



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** UC Hastings

**Organization:** East Bay Community Law Center

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**Update 1:** As I finished my first year at UC Hastings, I wanted to dedicate my summer to an internship that aligns deeply with my morals and values and to work closely with the community I grew up with. I was lucky to be selected as one of this year's Equal Justice America Fellows and this week is officially my third week with the East Bay Community Law Center as a law student intern with the Immigration Clinic.

As a Tibetan-American woman and daughter to immigrants, I have always felt a passion for Immigration law. I wanted to take the new skills and knowledge I have learned from my first year at law school towards working with people of all ages and ethnicities to help provide a path towards citizenship and stability while providing a safe space and familiar face throughout a terrifying and intimidating process.

In the last two weeks I have learned about various avenues of relief in Immigration law, I have been exposed to many different stories, and I have already learned new skills that I plan to carry out with me throughout the rest of my career. It has been so exciting receiving my own cases and clients, and I am so excited to learn so much more with EBCLC this summer!

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**Update 2:** I have officially reached the halfway point of my internship with the East Bay Community Law Center's Immigration unit. My caseload concerns a diverse array of legal issues, however, I have been most excited to engage with and learn about how the youth interact with the Immigration system. I have begun to learn the ins and outs of avenues of relief specific to youth, such as special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS) and DACA, in addition to other forms of relief like receiving asylum, a U-visa, and family-based petitions.

While helping these students navigate the Immigration system, the most rewarding aspect of client meetings has been connecting with my clients on a personal level. With each conversation, it is important to understand the intersections of each identity, complex family dynamics, and impacts of cultural norms. However, it is equally important to balance conversations with what their favorite music is, who their bias is in their favorite K-Pop group, and their aspirations and career goals. These last few weeks have taught me the importance of the bond you create with your clients and how that may influence their experience with the law.

Lastly, yesterday I (along with my attorney supervisor) submitted a citizenship application for my first client! It was amazing being able to help them complete their last step in a very long journey, but what felt even more



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amazing was not having to charge them for any of the services we provided! I have been enjoying my time so much at EBCLC and am excited to see what this last month entails as well as what new skills I may bring into my second year at UC Hastings.

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**Update 3:** These past few weeks I have been working towards submitting my first application on behalf of my client for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS).

Drafting a declaration for this application has been the most challenging project I have completed thus far. Navigating this process with my client has taught me not only the substantive law, but also the cultural nuances and personal skills that are necessary to create a bond and safe space for my client.

This aspect of the process, where the child must recount their negative and sometimes traumatic experiences with their parents, has been the most challenging for me because I feel as though parent-child relationships should be anything but standardized. It is difficult to box the cultural nuances that encompass a relationship between a parent and their child.

As a daughter of Tibetan refugees and immigrants to the United States, I can empathize with my clients in pursuit of SIJS in the complex relationships they share with their parents and the similar stories in how they are raised by parents with a large generational gap in cultural norms and traditions.

However, despite all these challenges, and with the support of my supervising attorney, we were able to complete the declaration on behalf of our client. I am so excited and hopeful for my client to begin their path towards citizenship. While I wish they did not have to jump through so many hoops and put themselves in such a vulnerable position, I am happy that the East Bay Community Law Center offers their services without cost to provide opportunities without any financial barriers.

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**Update 4:** I was in the first grade when my mother told me that my aunt would be dropping me off to class in the morning. I still remember the rain pouring down as my aunt and I ran to the portables at Harding Elementary. My mother and father hopped into our old, tan, Toyota van and drove to the immigration offices for her naturalization interview.

It was 2020, during the peak of covid, when I would log off my virtual LSAT class everyday at 7pm to walk over to my grandmother's to help her as she studied for her upcoming citizenship test.

Last Saturday, bright and early, on a foggy morning in the city, I got to accompany a client as they attended their naturalization interview. As nervous as I was to serve as their legal representative, I could only imagine the emotions that were probably flooding them as they took the last step of their very long journey and path towards citizenship in the United States. I was honored to sit by them as they received the news that they passed their citizenship test!

As I enter my last week as a law student intern with the East Bay Community Law Center, I feel as though I have so many great connections with the staff, my fellow interns, and the clients I had the privilege to work with this summer. I hope to make the most out of the last week I have before I return to being a student at UC Hastings!

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**Update 5:** Tomorrow, I begin my first day of my second year as a law student at UC Hastings. I am so excited to reconnect with my classmates, professors, and attend new courses I have chosen for my Fall semester! This summer I had the pleasure of working at the East Bay Community Law Center as a law student intern with the Immigration unit. In addition to my internship, I also served as an Equal Justice America Summer Fellow 2022.

As I reflect on the last few months I have spent with the East Bay Community Law Center working with the Immigration unit, I am so appreciative of every single supervising attorney that took the time to teach myself and my fellow interns the various ins and outs of the law. This summer I was able to learn substantive immigration law from in depth trainings that focused not only on the various avenues of immigration-based relief but also on the client experience and trauma-informed lawyering. It has been so rewarding learning and adopting various legal skills that I can implement as I begin my second year of law school and with future employment.

In addition to new knowledge of substantive immigration law, I have also learned new passions and interests that I enjoy. I learned that, more than anything else, I enjoy each connection I am able to make with my clients. When I am able to meet with my clients and learn their personal experiences outside of their legal inquiries, I am most fulfilled. Gaining hands-on experience as a legal intern has allowed me to further develop my interests and pursuits as I think about my legal career in the future.

During my internship, I helped clients file for naturalization, apply for special immigrant juvenile status, renew their DACA applications, and even accompany them to their naturalization interview at the Immigration offices in San Francisco. However, the most difficult challenge I faced all summer was writing the declaration in support of the special immigrant juvenile application. This aspect of the process, where the child must recount their negative and sometimes traumatic experiences with their parents, has been the most challenging part for me because I feel as though parent-child relationships should be anything but standardized and it is difficult to box the cultural nuances that encompass a relationship between a parent and their child. Yet, despite the hurdles I faced, I am most proud to have accomplished this assignment with help along the way from my amazing supervising attorney and my client as they allowed themselves to be vulnerable with me.

Lastly, working with the East Bay Community Law Center has been one of the most rewarding experiences. Aside from the new legal skills and knowledge I have learned, it has been so refreshing working with other like-minded folks that focus on uplifting BIPOC voices, understanding the nuances and intersections of client identities, and creating a safe work environment. I feel especially lucky to have worked directly under the co-director of the immigration unit and my supervising attorney, Theo Cuison. Theo has been an incredible support system as I navigate the legal field and provided me with a safe space as I overcame the challenges within immigration law.

As the new academic year is just around the corner, I am eager to see what new challenges will come my way and how I can implement the new skills and knowledge I have gained. I am excited to continue my search for a 2L Summer Internship and acquire even more skills to help advance my future in the legal field.

Thank you to the East Bay Community Law Center for an amazing Summer Internship and Equal Justice America for providing me with the support to pursue an internship that aligned deeply with my morals and values and allowed me to work closely with the community I grew up with!



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