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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Safe Passage Project

Update 1: I just finished my second week as a legal intern at Safe Passage Project and am thrilled to share my first EJA Fellow Update! Safe Passage Project provides free legal services to immigrant youth living in New York City and on Long Island. As I've shared before, I strongly believe that no child should ever face the adversarial, confusing, and complex immigration process alone. This conviction is what brought me to KIND over four years ago, and it drives me to continue this work as a law student and child advocate.

After a very warm welcome and orientation from SPP staff, I jumped right into the work. As a paralegal, my favorite part of my job had always been interacting and building rapport with clients. Over the past couple of weeks, I have had the opportunity to work with several clients and to provide support on Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and asylum cases. I am so excited to learn more!

I am incredibly thankful to Equal Justice America for their support of law students serving in the public interest.

Update 2: I am heading in to my fifth week as a legal intern at Safe Passage Project and am excited to share my second EJA Fellow Update! Recently, I drafted a request for prosecutorial discretion for submission to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). If approved, ICE may move to dismiss the client's removal proceedings in immigration court. The immigration system in this country is incredibly complex, and the sheer number of authorities and agencies involved in it can make it even more confusing and difficult to navigate. For example, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) handles apprehensions at ports of entry while ICE handles immigrant detention and removal – except for apprehended unaccompanied minors, who are then transferred into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Immigration proceedings and hearings are handled by the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR). Applications for immigrant benefits such as



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Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, family-based petitions, or asylum are submitted to and adjudicated by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The list goes on! I look forward to learning more about the interactions (or lack thereof) between various immigration authorities over the next six weeks here at Safe Passage Project!

Update 3: I'm now seven weeks in to my internship at Safe Passage Project and I'm excited to share my third #ejafellowupdate. So far, I have had the opportunity to work on various types of cases such as asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Over the past week, I've been drafting a Motion for Special Findings for a SIJS case. I have always been particularly interested in SIJS as it involves a fascinating intersection between state family law and federal immigration law.

SIJS has two steps - the first is in a state family court, where the judge appoints a guardian or custodian to the child and issues a Special Findings Order (SFO). In New York, this order should make five crucial findings: that the child is under 21; the child is unmarried; the child is dependent on a state family court through the appointment of a guardian or custodian; reunification with one or both parents is not viable due to abuse, abandonment, and/or neglect; and it is not in the child's best interest to return to their country of origin. With this order in hand, the child may proceed to the second step of SIJS - submitting the application, known as Form I-360, to United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). SIJS is a path to citizenship, meaning that a child with an approved I-360 can (over the course of several years) adjust their status to legal permanent resident and, if so desired, become a U.S. citizen.

Update 4: I just finished my ninth week at Safe Passage Project and I'm thrilled to share my fourth EJA Fellow Update! Since my last update, I recently conducted my own intake with a Spanish-speaking client to screen them for immigration relief eligibility after having observed attorneys conduct several screenings throughout the summer. I really enjoyed getting to speak with the client and their family!

In addition to the screening I recently conducted, I have spent the past few weeks drafting my first asylum brief. Asylum is an immigrant benefit available to those who (in addition to meeting other requisites) have either experienced past persecution or have a well-founded fear of future persecution on account of religion, nationality, race, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (or "PSG"). The last ground, "membership in a particular social group" has always been fascinating to me as crafting a PSG often requires some legal creativity. Per the Matter of M-E-V-G-, a cognizable PSG must be immutable (i.e., something that a person cannot change or should not be asked to change), particular, and socially distinct. I've really enjoyed conducting legal research and crafting this client's PSGs in support of their asylum brief and look forward to finishing this draft before completing my internship with SPP this week!

Update 5: I finished my internship at Safe Passage Project on August 11th and it is time for my final EJA Fellow Update! Coming into this internship, I was already familiar with the wonderful work that SPP does and



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was thrilled to work with children again. I have known that I wanted to be a child advocate since I began working as a Paralegal at Kids in Need of Defense in January 2019, and this passion has only continued to grow ever since. During my time at SPP, I continued to develop my knowledge of both immigration and family law through conducting research and drafting filings for submission to EOIR, ICE, and USCIS as well as to New York Family Courts.

I am incredibly grateful to the folks at SPP for mentoring me and for providing me with fascinating projects that have helped me to grow so much as a future attorney. My favorite part of my work at KIND was interacting with my clients and I had missed that rapport and trust-building so much over the past school year. Because of this, I am particularly thankful for the many opportunities I had this summer to work directly with clients, from drafting work permits and SIJS applications to fact-gathering for filings and conducting screenings with clients.

This summer has further cemented my commitment to public service and child advocacy. As I have said many times before and will always say, no child should ever have to face adversarial removal proceedings alone. I look forward to starting 2L at University of Virginia School of Law next week with a renewed sense of purpose and drive, and I am especially excited to spend this fall using and continuing to develop my knowledge of family law as a Guardian ad Litem Law Clerk at the Children's Law Center in Washington, D.C.!

I would like to close by thanking Equal Justice America again for their support. Their mission and commitment to serving law students dedicated to public interest are invaluable and I am incredibly proud to be an EJA Fellow.