



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:

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Update 1: Even though I have only been at Legal Aid Chicago for 3 weeks, I have already had the opportunity to learn and experience so many things. I am very grateful for Equal Justice America, because without it, I would be unable to spend my summer here. This is important to me because I am able to see firsthand the challenges, barriers, and traumas that the immigrant community faces as they confront the American legal system. I have already had the opportunity to work on U-visas, DACA renewals, EAD applications (work authorization), and FOIA requests. These tasks have given me more insight into the nuances and obstacles that the immigration system presents, and I find that I learn new skills and information every day. The attorneys and support staff are always more than happy to teach me new things, and I am grateful to be surrounded by a team who is also incredibly passionate about justice for the immigrant community. Some of my favorite things so far have been contacting clients. Many of our clients are Spanish speaking, so I have enjoyed using my language skills to contact them and support them in any way I can. I am looking forward to the rest of the summer and am excited to continue learning about immigration law!

Update 2: One of my favorite parts of my position at Legal Aid Chicago is interacting with clients. While my workday does consist of a fair amount of document review, drafting, translating, and editing, it can be easy to forget there are real people with real lives behind the papers. For me, meeting clients, hearing their stories, and connecting with them is very rewarding. It reminds me of what an honor it is to be able to work on their cases and help them with their immigration matters. Even though we deal with a fair amount of difficult situations – abuse, neglect, corruption, loss, and death – hearing from clients can be motivating even when there are difficult moments. I have done my best to interact with clients in a patient and professional manner, even when there are tense moments or situations. However, at the end of the day, I have learned that difficult moments come with the job, because many individuals we serve are going through some of the worst months or years of their life, and I am honored to answer their questions or listen to them vent about their hard day. We have all experienced a situation where we were frustrated due to a lack of information, so I have tried to put myself in their shoes during these situations to be a better advocate for them. Although there are hard days, I feel like these interpersonal challenges help me grow in my role and in my confidence to solve issues like this on a day-to-day basis.



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Update 3: I cannot believe that I am over halfway done with my internship! As I reflect on what I have done so far, I was struck by a few things. First, I am so grateful to the amazing attorneys and support staff at Legal Aid Chicago. They have been so encouraging and helpful during my time at LAC this summer. I have had many questions, and they have patiently answered them all. This process has been very helpful to my own professional growth, and I know that I will use what I have learned this summer in the future. Second, I am very glad to be in an internship that regularly challenges me. I am constantly given the chance to try new things, learn new procedures, and deal with unexpected challenges. Instead of seeing them as obstacles, every challenge I have faced has helped me grow and learn in my role as an intern. As a future lawyer, I know the challenges and obstacles are inevitable, and it is my job to learn how to solve problems without letting them derail me. Finally, I was struck by how fast this internship has flown by! Sometimes there is so much pressure in the legal world to move on to the next thing as fast as we can, but I have really enjoyed my summer here at Legal Aid Chicago and I plan to spend the remaining time at LAC learning and fully immersing myself in my role as an intern.

Update 4: One of my favorite parts of my internship has been the diverse legal matters that I have been able to work on. Because Legal Aid Chicago has so many different practice groups, there is a lot of interdisciplinary work, and I have had the opportunity to learn more about the intersection of employment law and immigration. Through a program called Deferred Action for Labor Employment, individuals can apply for deferred action, a form of prosecutorial discretion, while their labor claims are being investigated. This program acknowledges that many undocumented workers are the victims of abuse, violence, harassment, wage theft, and more in their workplaces because they are afraid to report the treatment due to their legal status. During this process, I have been able to talk with clients and help them with their forms. Even though this may seem more administrative, this is a vital process in making sure that their complaints are recorded and that they are protected. I have greatly enjoyed hearing from clients and guiding them through the process, and it has made me more aware of the labor struggles that undocumented workers go through without the protections that most of us have in our jobs. Going forward, I hope to find other organizations like Legal Aid Chicago that welcome interdisciplinary work in their legal advocacy. Because so many individuals that Legal Aid Chicago serves require more than one type of legal service, it is very helpful to have so many knowledgeable experts in one organization, rather than having to constantly refer clients out to other places.

Update 5: As I reflect on my summer at Legal Aid Chicago, I feel immensely grateful for my experiences and for all that I have learned. I have had the opportunity to work with amazing clients who reminded me every day of the importance of our work. I have drafted affidavits, interviewed clients, written cover letters, and filled out form after form to help our clients to the best of my ability. I have been able to work on visas, DACA, employment issues, and more. One of my most memorable experiences was being able to advocate for a client with the Chicago Police Department, and the challenges that I encountered during that experience helped me grow and learn as a legal advocate. Compared to what I had known at the beginning of the summer, my knowledge and confidence has grown immensely, and I will always look back on my experience fondly.



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First and foremost, I have had the privilege to learn from incredibly talented attorneys and legal staff who are passionately dedicated to seeking justice for the immigrant community. Time after time I have seen these individuals go above and beyond to solve problems, find information, create solutions, and invest in their clients. This has greatly inspired me to continue working for justice, even when there are obstacles in my path. Additionally, I have learned the value of a strong team that promotes a culture of coordination and kindness. The immigration team at Legal Aid Chicago has created a culture where everyone is willing to help and support each other, leading to more efficiency, results, and justice for clients! As I move forward in my legal career, I will be sure to look for more organizations that put the same emphasis on community and culture. Finally, I have also learned that I greatly value working at an organization with such a mission-based drive. I was excited to come to work every day because I knew that our clients were counting on us, and I was passionate about advocating for them and empowering them to seek justice.

As I move forward, I will definitely take this spirit of determination into my future work. I am very grateful for all the knowledge and practical experience that I received this summer, and I will continue looking for roles that allow me to advocate for others.