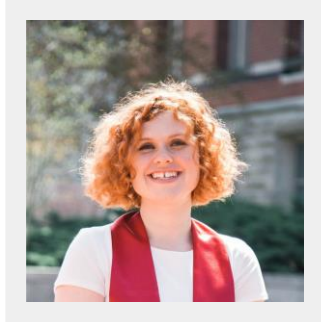




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Grace Baker

Law School: University of Michigan Law School

Organization: Pediatric Advocacy Clinic

Update 1: I've finished Week 4 of my summer internship with the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic, and the way I view legal need has already transformed. My caseload is incredibly varied. I have housing, education, Medicaid, custody, guardianship, immigration, and domestic violence cases. All these types of cases have one thing in common: no guarantee to legal representation.

Civil cases, or the lack thereof, can either elevate or devastate individuals and their families. While talking with my clients, I hear their frustration, anger, sadness, and disappointment. They have so much on the line, and they're often against a more powerful party, such as a company or the government.

However, I also hear my clients' bravery, resilience, and hope. They are fierce self-advocates. I feel so motivated to use my legal skills as an extension of their passion. The challenges of drafting a new type of motion and negotiating with opposing counsel feel exciting rather than overwhelming when I remember I'm working for my clients.

My greatest resource while acclimating to this work has been other public interest attorneys. I love listening to my supervisors talk about their experiences with past clients. I value the insightful transfer memos from previous student attorneys that tell the stories and goals of our clients. I rely on the practice guides written by seasoned immigration and DV attorneys. The public interest community is outstanding, and I look forward to continuing my work.

Update 2: The past few weeks of my summer internship have involved a lot of speaking to people, which is my favorite part of lawyering. It has been especially enjoyable as I prepare one of my clients and her witnesses for a hearing. I've gotten to know even more about my client during the hours we've spent together, and I feel so honored to be entrusted with her story.



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It's also been a joy to speak to her friends and family. I was initially worried they wouldn't feel comfortable speaking to me since they don't know me like my client does. But everyone has been so forthcoming and kind.

They've also expressed a lot of gratitude towards me. I honestly didn't expect that. I've occupied their free time and will put them through the nerve-racking experience of speaking in front of a judge. Why would they be happy with me? And yet, they thank me for inviting them to support my client, for listening to them, and advocating for my client.

Each witness paints me a picture of how this hearing's decision will impact not only my client's life but also the lives of others. My internship with the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic has taught me that direct service work for a civil legal aid organization can have benefits that reach beyond individuals and into communities.

Update 3: I have finished my first hearing!

At the beginning of the summer, knowing I'd eventually speak to a judge made me want to run for the hills. I was embarrassed about being nervous because I knew I wanted to be a litigator and that would, of course, require speaking to judges. I told myself I needed to "suck it up" and this nervousness would be a typical experience throughout my career.

However, I had a strange feeling of calm the night before and the morning of my first hearing. I knew I was prepared. I knew every inch of this case better than anyone else. I had spent hours speaking to my client and my witnesses, so what was a couple more hours of talking - even if it was in front of a couple of new people? As I made my opening statement and questioned witnesses, I was confident. I had no idea I'd make this much progress in just a summer.

One thing has particularly stuck with me since the hearing. The Administrative Law Judge said she had never done one of these hearings with so many people present. An administrative hearing is a requirement for all people who want the outcome that my client wanted, so I suppose the majority of people the ALJ sees are unrepresented. They don't have lawyers to call and prepare witnesses to support their case.

I feel very grateful that the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic exists and was able to provide my client the support she needs. There are so many amazing people in this world who could benefit greatly from legal aid.

Update 4: During the past couple of weeks at the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic, I performed a deposition and represented a client in person at a courthouse for the first time. Neither of these two experiences went how I imagined, which means I learned a lot.



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As I waited for my case to be called in court, I had the opportunity to watch other attorneys showcase their skills. I also compared them to the parties who were self-represented. When my law professors mentioned pro se litigants and their challenges during my 1L classes, I mostly thought about the unfairness of a person untrained in the law having to build a case capable of countering the case developed by an attorney. What I hadn't thought about was the unfairness stemming from attorneys' connections with judges.

It was clear the attorneys in the courtroom were well-acquainted with the judge. They were cracking jokes with him before their cases were called. Even when the attorneys were making their arguments, they spoke with the same tone one might use with a longtime mentor. I was happy to see they all had good working-relationships. It was helpful to watch the power of connections and reputations in action.

But it was upsetting to see the isolating impact these connections had on pro se litigants. These litigants were not comfortable communicating with the judge. These litigants couldn't hide their strong emotions to focus on charming the judge. These litigants spoke what they felt and believed, even if it wasn't what the judge wanted to hear.

The result was that the judge sympathized with the attorney-represented litigants much more frequently than the self-represented litigants. I'll admit I got choked up thinking about my client and how things would be for her if she didn't have the clinic. I hope one day we'll have free legal services for all litigants who can't otherwise obtain representation.

Ten weeks down, two to go! I can't believe my internship is nearly over.

Update 5: My summer internship with the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic has come to a close, and as I reflect on the experience, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. This internship has been a transformative journey, one that has not only broadened my legal horizons but also deepened my understanding of myself and my capabilities.

One of the most significant lessons I learned during this internship was the art of effective communication with clients and the skill of negotiation on their behalves. It was an eye-opening experience to witness the tangible difference that skilled advocacy can make in the lives of those seeking justice. Representing clients in hearings and even participating in a deposition taught me not only about lawyering but also about my own strengths and weaknesses. I had to confront challenges head on, absorbing feedback and continuously refining my approach.

I am so thankful to my clients for entrusting me with their cases. Throughout the summer, I represented ten clients. I practiced and researched landlord-tenant law, child protection law, public benefits law, immigration law, and education law.



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Because of my internship, I am now certain I want to pursue direct service work after graduating law school. Talking with clients was my favorite part of the job. Knowing I was working for them motivated me through writing motions and practicing arguments. It isn't easy listening to others talk about their challenges. I often wished I could do even more to alleviate my clients' burdens. But I learned that I'm a much stronger person than I had realized.

Providing civil legal aid services requires resourcefulness, patience, creativity, and determination. I look forward to continuing developing these attributes through the rest of my coursework at the University of Michigan Law School and next hands-on experiences. This fall semester, I will be a student attorney for the law school's Child Welfare Appellate Clinic. I am excited to step into the new world of appellate advocacy.

I'll also be searching for opportunities in family law at Chicago civil legal aid organizations for summer 2024. If anyone has any recommendations or contacts, I would appreciate you letting me know!