



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** University of Michigan Law School

**Organization:** Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

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**Update 1:** This summer, I have been very fortunate to receive funding through Equal Justice America to support my legal internship experience at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in the Houston field office.

I came to law school to pursue immigration law, and this internship is a great step towards that goal. I have already learned so much and I truly look forward to the rest of my experience. Since KIND is focused on unaccompanied children, I have especially been exposed to the complexities and gaps that the legal system presents for youths navigating their path (often alone).

Equal Justice America is a nonprofit that helps fund law students pursuing careers in civil legal services for the public interest - helping us increase access to legal assistance, which can be make or break for the populations we serve.

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**Update 2:** The end of June marks the end of my first month interning with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in Houston, Texas. I have been enjoying an amazing and impactful time with KIND, and I am looking forward to the remaining five weeks of my internship.

Since my last update, I have had the incredible opportunity to engage deeper with the client populations we serve, as well as participate in interesting trainings and take on thought-provoking research projects.

In preparation for our Intern Intake day, I sat in on two intakes with unaccompanied children. This was a very moving experience, as the clients were very young. The paralegals who interviewed them showed so much care and patience. At the intakes, the children get offered a snack and a drink, and get to choose from a variety of activities that they can do during the interview. They have printed coloring pages and crayons, pipe cleaners,



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and fidget toys. I even learned a new Spanish word during one intake: "plastilina" is play dough! These tools made such a difference in making the children feel comfortable during their interviews.

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**Update 3:** Checking in again with another EJA Fellow Update. It is wild realizing that I am now on the downhill slope of my time with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in Houston, TX. So far, I have been having an incredible experience, and I am looking forward to my (few) remaining weeks with this phenomenal organization before I return to University of Michigan Law School.

Last week, I wrapped up the first draft of a request for prosecutorial discretion. This request will be made to ICE's Principal Legal Advisor for a favorable exercise of discretion in the asylum case of a young woman who endured immense trauma in her home country as a teenager. She arrived in the United States as an unaccompanied child. Unaccompanied children usually have a difficult time navigating the complex and high-stakes world of immigration law, but KIND helps these children with both legal and social services. This assignment gave me a role in helping the client, and also gave me a chance to flex my legal writing muscles. Texas is in the 5th Circuit – meaning that in general certain types of asylum claims are more difficult to win than in other circuits. This assignment was an interesting opportunity to engage with the law and try to make my client's facts fit with helpful precedent (or maybe just not fit with the unhelpful precedent!).

More fun as well: KIND Houston was grateful to receive donated tickets to an Astros game, and we interns were able to make the game as well

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**Update 4:** I only have one week left in my internship with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) in Houston, Texas. My time with KIND has been absolutely phenomenal and I am so grateful to my colleagues this summer for being so welcoming and helpful to the intern team.

Each legal organization I have worked for has done intakes, but it has been several years (since before the pandemic began) since I have done an in-person intake. It was very impactful to return to in-person service providing this past week. I have discussed this in a prior update, but KIND truly excels at caring for clients during intakes. One of the intakes was for a young girl, who came to our office with her mother and two younger siblings. I was able to occupy the siblings with activities so that I could give the client and her mother important information about the intake and their rights. Later, when we had to speak to the mother privately, another member of our team was able to supervise the kids and even read them a short story. This allowed us to obtain all the information we needed while also making sure everyone was comfortable and even having a bit of fun!

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**Update 5:** On one of the last days of my internship with Kids in Need of Defense in Houston, an attorney showed me the asylum grant rates for different courts across the country. The variance was stark. In jurisdictions like California and New York, while the majority of applications were still denied, many folks were



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granted asylum. Then, when the attorney selected Houston, the approval rate dipped well below 10% for applicants from the countries that made up nearly our entire client base.

There had been an overwhelming sense of fighting an uphill battle for our clients all summer, but to see the numbers laid out so plainly pushed things into a clearer perspective. My previous work in other states helped many folks for sure, but in a jurisdiction where the odds are so stacked against the clients, legal assistance is even more crucial. While I had never planned on beginning my career in Texas, I am appreciative that life has led me to a place where there is work to be done, great organizations to become a part of, and amazing people to be serve. I can't wait to see where I end up after graduation, and I will certainly be taking my experiences from this summer with me as I go forward into my career.

Thank you to KIND's Houston team for giving me the opportunity to learn and grow this summer. I cannot speak highly enough of the people I worked with this summer, they were incredibly welcoming and kind (sort of pun intended). Thank you also to my fellow interns, Sam, Cinthia, and Alejandra who made this experience even more wonderful!