



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Eden Lichaw

Law School: Fordham University School of Law

Organization: The Legal Aid Society

Week of June 15th:

This summer I have been selected as one of this year's Equal Justice America Fellows, and am working at The Legal Aid Society in the Juvenile Rights Division. Like many others in the wake of George Floyd's death I have been thinking a lot about systematic racism and the inequalities that exist in our society. In the past two weeks at Legal Aid, I have seen the direct effects of our current system on my clients, especially in regard to determinations of child safety and subsequent removals. I am so excited for the opportunity this summer to learn firsthand how I can use my future law degree to help in dismantling this biased system. While the training I am getting is amazing, seeing the impact of my work on my clients is even more outstanding. I am realizing that not only can I advocate for better individual futures for my clients, but that I can advocate for a better society as a whole. It is up to each of us to create change!

Week of July 6th:

I have been at The Legal Aid Society for five weeks now in the Appeals Department of the Juvenile Rights Division, and it has been a phenomenal experience. As someone who was in the court system as a child, it is surreal to be on the other side, playing the role of an advocate. Over the past few weeks, I have been working on a brief for an appeal for a neglect case that involves drug use. As I write the argument, I wonder what will happen to my client if the court decides to reverse the previous decision. I remember feeling completely out of control of my future, knowing the court had the power to make any decision it wanted. It is a struggle knowing that my client may not receive a decision she wants or may receive a decision that may not actually result in the best future for her. As an advocate it occurs to me more than ever that sometimes children just need to know that they are being heard. Even if the decision on appeal is reversed, at least this little girl will know that I felt her struggle and that I advocated for her position. She will know that her opinion did matter, even if the outcome is not what she hoped. Children need to know that someone else feels their struggle. It is beyond exciting for me to be able to take on that position.



Week of July 27th:

My time at The Legal Aid Society is coming to an end, and more than ever I am so grateful for this experience. Since my second week, I have been working on writing a brief for an appeal for a neglect case that involves drug use. Last week, I submitted a final draft of the brief to be edited by multiple attorneys and this week I have had multiple conversations with those attorneys on how to improve this specific brief and my brief writing in general. In writing this brief, I truly feel as if I was able to give my a client a voice in the matter, and that I advocated for the outcome desired by her. I was able to be a vehicle to help her have a say in her future.

I am excited to continue to learn from the attorneys around me, in my last two weeks. It is crazy to think about how much I have learned in the eight weeks I have been at Legal Aid, about both juvenile rights, but about practicing law in general. I am so honored to be working with the staff at Legal Aid. I am excited to continue learning, growing, and fighting alongside others in the pursuit of juvenile rights.

Week of August 10th:

Part of my journey as an EJA fellow is reflecting on my experience at The Legal Aid Society this summer.

I initially wanted to work at Legal Aid because of my personal experience as a juvenile with a court appointed advocate. I wanted to play the same role my advocate had once served for me. It was a surreal experience this summer to fulfill this goal. However, over the course of the summer I truly realized the work of Legal Aid is more than just being an advocate for individual clients. Rather the greater purpose of the attorneys at Legal Aid, especially in the Juvenile Rights practice, is about advocating for the future. While each individual case is important, the attorneys at Legal Aid are more focused on advocating for a better future for society as a whole.

Over the past few months conversations about systematic racism and income inequality have become a daily topic of conversation. However, these topics have always been at the forefront of work at Legal Aid. This summer I worked alongside attorneys who contribute to equal justice for children every day by helping give clients a voice in the court system. They recognize that systemic racism permeates our court system and that as attorneys we bring our own internal biases to our cases. Their passion and tireless commitment to educating themselves and challenging their beliefs, in order to provide the best representation to their clients, demonstrates the type of attorney I hope to become. Their committal to fighting for their client's views, regardless of their own, exhibits a level of advocacy I hope to one day evince.

Seeing the impact of my work on my clients this summer was an outstanding feeling but knowing my work will contribute to a better future is even more phenomenal. I aspire in my career to continue to advocate for those who may otherwise have no voice and continuing to learn and evolve as a result of my experiences.