



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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LAW SCHOOL	Boston University School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Update 1:

I'm excited to share that I was selected for a fellowship with Equal Justice America (EJA)! With EJA's support, this summer I will be working with Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). As part of my fellowship, I'll be sharing updates about my internship every few weeks, and here is my first one!

KIND is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and advocating for unaccompanied migrant children across the world. These children are among the most vulnerable, facing significant challenges and traumatic experiences at such a young age.

The necessity of providing trauma-informed support is one of the many reasons I was drawn to KIND. Their holistic and interdisciplinary advocacy approach, which includes legal assistance, psychosocial support, and policy work, ensures that clients' needs are comprehensively addressed, going beyond just fundamental legal representation.

Since joining KIND, I have seen the importance of this work in bridging the access to justice gap and ensuring that migrant children are properly represented in court proceedings. In my short three weeks, I have learned so much and I am excited for the rest of the summer! I'm incredibly grateful to all of the KIND staff for creating such a welcoming environment for myself and the other interns, as well as for the children we serve! I'm also thankful to EJA for their financial support!

Update 2:

Prior to starting law school, I interned at an immigration firm, where I helped prepare family-based immigration petitions for individual adults and families.



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There, I first learned the importance of client counseling and zealous advocacy particularly within the immigration law context: informing clients about the unfortunate realities of the immigration system, which significantly limit and hinder potential avenues for seeking legal status and relief, while also effectively advocating for their needs and goals.

Since starting at KIND, I've had to learn how to tailor these two fundamental aspects of lawyering to working with children and teenagers. The first intake I assisted with was for a client who was just five years old. We talked with them about their migration journey and their life now in the U.S. After the intake, I realized that it is especially crucial when working with vulnerable children in legal proceedings to maintain this client-directed approach while also protecting the child's best interests and continuing to empower them as best as we can throughout the whole process.

When working with unaccompanied migrant children, who have undergone so much trauma and, since their arrival, have had to explain their traumatic experiences repeatedly to different immigration officers, shelter case workers, and legal service providers, it is important to avoid any further re-traumatization. It is essential to create a safe environment where they can feel comfortable sharing their story and trusting us to support them as their case progresses.

I can't believe I've been at KIND for a month now, I have learned so much from all of the staff and I'm excited to continue learning and working with everyone!

Update 3:

These last few weeks at KIND, I have been working on research projects regarding various inadmissibility grounds to assess whether our special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) clients would be subject to grounds that could render them ineligible for relief from removal.

For a bit of context, grounds of inadmissibility are reasons laid out in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) for why non-citizens seeking admission into the U.S. and certain immigrants seeking to apply for permanent and conditional residence might be ineligible. These inadmissibility grounds are vast, ranging from health-related grounds to criminal grounds. SIJ is a classification of humanitarian immigration relief that allows children to become eligible for permanent residence if they are unable to reunite with one or both of their parents due to abandonment, neglect, or abuse.

Throughout this research, I've been reminded of the cyclical nature of trauma and how trauma at a young age can often lead to greater vulnerability to mental health issues and involvement in the criminal punishment system. The overly broad nature of the grounds of inadmissibility, particularly the criminal grounds, often overlooks the trauma and instability that many SIJ



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children experience, making them more susceptible to activities that could render them removable.

Despite the inequities of the immigration system, I've seen how hard KIND attorneys and staff work to advocate for their clients. They do their best to exhaust all possible legal avenues and arguments to overcome inadmissibility grounds, looking after the client's best interest and ensuring that they remain eligible for relief.

Update 4:

Last week, I had the opportunity to observe one of KIND's amazing paralegals conduct a client intake. KIND mostly handles asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ), T-visa, and U-visa cases, so the intake is designed to be the initial screening of the client's eligibility for each of these relief categories. Going through the eligibility considerations for each pathway is a long process involving lengthy questions, which can often take a few hours.

The intake consists of asking the child personal questions about their life in their country of origin, their migration journey, their time in detention with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and their life now in the United States. As you can imagine, these questions can bring up a lot of trauma for the child. Given the vulnerability of the children, the intaker will often take breaks, provide snacks, offer reassurance, and, if a question is too upsetting, move on. This takes off some of the pressure of getting to every question, as the intake is merely the initial meeting, and the child will have an opportunity to connect with their KIND attorney or pro bono attorney later, where they can talk more about their experiences.

During the intake I observed, I witnessed the paralegal putting the child's needs first throughout the long process and providing a welcoming and comforting presence. Afterwards, I realized the importance of completing the intake as best as possible, but beyond that, the child's well-being should always come first. As such, avoiding retraumatization and creating a safe environment is of the utmost importance, especially during the intake process.

I can hardly believe that I only have two weeks left of my internship with KIND! Over these last few months, I have learned so much from the amazing attorneys and staff. I'm so appreciative of all of them for taking the time to show us the ropes.

Update 5:

As I reflect on my 10-week internship, I want to begin by thanking all of the attorneys, staff, and clients for trusting me and giving me the opportunity to assist with their cases. The projects I worked on ranged from helping clients schedule their medical examinations and sending records requests to preparing applications, drafting motions, and conducting country conditions



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and crimmigration research. At the heart of my work this summer were the connections I made with clients, which deepened my understanding of the immense responsibility that comes with zealously advocating for them at every stage of their immigration cases.

This summer, I witnessed firsthand the dire need for direct legal services within immigration law, particularly for unaccompanied migrant children. These children, who have experienced trauma and instability at such a young age, are among the most vulnerable groups. Each year, thousands of migrant children are placed in removal proceedings and have to face immigration court without an attorney, as they do not have a right to appointed counsel. KIND and other legal aid organizations are doing incredible work to meet this need, providing unaccompanied children with the legal representation, advocacy, and support they deserve throughout the long and complicated immigration process.

I am so deeply grateful to everyone at the KIND Boston Office for being so supportive and welcoming during my internship. Witnessing and being part of their advocacy efforts for migrant children has had a profound impact on me, and I know these experiences will stay with me as I continue with my legal career and community work.

I am also very thankful to Equal Justice America, the Massachusetts Bar Foundation, and Boston University School of Law for all of their support this summer which made this opportunity possible.