



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: Today was my first day at Pangea, and it was a busy one. We started the day off with a pro se asylum clinic session where me, another intern, and a volunteer participated in a moot court proceeding entirely in Spanish to show pro se clients who had hearings soon how to represent themselves. I acted as the respondent. Clients would talk about their own experiences already in court as well, and it was great learning from them and helping create a space where others can learn and benefit from each other's lived experiences. I hope the clients felt empowered to represent themselves after that moot court. The rest of the day, we had orientation, office tours, and tech set up. I really like the work environment, and I feel ready to start my first assignment and meet with my supervisor tomorrow.

Update 2: My first month at Pangea has been so great. I've been able to work on many different types of assignments that exercise different skills. I've worked on a country conditions report for an LGBTQ+ survivor, a stipulation letter for a genocide refugee, and a petition for a green card for a survivor of gendered violence. I've also accompanied three clients to court. One of the best days at Pangea was when I accompanied an indigenous asylum seeker from Colombia to an individual hearing, and the judge essentially granted her asylum. It was so beautiful and rewarding to see how relieved and happy she was. I was really anxious about my Spanish speaking abilities, especially when talking to clients, but the staff at Pangea have been so accommodating and want to help me get better. This week, I'm shadowing client intake interviews, so I'm really excited to see how cases are chosen by Pangea in the first place. I'm learning a lot, not only about substantive legal issues but also how a sustainable non-hierarchical workplace functions.

Update 3: My time at Pangea has been great. I have been working on most of the same assignments that I was working on when I wrote my last update, but now I'm almost done with all of them. I'm really excited to start working on a workshop about the Convention Against Torture (CAT). I've mainly done asylum work in the past, but I haven't explored how people may seek refuge under CAT so I'm excited to explore this avenue of



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relief, especially for clients who may not be eligible for asylum because of prior convictions or certain past experiences. There was one day two weeks ago where I had to drop all my work and write a legal memo for a client who was going to potentially be detained by ICE the next morning. That day was stressful but I felt supported by the Pangea staff, and the experience provided insight into the time sensitive nature of removal defense work. I feel like my work is well paced, and I have enough time to complete each assignment while also starting others. Pangea is really great at not overwhelming interns.

Update 4: I'm feeling sad that my time at Pangea is coming to end soon. I only have two more weeks left here. I've been working on a really cool assignment with one of the Pangea attorneys. The assignment is to help create a template for a Pro Se Workshop that helps people in ICE detention centers who may have potential CAT claims (Convention Against Torture claims) represent and defend themselves against removal. I love this assignment because it requires breaking down the complicated nuances and logistics of a CAT claim into accessible terms, which I didn't realize would be so hard. It is about increasing accessibility, empowering people to stand up for themselves, and not gatekeeping legal power. My supervising attorney has also been pushing me to think more about how guiding people on how to understand their own mental health issues can bolster their CAT claims as well. I'm really excited about this project. I'm also starting to work on a pre-hearing statement as well, which I've never done before. These last two weeks are going to be busy as I tie loose ends of pre-existing assignments awaiting feedback and starting new ones.

Update 5: It's quite bittersweet that my time at Pangea has ended. I feel like I got to do so much important work and meet so many cool attorneys and paralegals throughout the process. I was very busy until my very last day. On my last day, I accompanied two asylum seekers, a husband and wife, to their individual hearing. The hearing lasted three hours and it was quite hard typing the transcript of the hearing because of the length and pace of the proceeding. However, since the judge had many qualms with their claims, I knew that writing down every single word, especially the judge's final opinion, would be helpful (perhaps even necessary) in bolstering their claim before the next individual hearing.

As an overall recap of all the work I completed at Pangea, I worked on: a country conditions report on El Salvador, an I-130 Petition, a pre hearing statement, a post-conviction relief stipulation request, drafted a copy of a manual for pro se CAT applicants, and accompanied clients to three individual hearings. I became more confident in my Spanish speaking skills and my legal research skills, with the continuous support of the attorneys at Pangea. Their work isn't as daunting to me as it was before I started the internship because of their thorough training. I would highly recommend Pangea to prospective legal interns.

Looking back, the most rewarding project I worked on was creating a written guide for detained immigrants who may have claims under the Convention Against Torture to represent themselves *pro se*. I really tried to translate the legal jargon into accessible terms that to people who have experienced immense trauma and who may not have a robust educational background could easily digest and understand. I also really enjoyed the assignment writing



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a post-conviction relief stipulation request to a prosecutor on behalf of a Cambodian refugee at risk of deportation. I was able to hone my skills of identifying and highlighting client equities.

I will also remember one conversation with my supervising attorney that stuck with me. We were talking about how nature documentaries portray other animals' migration patterns with such reverence. Just like any other group of living sentient beings, the right to migrate is essential to healthy communities in my opinion. While we are mesmerized by the beauty of other species' migration patterns, the state penalizes our own. This conversation really reminded me of the humanity behind Pangea's work and will stick with me for a long time.