



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024 EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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ORGANIZATION	New York Legal Assistance Group: LGBTQ Law Unit

Update 1:

As an Equal Justice America Fellow, each month I will share an update about my placement at NYLAG's LGBTQ Law Unit. In my first few weeks, I've had an immersive and impactful experience. I've shadowed intake sessions with clients, participated in name change and gender marker change clinics, and also contributed to an advanced directives clinic. A highlight for me has been the opportunity to utilize my language skills in French and Spanish, translating documents, drafting affidavits, and meeting with clients. This has deepened our office's understanding of our client's experiences and fostered stronger connections. What has truly stood out to me so far is the volume of need among our clients and their incredible resilience in overcoming significant hurdles. The LGBTQ Law Unit works hard to provide affirming, accessible legal counsel that respects the client's journey and will better their quality of life. I've loved learning how to be the best advocate for your client, and I'm eager to contribute further to our mission!

Update 2:

As June ends, it is time for my second Equal Justice America Fellow update! So far, I have successfully filed two name change applications. Receiving a name change order is a pivotal moment for clients as it validates and empowers them to navigate the world with a name that finally reflects their identity. I have also begun drafting a memo on the Biden administration's latest immigration policy changes, focusing specifically on how the June 2024 expansion will impact our clients who have recently entered the U.S. In addition, I have started conducting intakes independently. This involves reviewing our hotline for potential clients, guiding them through our intake process, and presenting the intake to the unit. I am often the first "face" of NYLAG the clients will meet, and conducting intakes has reminded me of the impact of active listening. As I am often the initial point of contact at NYLAG, my goal is to create an empathetic environment where individuals feel safe to share their legal concerns with me.



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The Equal Justice America Fellowship Fund plays a vital role in ensuring that aspiring legal professionals can dedicate themselves to serving underrepresented communities and advancing social justice causes. Your donation, no matter the size, will make a meaningful impact by supporting fellows who are committed to making our legal system more accessible and equitable for all.

Update 3: It's time for my third Equal Justice America Fellows update! July has been incredibly rewarding so far. One of the most memorable moments was receiving a name change order for one of my first clients at New York Legal Assistance Group. It's a milestone for both of us! I've continued to prep affidavits and declarations of support for our Spanish and French-speaking clients. My experience so far has shown me the importance of language accessibility in the legal field, and I'm so happy to put my language skills to use. Additionally, shadowing NYLAG attorneys in housing court has given me a deeper understanding of the critical need for legal representation in housing matters across New York. Every individual deserves an advocate who comprehends the intricacies of housing law. Finally, I've had the privilege to work closely with attorney Lara Russo on drafting a brief for an asylum case. The opportunity to collaborate with Lara and contribute to the case has been incredibly fulfilling and I look forward to continuing to support our client.

Update 4: In my fourth Equal Justice America Fellow update, I would like reflect on the Advance Directives Clinic. The Clinic was conducted by the New York Legal Assistance Group's LGBTQ Law Unit in collaboration with Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP. At the beginning of my internship, I was involved in outreach efforts to identify and connect with potential clients interested in drafting essential legal documents such as healthcare proxies, powers of attorney, and wills.

A significant number of clients were initially unaware of the importance of these documents. Many had not considered how they could utilize such tools to exercise control over their healthcare decisions and end-of-life arrangements. This lack of awareness highlights the critical need for proactive education in this area.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of the clinic was the clients' realization of the autonomy they could achieve through these documents. Many clients were surprised to learn that they could shape their own end-of-life care and ensure that their wishes would be honored. For older adults in the LGBTQ community, who may face unique challenges and vulnerabilities, the ability to establish clear directives is crucial for safeguarding their rights and preferences.



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The clinic's success in aligning clients' documents with their personal goals underscores the importance of legal advocacy in promoting self-determination and security. I felt proud to not only be a part of a clinic that offered clients greater peace of mind, but also important legal protection for their futures.

Update 5: As summer comes to an end and a new school year begins, it's time for my last EJA Fellow update. My internship experience with New York Legal Assistance Group's LGBTQ Law Unit was profoundly impactful for several reasons.

Working within a specialized unit allowed me to see a variety of legal issues, like housing, asylum law, and advance directives, all focusing on the overarching goal of safeguarding and advocating for members of the LGBTQ community in New York. In particular, I enjoyed working in asylum because it allowed me to enhance my legal writing and use both Spanish and French on a daily basis. I learned how to interview clients and then craft clear narratives of their experience, and compile research on different countries and their treatment of LGBTQ communities. I even had the opportunity to shadow two individual asylum hearings.

By working closely with the unit's attorneys, I learned that trauma-informed client care is the most important ingredient to a successful case. Our clients often faced violence, persecution, or discrimination based on their identity, and it was important to not only recognize this trauma up front, but to understand the role trauma plays throughout a client's life. The supportive and affirming atmosphere of the unit meant that clients could openly discuss their concerns without fear of bias or misunderstanding.

Being surrounded by such a supportive team made my experience even more enriching. Their emphasis on collaboration highlighted the crucial role of teamwork and showed me that the most successful outcomes are the result of collective effort and shared expertise.

The entire unit believes so deeply in their mission, and that passion directly translates to transformative legal advocacy for the LGBTQ community. Their guidance and openness to let me try new things made for such an educational, enriching summer.

Finally, I urge you to support Equal Justice America. Your contributions ensure that dedicated students can devote their summers to helping communities in need, furthering the cause of justice and equality. By continuing to fundraise and support this vital organization, you help sustain the critical work that makes a real difference in people's lives.