



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Southwestern Law School

Organization: Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Update 1: This summer I am receiving funding from Equal Justice America to support my work at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). Equal Justice America promotes access to justice and provides funding to law students working to help underserved communities at civil legal aid organizations. KIND is a nonprofit organization that provides legal services and social services to immigrant and refugee children.

My supervisor, one of the staff attorneys at the KIND LA office, has been amazing at guiding me through the first few weeks of my internship. In the next several weeks I will be writing an asylum brief (legal arguments to convince immigration officers to grant asylum to a client). I had the opportunity to meet the very young little girl from Central America whose asylum case I will be working on. I am very happy I got the chance to meet her to remind myself of who it is I am helping while I work on her asylum case.

These past couple of weeks I have also been learning about how to help clients obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a form of immigration relief for children who have been abandoned, abused, or neglected by one or both of their parents.

The United States immigration system is very complex and confusing to navigate. I feel very privileged to be able to use my experience and education to make an impact in the lives of immigrant and refugee children through my internship this summer.

Update 2: I've officially completed one month as an intern at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). I am thankful for my supervisor who has structured my internship so that I can experience the process of



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obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile status for clients from the beginning steps to the final steps. I've gotten the chance to meet more of the young girls whose cases I have been working on, and it has been the highlight of my internship so far. This is my first experience working with children, and it has been extremely rewarding.

KIND provides a lot of trauma-informed training for everyone working at KIND. Through my experience so far, I have seen just how important these types of trainings are for anyone that works with clients who have experience complex trauma. I have heard clients' stories about the traumatic abuse and violence they have experienced. Working in the legal field, it is our responsibility to make sure clients are protected in every way. Being sensitive to and mindful of clients' traumas is extremely important.

These past couple of weeks at my internship I have also been diving deeper into learning more about the requirements for asylum. As my supervisor put it, being granted asylum is almost like winning the lottery. Immigration officers and judges have a large amount of discretion and power in granting asylum applications. It's not surprising to find out that in some jurisdictions, the denial rates reach 90%. Unfortunately, following the end of the harsh Title 42 restrictions on asylum, the Biden administration imposed more restrictive measures last month that will risk the safety of unaccompanied children. As always, I hope for changes that help protect our neighbors.

Update 3: I am loving my time here at KIND. This week I had the opportunity to go to a guardianship hearing with my supervisor for one of the cases I've been working on. This hearing was to determine whether the client's petition for guardianship and petition for special immigrant juvenile findings would be granted.

This week the KIND Los Angeles staff and interns also went to the LA Gibson Dunn office for an intake clinic. Gibson Dunn is one of the firms that partners up with KIND to take on clients pro bono that are referred to KIND. I had the opportunity to translate between a potential client and a Gibson attorney for an intake. It was a great opportunity for me to see the other half of the services that KIND provides. KIND staff attorneys mentor pro bono attorneys so that more unaccompanied immigrant children have access to representation.

I have been learning so much more about ways to help the immigrant community. The staff at KIND LA have been amazingly supportive, and it's always inspiring to be around people who are passionate about helping vulnerable communities.

Update 4: I recently had the opportunity to do an intake on my own with a 5 year old client, and I was able to identify that the client was eligible for asylum. It was a bit difficult trying to get such a



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small child to open up about potentially traumatic events, but I'm glad I was able to obtain enough information to identify a form of relief.

This summer has gone by so quickly. My internship is almost coming to an end. KIND does amazing work to support immigrant children, and I'm glad I chose to spend my summer with them.

Update 5: I learned so much in the 10 weeks that I spent with KIND. After an arduous first year of law school, KIND reminded of the "why" I decided to pursue law school. I choose to use my education to make an impact for underserved communities. Access to justice is difficult to obtain for disadvantaged people, and KIND does a huge part in providing access to justice to unaccompanied immigrant children.

All of the clients that I worked with this summer were teenagers or very small children who have endured intense trauma in their home countries and during their journey to the U.S. It was very gut wrenching having to interview a young client and seeing the client cry when they talked about seeing their parents be tortured or threatened by gangs. Other difficult moments were hearing a client talk about being abandoned by his parents and later being punched by a border patrol agent. This was definitely the most difficult part of the internship. On top of dealing with trauma, these children must continue living with the uncertainty of their status here in the U.S.

During my last couple weeks at KIND, I conducted an intake for a client who was referred to the KIND Los Angeles office by KIND's border team in Mexico. The KIND border team assisted the client in presenting herself at the border and advocating for her. I learned that the border team provides important information and legal services to migrants in Mexico. The expansive reach of organizations like KIND is priceless. Immigrants are a huge population who often go without adequate legal representation.

Everyone that I have worked with at KIND show a great deal of care and passion for helping the clients. There was not a single person who did not try to go above and beyond to resolve an issue for their clients.

I am happy that I chose to spend my summer with KIND. I am grateful for this rewarding opportunity to provide support to immigrant children. Organizations like KIND and Equal Justice America are crucial in order to provide resources to disadvantaged populations.