling documentation and cover letters for actual I-130 petitions as well as other immigration forms like DACA renewals. Throughout the course of the ten weeks, one thing became clear about immigration law, it is incredibly complicated even for the attorneys that practice it. Due to each client's history being different, I watched the attorneys in the clinic constantly rely on their own knowledge as well as the knowledge of their fellow attorneys to make the best decision regarding certain cases. I was impressed that the attorneys took time to learn from each other instead of assuming that they knew best in all instances. I also was surprised by just the sheer case load that the clinic handled. I discussed this in one of my earlier updates, but often two paralegals would be handling intake calls for the entire clinic which involved handling around 30 calls a day and ensuring that they called each person back and took down the details of their specific case. The few times that I did intake calls with clients, it would take me around 30 minutes a person depending on how intricate the details of the case were. People in public service jobs work incredibly hard to be rewarded very little, so I walked away from GCLC with a huge amount of respect for each person that was dedicating their time to the clinic and the people of Chicago.

As I return to law school this upcoming fall, there are several lessons that I learned from GCLC that I will be taking with me. The first one is that it is okay to try and fail several times in order to figure something out. Immigration law was an absolute vertical learning curve for me since I had no previous experience with immigration. I constantly had to ask questions and research the forms that I was putting together to understand how they were supposed to be organized. While it could be embarrassing at times to ask what seemed like somewhat simple questions, I had to swallow my pride to learn best practices and I think law school is somewhat similar. This next year I hope that I will utilize office hours much more to ask for help in areas I don't quite understand and not be ashamed if something isn't clicking the first time. The second lesson I want to bring back with me is to turn to colleagues for help. I watched as the immigration attorneys would constantly look to each other for ideas or advice on how to handle certain cases. As a philosophy major, I think I entered law school used to figuring problems out on my own and never really turned to classmates for assistance. This next year I want to follow in the attorney's at GCLC's footsteps and be open to assistance and ideas outside of my own. I am so grateful to EJA and GCLC for giving me the opportunities that they did this summer and will be carrying what I learned with me into the rest of law school and my future career.