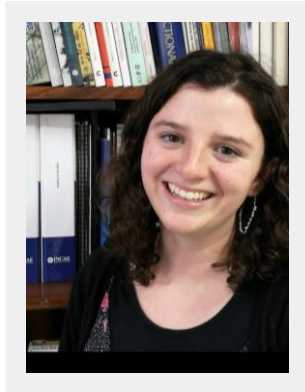




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: On the Trafficking Survivors Assistance Program at Legal Aid Chicago, we talk a lot about what kind of legal representation we would like to provide our clients. Sometimes people throw around lots of buzzwords, like holistic care and client-centered representation. I have heard these before at other organizations, but it feels really different here. I see these conversations put into practice day in and day out. I see it when my colleagues jump at the chance to support a trafficking survivor who received a DUI at an inopportune moment in their immigration case. I know other legal service providers would be quick to close out a case like this, to refer the client elsewhere where they would likely have to pay to receive representation with an attorney who may not understand how their arrest could have been a response to years of complex trauma.

I also saw this practice of care in action when my supervisor coaches me on only asking the most pertinent questions to a survivor of labor trafficking. Could we win the T visa without having to ask re-triggering and re-traumatizing questions? Do we have enough information for the adjudicator to make a favorable decision? If so, we stop. This is a practice of treating our clients with dignity and privacy. The first few weeks of my internship have flown by. I can feel my brain rewiring and resetting. After a year of doctrinal classes, case law, and memorization, I am feeling a renewed sense of purpose and direction in my legal pursuit. I am learning so much from my colleagues and clients about what it means to be an advocate. I love thinking of my role as malleable depending on the client's individual, unique situation. I am looking forward to the rest of the summer and I hope to apply these learnings and lessons to my practice for years to come.

Update 2: I am a few weeks into my internship on the Trafficking Survivors Assistance Program at Legal Aid Chicago and I am learning so much. I now understand some of the complexities of trafficking and why it is such a unique field to work in. Unlike other types of victimization, such as assault or domestic violence, trafficking survivors rarely self-identify. Trafficking can look like many different things, including domestic violence, labor



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exploitation, and smuggling. Identifying trafficking can be tricky and working with survivors requires a heightened level of support as they often lack social and economic stability after escaping from their trafficker. My team has a full-time social worker who supports our clients to stabilize and connects them to financial, housing, medical, and therapeutic resources. I know that having a social worker on staff is rare in legal aid organizations and I am grateful that we can provide more holistic legal services. I also feel so grateful to be able to gain experience across legal fields.

On the immigration side, I am working on applications for permanent residency after a T visa grant, working with derivatives of our primary clients on their applications, and am writing U visa declarations and cover letters. I have gotten to work with clients at every stage of their interaction with LAC from initial intake to receiving their green card. In addition to the immigration work, I am conducting complex research for a potential civil case that seeks to provide au pairs with labor rights to fair wages. I am working on a Stabilization Guide to help our clients access vital resources. Later this week, I will accompany a team member on a trip to Southern Illinois to connect with migrant farmworkers in isolated, rural communities to talk to them about their rights and give them our contact information in case they are experiencing labor trafficking or exploitation. Each day is different, and I am really enjoying the opportunity to experience so many types of legal work.

Update 3: I went to a coffeeshop in my neighborhood this week and noticed a vibrant sign in the restroom. The sign had a dramatic image of a young woman getting kidnapped. It warned about human trafficking and gave tips for how to identify when someone was in a trafficking situation. I left thinking a lot about how the work that I have done this summer has nothing to do with the image of trafficking that this type of sign seemed to highlight. While I understand that there are some scenarios that fit this image, it seems to be much less common than the labor trafficking cases that often occur right under our noses. We do not often think about how the restaurant or gas station worker, landscaper, or agricultural worker are often forced into scenarios that are a form of modern-day slavery.

