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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Update 1:

Today, I finish my third week as a summer legal intern with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in Washington D.C. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) serves vulnerable unaccompanied children and youth escaping poverty, community violence, gang recruitment, and other compounded factors that would make any reasonable person flee. In the first three weeks alone, I observed family court hearings for custody determinations, a prosecutor prep KIND's client to testify in front of a grand jury, and listen to the KIND DC team collaboratively work through complex legal issues. Excited to implement what I learn during clinic this year at American University Washington College of Law.

Excited to see what else this summer with KIND will teach me as I begin to think about my post-graduate opportunities in Washington D.C.

This summer would not have been possible without the amazing financial support from Equal Justice America and The Hispanic Bar Association of DC.

Update 2: One month at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)! I was a little nervous about doing family law but was excited to learn more because it is an area of the law that intersects with immigration. Crime is also an area of law that intersects with immigration--I conducted U visa research, drafted motions and applications for clients. This was especially exciting 'cause I researched and drafted an updated, technical chapter on U visa processes and policies as a legal researcher for NIWAP last semester!

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) also does policy work and a few weeks ago, DC's Jessalyn Schwartz testified at the D.C. City Council to advocate for the Vulnerable Youth Guardianship Protection Act. The Act would extend D.C.'s Superior Court jurisdiction to align with federal law in order to provide immigrant youth in D.C.



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increased opportunities for stability and productivity in D.C. and increase access to immigration relief through Special Immigrant Juvenile Statues (SIJS). My former youth worker heart is so ecstatic and hope the D.C. City Council acts to support these youth.

Update 3: There is no better feeling than when you have a breakthrough on a tough assignment. I joined KIND because I wanted experience in family law and immigration. I struggled with the family law aspect because it was something I'd never done before! I just wanted to share that there is always an opportunity for growth in challenges. And improving my skills at the intersection of family and immigration law is only going to make me a better attorney and advocate for my future clients.

While I was fortunate to have been awarded amazing scholarships from Equal Justice America and The Hispanic Bar Association of DC (HBA-DC), many of my fellow law school peeps are doing this work for little to no pay in the name of supporting organizations that work with directly impacted communities. It should *not* be this way--the legal profession and legal education need to figure out how to make this career pathway more accessible--my peers are in very real need right now. Consider donating to the EJA Fellows Fundraiser (<https://lnkd.in/eQRHDZz2>). Whatever is raised will be distributed to those on the waiting list. Rent isn't cheap ya know?

Update 4: It is bittersweet thinking how little time left I have with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). It is amazing how much can be accomplished and learned by being on the field--to be honest, the rigidity of academia is not my favorite part of law school because there is an emphasis in the theoretical and less on the reality of our society. The opportunity to take on public interest and movement lawyering roles is what keeps me going--because it is something that impacts my appreciation for the law and what it can and should be doing for marginalized communities. I enjoyed the real work I accomplished this summer and looking forward to finishing up my projects and work.

Update 5: And with that, my last summer as a law student has ended. Yesterday was my last day at my internship with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). I feel like I accomplished so much this summer, despite how fast the 10 weeks went by!

I drafted an asylum brief for the first time--making legal arguments, applying the facts, and presenting country conditions evidence. This was by far my favorite part and I wish I had more time to perfect them. I did catch myself leaning too much into my perfectionist tendencies and then letting myself doubt my ability. But, that is part of being a First-Gen Latina. You gotta push past it, keep showing up, and putting your best work forward. I also had the opportunity to interact with young clients--my youth advocate heart is happy.

I shared in a previous post that family law was difficult for me to work on and I was really slow on drafting the motions because I would read and reread and made sure I understood the DC Codes and applied the facts



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correctly and persuasively. My supervisor expected so much from me, trusted me to put in the work, and was incredibly patient letting me work through multiple drafts, providing feedback, and talking through it. I was definitely out of my element, but it is a process I am so grateful to have learned this summer.

Now for a little R&R in LA with friends and family before starting my LAST YEAR of law school, prepping for the BAR exam, and just trying to get to graduation.

This is my final EJA Fellow Update and I cannot be grateful for the funding EJA provided this summer--cause ya know rent ain't free.