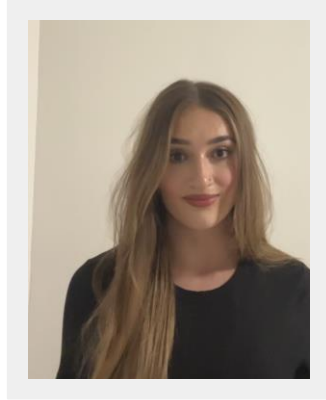




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Sophia Tarantino

Law School: UC Law SF

Organization: Open Door Legal

Update 1: I have been working for Open Door Legal, in San Francisco for a little short of a month. ODL's mission is to eradicate poverty through access to legal aid, and, as such, they focus on a wide range of issue areas to offer a full variety of legal aid to their clients. I am an intern with their housing department, working on both unlawful detainer actions and plaintiff-side litigation. Even though it may not be a lengthy amount of time, I have already learned so much! I work closely with housing team attorneys to complete notices, memos, and research. I have a couple of clients that I am currently working with. These cases focus on issue areas that range from unlawful detainer actions to reasonable accommodations and disability law. As the summer progresses, I am excited to work with my supervising attorney, on client intakes, and discovery motions, and watch how attorneys manage their day-to-day caseload. The team at ODL has been such an incredible inspiration. Watching lawyers advocate for their clients, most of whom lack substantive access to legal aid without ODL, has given me a new appreciation for the legal field and has shown me that true lawyering can make an incredible difference in the community.

Update 2: Open Door Legal has been an amazing place to work. I am about halfway through my summer internship, and I already feel as though I have learned so much. Since I work on both affirmative cases and unlawful detainers, I have had the opportunity to participate in discovery and communications with opposing party counsel. Since our last EJA update, I have had the opportunity to conduct intakes alone (with the supervision of other housing attorneys). I have always been interested in trauma-informed lawyering, so this was a wonderful opportunity to exercise this skillset. Our clients can come to appointments nervous, irritable, anxious and/or excited to share updates to their case or speak about their experience. I have seen firsthand how ODL is able to practice trauma-informed techniques in their communication with clients through deescalation techniques, mindfulness exercises, and active listening. In the next month or so I am looking forward to



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completing more client intakes, drafting more motions and formal legal writing, and working closely with attorney mentors to receive favorable outcomes for our clients.

Update 3: I am almost done with my clerkship at Open Door Legal and I feel as though I have learned so much -- from professional development, client interaction, and case management. These last couple weeks, I got to hone my discovery skills and help attorneys on my team with interrogatories and discovery preparation. I have been able to take on cases (with attorney supervision) and conduct intakes solo, assisting the client by interviewing them about their legal issues and understanding how we can help. This last week I was able to help lead a grievance hearing for a client to assist them in negotiating with their landlords to avoid eviction. I was very nervous, but relied on my negotiations skills and earlier preparation to guide me through!

Update 4: As I finish up my internship with Open Door Legal, I can soundly say this was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had while in law school. The opportunity to work as a team on vital cases that benefit my own community has been incredibly fulfilling and has shown me that law can be used for good. It has also utilized all the technical aspects of law you read and hear in class and brought them into the public interest, where they can actually better the community. As I near the end, I have worked hard to sharpen my understanding of disability law and how that intersects with housing rights. I have been able to help clients by drafting reasonable accommodation demands, and explaining their own rights as it pertains to reasonable accommodation/modification. This summer has only reaffirmed my interest and passion for using the law for good!

Update 5: As I reflect upon my summer, I simply cannot believe the amount of growth I have experienced -- both professionally and personally. Working at Open Door Legal opened my eyes to the endless ways in which law can truly help the most marginalized -- from eviction defense to consumer protections to probate law. My time at ODL was filled with intakes, client appointments, memos, legal research, and amazing staff meetings with dedicated attorneys and paralegals. For the first time in my legal career, I was able to lead cases, alongside my supervising attorney, and find solutions to their housing problems, or at least attempt to. I was able to research disability law and public housing -- a perfect transition into the clinic I am participating in this Fall, the Medical-Legal Partnership for Seniors. Not only did I gain client experience, I also gained a more practical skillset and learned what it takes to make a legal organization organized, ethical, and prepared. I learned case management, timekeeping, file preparation, and professional communication skills that I know will serve me well in any legal environment. I am forever grateful for my experience at ODL, and for EJA for helping fund my summer. This work is so critical, and it is amazing to know there are others who agree.