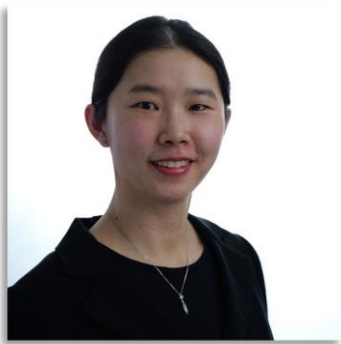




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| NAME | Kelly Ziqing Su |
| LAW SCHOOL | Boston College Law School |
| ORGANIZATION | Volunteer Lawyers Project |

Update 1: I am very fortunate to have received a fellowship from Equal Justice America this summer to support my internship with the Family Law and Guardianship Unit (FLGU) of the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association (VLP). As part of my fellowship, I will be posting updates about my internship throughout the summer, with this post being my first

The team at VLP has been fantastic in terms of providing detailed training and instruction and giving us interns opportunities to take on substantive legal work to assist clients. During VLP's Family Law Clinic earlier this week, a pro-bono attorney, FLGU staff attorney, and I met virtually with a client who required an ASL interpreter. I assisted the attorneys with taking notes during the client meeting in order to keep the rest of the FLGU team up-to-date on the client's case. It was also great to observe the attorneys 'in action' as they delivered legal guidance, particularly the way they effectively engaged with the deaf/hard-of-hearing client over Zoom. In addition to the clinic, I got to conduct my very first client intake. This was very nerve-wracking, but I also enjoyed talking with the client and learning more about them beyond the details of their case profile.

Thank you to Boston College Law School for preparing me for this opportunity, to VLP for a great start to my legal internship, and to Equal Justice America for helping to fund my work this summer.

Update 2: As I am midway through my fourth week of interning with Volunteer Lawyers Project, it is time for my second EJA Fellow update. Since my last update, I am continuing to conduct client calls, perform intakes, request documentation, and assist at our Family Law Clinic meetings. I am also slowly becoming more familiar with the different procedures, forms, and rules in family law and guardianship matters. For example, it has come up in several cases that children of unmarried parents are, by default, in the custody of their mother. I have seen how this one rule has determined what course of action the attorneys choose to take with a client's case. It is a reminder that, while the type of work I am doing is rather consistent, there is so



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

much variety in the details of the clients and the relevant legal rules that it is a constant learning process.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the team at VLP's Family Law and Guardianship Unit for how great they have been with distributing work, setting up regular meetings, and addressing any concerns or questions I have. I am learning a lot about the day-to-day of legal practice and what it means to be an advocate who works with clients, and I am excited to see how the rest of my internship turns out at VLP.

Update 3: During the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association's clinic this past Wednesday, I got to meet the client whom I conducted my first intake call for and whose case I have been working on since then. She expressed to us her gratitude and kind words for VLP's assistance and services, and it was an eye-opener as to the personal significance of this internship thus far. First, it is a privilege to be a part of this larger mission of increasing access to justice for vulnerable clients. Second, I find fulfilment in putting effort into the smaller tasks and routine of meeting with my supervisor, prepping before a call, etc. as I become more familiar with legal aid and thus more equipped to better serve clients. I hope to carry this twofold sense of purpose with me after my internship wraps up throughout the remaining two years of law school and future professional pursuits.

Update 4: Since my last update, I participated in my first in-person clinic with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association at the Suffolk Probate and Family Court. It was definitely a bit of organised chaos because we had to coordinate, in an in-person format, with staff and pro bono attorneys, clients, and the court service centre staff who were using the same facilities. Nonetheless, my supervisors hyped up the in-person clinics as one of the best parts of working at VLP and I fully understand why. I really enjoyed the face-to-face client interactions, the fast-paced work environment, and the chance to work on paternity, amended petitions, and other unfamiliar legal issues.

The other interns and I have been working on a non-legal project in addition to our usual workload, namely creating informational flyers for clients. This project reminded me of the importance of communication in a different context. As I worked on making informational flyers about divorce, I had to consider how to clearly explain divorce and related details through graphic design, avoid inundating clients with unfamiliar legal terms or text, and incorporate charts or other visuals effectively.

Update 5: As I am in the last week of my internship, I am reflecting on my experience working with vulnerable individuals and families in legal aid. I developed the typical 'lawyering' skills that I expected to encounter, such as drafting legal documents, making sense of court dockets, and familiarizing myself with practice-specific procedures. Some other highlights include:

- Handling service by publication for a client
- Observing a guardianship session at court



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

- Drafting a referral memo to help a client obtain full legal representation
- Providing one-on-one advice to a client on obtaining child support through the court vs DOR (after my supervising attorneys gave the green light)

There were two difficulties that I encountered. First, I sometimes found myself in a 'counselor' or 'friend' role, providing a listening ear for clients who wanted to cope with the stress of legal proceedings and the struggles that led to them seeking legal aid. It pushed me to learn how to avoid taking that emotional weight along with me. Second, I initially struggled with delivering bad news to clients. I recall having to inform a client that she could not qualify for our services without discrediting her situation. My supervisors were on top of this, teaching us how to maintain boundaries, be transparent yet respectful, and follow up bad news with some sort of action plan or next steps for the client when possible.

The most challenging yet rewarding aspects of my internship were developing direct client service skills and participating in clinics. I learned how to anticipate questions that the client may have for us or vice versa, spot potentially problematic issues in the client's case, and adjust my communication style to the client. Clinics took client service to another level as I balanced onsite, simultaneous communication with clients and colleagues to help clients the best we can. My supervisors were great teachers as they shared all their communication-related tips and tricks and struck a good balance of supervising me vs letting me work independently with clients or on other projects.

Overall, the Family Law and Guardianship Unit at the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association provided invaluable learning opportunities. Thanks to the meaningful work and my fantastic supervisors, I feel more confident leaving this internship than I did going into it. I am excited to apply the skills that I learned from VLP at the Community Enterprise Clinic, a Boston College Law School clinic with a similar public interest edge, as well as in future work experiences. Huge thanks to EJA as well for their generous support!