When I tell people about the work that I am doing this summer, I get the feeling that a lot of people immediately have an image in their head of the young woman kidnapped on the sign in the café bathroom. I wonder why that is. Maybe the media has emphasized a very specific type of sex trafficking because it is horrific and elicits a reaction out of people. Maybe it is harder to acknowledge labor trafficking in the United States because as a society we benefit from cheap landscaping or farm work. Maybe we would prefer not to look too closely at the conditions of laborers all around us. Either way, I believe that making their experiences invisible is harmful and I am grateful to learn from and with survivors of labor trafficking each day.

Update 4: As this summer comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on moments that most align with how I see myself in my career. Two of these occasions were when I was out in the community providing informal legal services directly to individuals. The most impactful of these was on a farmworker outreach trip with our



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Migrant project. I was lucky enough to accompany a coworker, Pedro, on a trip to visit migrant agricultural workers in small towns in central Illinois. Pedro has been driving all around Illinois for the last thirty years to meet with farmworkers on the H-2A and H-2B program. His role is to build relationships with the workers, briefly talk to them about their rights, and offer them his contact information in case they have a problem with their legal case or are being treated inappropriately.

The first town we went to had around nine Mexican farmworkers who were on a break for the afternoon by the time we arrived. I felt a little nervous driving up because I worried about building rapport with people so quickly. We were strangers, walking right up to workers on their evening break. However, Pedro has a way of relating to others that made everyone feel at ease immediately. We were very quickly joking around with the men and they were opening up to us about the conditions of their work. One of the workers had been injured while on the job and asked Pedro many questions about his rights regarding medical care and compensation.

When we arrived at the next town, it took us around 45 minutes of driving around before we could find the workers. They weren't located at the address that was listed on the H-2B visa that we were following. Pedro was determined to find them, and after we made a few circles around the corn and soybean fields, we found them. The group immediately invited us into their home where they were preparing dinner. They had many questions about obtaining status in the United States and about paying taxes. With every interaction, Pedro genuinely offered his direct phone number. It was clear to me and to the workers that he truly wanted to help and that he would make time for all their questions and legal needs.

I left feeling really inspired by the vision of legal services that meets community members where they are at, instead of hoping that they will be able to access services by finding our contact information and leaping through the endless bureaucratic hoops to get help. I feel grateful to work for an organization that prioritizes connection in this way, and I hope to be able to provide community based legal services long into my career.

Update 5: I am incredibly grateful that Equal Justice America and Legal Aid Chicago provided me with the opportunity to intern on the Trafficking Survivor's Assistance Program. I learned so much about a complex legal field that is interdisciplinary and diverse, got hands on experience providing community-based, holistic legal services, and have a deeper understanding of how I would like to show up as an attorney as I continue in my career.

I feel most touched by the rapport that I was able to build with clients as I accompanied them through different parts of their legal cases. I applied for permanent residency with a client who had lost faith in attorneys that had wronged her in the past. Our closing conversation was one of gratitude and hope, which was so different from the tone of our communication at the beginning of the summer. I also helped a trafficking survivor apply for residency and advanced parole when his child in Mexico was sick and desperately needed to see his father. Our advocacy on that case convinced a prosecutor in California to drop DUI charges, which would have been a



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barrier to permanency and stability as he healed from the trauma from his trafficking. I spent hours and hours on the phone with a young woman who had been trafficked by an au pair company. I remain inspired by her drive to tell her story to enact change in Illinois and across the United States so that no one else experiences the exploitation and harm that she went through. During my final week, we conducted a Pro Se Asylum Clinic and I worked with a young man from Venezuela who had been bused from Texas to Chicago. His visible scars from his persecution in his home country and travel by foot to the United States were jarring evidence of his resiliency.

Moving forward, I hope to hold the lessons I learned this summer with me as I continue my career. One of these is to set clear expectations with clients and follow through on my promises so not to repeat behaviors of their traffickers. I also learned that part of holistic legal services involves being creative, meeting clients exactly where they are, and giving people grace when things get touch. I look forward to applying these lessons as I continue on in my career and I am grateful to EJA and Legal Aid Chicago for trusting me to do this difficult work.