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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:

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Organization: Legal Services of South Central Michigan: Family Law Project

Update 1: This is my second summer with Legal Services of South Central Michigan. I decided to come back because I loved the working environment, the clients, and the fact that I was helping the community that I grew up in.

My department, Family Law Project, assists domestic violence victims with both divorce and child custody cases. Last summer I spent most of my time performing client intake interviews and drafting simple motions. It was my first real introduction into the law.

This year, I was able to do more for FLP. Within my first few weeks back with the program, I was able to dive right in with only a short refresher. I interviewed clients, drafted many pleadings, and was given the opportunity to draft advise letters with minimal guidance.

My clients have really taught me what it means to be empathetic. These people may be in the lowest point in their lives, and just reaching out and asking for help was a big step for them. I am so grateful to be a part of this and a part of the healing process for them. Despite not being able to physically see my clients make the changes since covid. I still feel very personally connected to them just by working on their cases.

Update 2: With this being my second summer at FLP, I feel right at home. I am loving what I do, and I am excited to go to work each day. This is something I only dreamed of finding in a job.

This past week, I attempted to ask for more responsibilities. I told my supervising attorneys that I really wanted to understand what the job of a lawyer entailed. There is such a large gap between being a law student and a clerk to being a full-blown attorney. This includes coming up with solutions yourself and really understanding the law in a practical way instead of just academically.

After speaking with a newer attorney in my office, I understand that everyone goes through this phase. This is something that the legal community struggles with continuously, and the best way that I found to bridge the gap for myself is to make my intentions clear to my supervising attorneys. I am given opportunities to come up



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with advice on my own before speaking with my supervising attorney, or asked questions like “what should we do here.”

I have been put in countless uncomfortable, but career benefiting situations, and I only have my supervising attorneys to thank.

Update 3: I cannot believe that time has gone by so fast! I only have 2 weeks left in my clerkship, and it is astonishing how much I have gotten done within the past 8 weeks.

Last week, one of my mentors left our office to pursue her dream area of law. It was a bittersweet moment. She gave me plentiful advice and was the one to truly guide me on the path of being a “real” attorney.

Some things that really stuck with me was the importance of self in this line of work. We spend 40 hours a week serving others and putting other’s needs and wants first. I know this is crucial especially when working with domestic violence victims, but sometimes we as attorneys need to take a step back and think about what we are sacrificing.

Being able to say no to my supervisors has been hard. I want to help so many people, but there is only one of me. Being able to say no or “my workload is too full” is an essential part of the job. I have been working on setting a good work life balance and not taking work home with me, but it has been a journey. One thing she said that stuck with me was, “do you want to be doing this for a year then burn out, or do you want to be doing this for the rest of your life?”

Update 4: Coming on to week 8 of my time at the Family Law Project, I am amazed at how much I have learned and grown both as a professional and as an individual. Working with clients in the field of family law has been a transformative journey that has tested my patience, empathy, and understanding in ways I never anticipated.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned during my time here is the importance of patience. Dealing with clients who are going through some of the most challenging and distressing periods of their lives requires a level of patience that I struggled to cultivate within myself. Some clients would call or text me at odd hours of the day, or refuse to schedule a meeting time within the work day, or even just plain refuse to answer my calls, texts, or emails. These situations were mentally draining on my end, and at times, I felt unappreciated for my efforts. However, stepping back and realizing the level of stress and anxiety my clients were experiencing allowed me to better connect and understand their actions.

Taking time to view each situation from the client’s perspective has been a crucial aspect of my professional growth, and I believe this will make me a better lawyer because of it.



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- **Update 5:** Since I have concluded my time at the Family Law Project, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the skills FLP has taught me. Despite being my second summer with FLP, it has continuously provided me with invaluable experiences and helps me bridge the gap between law school and the real-world practice of law.
 - Over the past 10 weeks, I have had the privilege of working directly with domestic violence survivors to help them seek justice, security, and freedom from their abusive environments. This experience has opened my eyes to the immense challenges faced by these brave individuals, and it has fueled my commitment to tirelessly advocate for their behalf.
 - Throughout my time at FLP, I have primarily focused on three crucial areas of family law - divorce, custody, and obtaining personal protection orders (PPOs). Each case has brought its own unique set of challenges and emotions, but it has been deeply fulfilling to see how even the smallest victories can make a significant difference in the lives of our clients.
 - Working on divorce cases has given me a comprehensive understanding of the legal intricacies involved in ending a marriage. I had the opportunity to assist clients in navigating the division of assets and child custody arrangements. These cases have taught me the importance of sensitivity and compassion when dealing with clients who are going through an emotionally turbulent phase in their lives. I was even able to witness mediation and watch how successful mediation can take such a heavy weight of our clients' shoulders. Witnessing this sparked an interest in mediation and really solidified my plan to obtain a mediation certification.
 - Custody cases have been equally rewarding and despite being more demanding Abusers often used the children as a weapon to obtain control over our clients, and to be able to release our clients from that control using the legal system was a rewarding experience.
 - The most rewarding moments of my time at FLP have come from helping clients obtain PPOs against their abusers. These orders are essential tools in breaking the cycle of violence and providing victims with a sense of security.
 - As I look back on these past 10 weeks, I can confidently say that this fellowship has been a life-changing experience for me. It has not only deepened my passion for family law but has also reaffirmed my commitment to social justice and empowering vulnerable communities.
 - I am determined to carry the lessons and experiences from this fellowship into my future legal career, ensuring that I continue to be a vocal advocate for domestic violence victims.



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