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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: University of Michigan Law School

Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1: After finishing my first year of law school at Michigan Law, I am interning at Legal Aid Chicago for the summer. I am a legal intern on the Employment Project within the Immigrants and Worker's Rights Practice Group. I have been writing memos, drafting demand letters, calling clients, and, of course, doing lots of legal research!

After interning here for a few weeks, I know that I feel most fulfilled when I am working together with people to solve their problems. The biggest lesson I have learned so far is that the need for free legal services, especially for low-income communities, is much larger than I previously thought. The clients I have worked with so far have experienced wage theft, discrimination, harassment, and many other problems. I hope this summer will teach me more about the ways lawyers can be helpful and facilitate change.

Update 2: I've been an intern with Legal Aid Chicago for 5 weeks now, and I am so grateful for this experience. A project that I'm especially proud of involves a client who was severely underpaid by his employer. I was asked to do some legal research into whether the particular facts of this case made it so the client was entitled to more pay. The law was clear: he absolutely was. After doing this research, I was asked to apply what I learned and draft a demand letter to the employer. Within a few days, the employer agreed to a settlement. This is a great example of the significant impact that a lawyer can make on someone's life: after a few hours of legal research and legal writing, our client will receive the compensation that he is owed.

Of course, not every case is so quick to resolve. And, in many cases, without the help of a lawyer, it's possible that not everyone will be able to successfully navigate our complicated and convoluted legal system. Our job as lawyers is to make the law more accessible for everyone. I'm proud to be spending my summer doing exactly that.

Update 3: When I started law school one of the things that I missed the most from my job as a paralegal was working with clients. At the time, I didn't realize how much I appreciated talking to clients everyday. I was devoted to learning theory and gaining an understanding of how the legal system in the United States works. While this is extremely important, I didn't come to law school to simply understand the law – I want to learn



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how to actually navigate the legal system and help others do the same. The realization that client interaction is important to me further encouraged me to apply to organizations that provide direct services. Luckily, over the last 7 weeks I have had countless opportunities to speak with clients and conduct intake interviews. Although so much of what we talk about won't make it into any legal document, it provides context and helps ensure we are representing our clients to the best of our ability.

Update 4: I am reflecting on the immense amount of work that legal aid organizations do for their clients and the incredible dedication shown by everyone working here. Last week we had an all staff meeting at Legal Aid Chicago where each of the practice groups shared what they were working on. I was blown away by how many different ways the organization is making a difference in people's lives – from preventing wage theft to conducting outreach to those who are homeless – Legal Aid Chicago is working on dismantling the cycle of poverty from every angle.

Update 5: Now that my summer internship at Legal Aid Chicago has ended, it's time to post my final EJA Fellow Update.

My experience this summer further confirmed that I want to be a public interest lawyer. I was constantly inspired by the people that I worked with – my colleagues were all fiercely committed to their work and dedicated advocates for our clients.

I came to law school because I was frustrated by the systemic injustices that we are surrounded by. And as I learned more about how injustices are connected, I became more frustrated with “the system” in general. It can be overwhelming to think about how much work needs to be done. In order to change something, you need to understand it first. That's why I came to law school. I know I can't “fix” anything on my own, but I do believe that everyone can make a difference, no matter how small. It's just a matter of figuring out where we fit in that change. I think I've found my place: by providing direct legal services to people who cannot afford them.

Legal problems rarely occur in a vacuum, and I appreciated that Legal Aid Chicago worked with our clients to address their problems holistically. Many clients had multiple open cases with the organization to address various issues: employment, housing, or immigration to name a few. For example, if someone is discriminated at work, they may fall behind on rent and can lose their home. This can affect their ability to care for their family which can lead to children being separated from their caregivers. The initial issue of discrimination in the workplace can snowball into various issues, each of which requires a different type of legal remedy. By working with people directly on one or more of these issues, we can and are making a substantial difference in other aspects of their lives, even if we aren't aware of it.

I am very conscious of what an immense privilege it is to attend law school. And yet I firmly believe that it shouldn't be a privilege to be able to navigate the law. I hope to use what I learn during law school and my internships to make the law more accessible.



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