

When I started working for the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC), I witnessed many problems can arise because of complexities in the immigration system. In my first month working, I dealt mostly with clients who had made mistakes regarding immigration matters and needed help to untangle them. This include clients who mistakenly submitted multiple claims for recompensation, clients who needed and qualified for a fee waiver for their citizenship application but could not provide information verifying this information, and clients who could not seem to get representation for fast-approaching asylum court dates. These clients who came to the APALRC feared losing the progress that they had made as individuals living in the U.S., unsure of how to navigate themselves because of financial or linguistic barriers. The APALRC could clear up any miscommunications by providing translations for their legal services, as well as doing their due-diligence in research to discover how to unravel the complexities of these issues.

During the second half of my internship, I worked with victims of domestic crime and human trafficking to obtain citizenship. While this work was very informative and rewarding, I discovered the need for lawyers to be empathetic as well, as often recounting the information was very challenging for clients. The need for understanding from attorney's not only built trust with clients, but helped facilitate information. My most profound memory came from an individual who had lived in the U.S. for decades, but had no immigration papers. She wanted to have the ability to return to Sri Lanka to visit her family, which she had not seen since she left, while retaining the ability to stay in the U.S. and work to support them. Obtaining immigration status for non-citizens is a very difficult task, as the immigration system does not provide many exceptions. For weeks, it seemed as if there was no option for our client as we went through the different methods that could be used to obtain immigration status (marriage, having children who were under the age of 18 residing in the U.S, etc.) but to no avail.

However, there was one area of her story that we could not understand; how she came to the U.S. Every time we probed into this story, we would obtain an unclear and shaded answer. Before letting the client know we did not believe there was anything we could do for her, my attorneys advised me to ask once more about how she came to the country. During this phone call, it was hard to obtain any relevant information, but this time, I particularly stressed the fact that she should not be scared to disclose any information. After ensuring that she wanted to obtain immigration status by any means, I reaffirmed with her that the immigration system could provide a remedy for crimes committed against the potential applicant, and that she had a team of attorneys who would be at her disposal to provide her legal protection if she so needed. The client then let me know she came here with a diplomat of a foreign country. This was an opening.

We then asked her an array of questions concerning her work experience. We discovered that the diplomat's family had significantly reduced her pay from what they promised her, and she was not

allowed to freely leave the residence without the supervision of the family. When other workers escaped, she was blamed and the diplomat's family decided to send her back to Sri Lanka, while in possession of her passports. Fearing not being able to support her family, she fled and has remained in the U.S. ever since. After gathering all this information, we understood her to be a victim of human labor trafficking, which the immigration system allows immigration status to be given to (T-Visa). There are estimates of tens of thousands of victims of human trafficking in the U.S., but the T-Visa applications are often well below their cap of 5,000 applications per year. This can be because of the fear of having to file a police report in order to get the visa, or those who are not even aware they can obtain a visa in this manner. Once again, the need to be an empathetic lawyer was needed. Our client struggled heavily with filing a police report. She was scared of the influence the diplomat's family had, and she felt a connection to them, even though she was unaware she was being trafficked. After many sessions of reaffirmation about the legal protections she could be granted, she let the APARLC know she was okay with proceeding.

The EJA fellowship grant significantly helped me in my ability to provide legal immigration services to clients like the one who had been trafficked. Not having a financial burden throughout my internship allowed me to really focus on the clients and obtain a relationship with them. I could research immigration areas outside of work that I did not know, instead of focusing on how I would be able to afford my groceries. I was able to learn the ins and outs of immigration, and I better understood how to be an empathetic lawyer. For my public service internship and the EJA fellowship grant, I am truly grateful.

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