



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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**Update 1:** My first two weeks at the Legal Aid Society of San Diego (LASSD) have not only been extremely exciting, but immensely rewarding. Providing legal assistance to marginalized and indigent San Diegans has taught me quite a few things about the law and about myself. Firstly, filing for a temporary restraining order—whether it’s civil harassment, elder abuse, or domestic violence—is surprisingly more complex than one would think, demonstrating how even laws that are meant to protect individuals can have a deterrent effect due to the difficulties associated with navigating the legal system. Secondly, the importance of empathy and patience when working with clients who are often in vulnerable and distressing situations cannot be overstated. These interactions highlight the crucial human element of legal work, reminding me that the law is not just about statutes and procedures but is fundamentally about people’s lives and well-being. Lastly, the significant impact that legal aid can have on a person’s life has reinforced my commitment to public interest law. Witnessing firsthand the positive changes of the work that I do and the direct impact it can have on someone’s situation has been incredibly inspiring. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the critical role that organizations like LASSD play in ensuring justice for all members of society.

**Update 2:** The last month at the Legal Aid Society of San Diego (LASSD) has challenged me in ways that have been fundamental to my personal and professional growth. I have the privilege of being in a role that can directly empower and uplift individuals so they can confidently go to court and fight for the legal protection they deserve. At the Hall of Justice courthouse clinic, I predominantly assist individuals with filing their answers to unlawful detainers (otherwise known as evictions), which has been a process with a large learning curve. Although we are provided scripts to follow, I experienced firsthand how difficult it is to navigate the paperwork required to successfully file an answer. Every answer starts off with a lengthy interview where we will ask the clinic participant a series of questions to assess if they have any affirmative defenses they can raise during their court hearing; this requires careful attention to detail and strong communication and client interaction skills as oftentimes clinic participants will go on tangents that are not relevant to the questions we have to ask. Each interview is evidently unique for that



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reason, reflecting the diverse circumstances and challenges faced by the clinic participants we assist. Helping them articulate their affirmative defenses and understand their rights is incredibly fulfilling and informative as it has pushed me to simplify the law in a way that can be easily digestible to any layperson.

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**Update 3:** It's surreal to think that I'm halfway done with my internship at the Legal Aid Society of San Diego (LASSD). I have learned a tremendous amount from my supervising attorneys, and I look forward to growing my legal knowledge throughout the rest of summer so I can continue to help clinic participants get through life-altering events, such as being a survivor of domestic violence or receiving an eviction notice. The clinic participants I have the privilege of assisting have also taught me a great deal about the responsibilities I have as a future attorney. It has become apparent to me through filling out court documents that the process is by no means simple: it requires an understanding of legalese that may be overly complicated and knowledge of how the judge or law clerks at the specific court like the paperwork to be completed.

One of the most significant lessons I have learned during my internship is the importance of empathy and patience. Many of the clinic participants are experiencing some of the most challenging times of their lives, and it is crucial to approach each case with sensitivity and care. I have witnessed firsthand how a compassionate and patient approach can make a significant difference in helping individuals feel heard and supported. This experience has reinforced my belief that legal professionals must possess not only a strong understanding of the law but also the ability to connect with clients on a human level.

As I continue this internship, I am excited to further develop my skills and knowledge. I am grateful for the mentorship and guidance I have received from my supervising attorneys, and I am committed to applying what I have learned to make a positive impact on the lives of those in need.

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**Update 4:** Working with survivors of domestic violence has been particularly eye-opening. These individuals often face a complex web of legal and personal challenges and providing them with the necessary legal support requires a deep understanding of their unique situations. I have learned the importance of building trust with clients and ensuring that they feel safe and respected throughout the legal process. This aspect of my internship has underscored the critical role that attorneys play in advocating for and empowering survivors, and it has strengthened my resolve to pursue a career in this field.

In addition to working with survivors of domestic violence, I have also assisted individuals facing evictions. Housing insecurity is a pressing issue—especially in San Diego—and many of the clinic participants I have worked with are struggling to navigate the legal system while trying to maintain stable housing for themselves and their families. This experience has highlighted the urgent need for legal assistance in addressing housing issues due to the influence and resources that institutional landlords have over their tenants and has given me a deeper appreciation for the impact that stable housing has on individuals' overall well-being. By helping clients understand their rights and options, I have been able to contribute to their efforts to secure safe and affordable housing.



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My time at LASSD has provided me with valuable insights into the practical aspects of legal work. From drafting legal documents to preparing my clinic participants for court hearings, I have gained hands-on experience that has enhanced my understanding of the legal process so that I can help others understand it as well. I have come to learn how to effectively communicate complex legal concepts to clients, which is essential for empowering them to make informed decisions about their cases.

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**Update 5:** This summer as a legal intern at the Legal Aid Society of San Diego has been an enriching experience that has deepened my understanding of public interest law and reinforced my commitment to social justice. I had the opportunity to work directly with clients facing critical legal issues, such as domestic violence and housing insecurity. These experiences have not only enhanced my legal skills but also provided me with a profound appreciation for the human impact of the law.

One of the most impactful aspects of my internship was working with survivors of domestic violence, an experience that profoundly shaped my understanding of the intersection between law and human vulnerability. Domestic violence cases are often complex and deeply personal, involving not only legal challenges but also emotional and psychological trauma. I quickly realized that providing legal support in these situations requires more than just an understanding of the law—it demands a nuanced, compassionate approach that takes into account the intricate dynamics of abuse and the unique needs of each survivor.

Throughout my work with these clients, I learned the critical importance of creating a safe and supportive environment where survivors feel empowered to share their stories. Trust is not easily given, particularly by those who have been subjected to manipulation and control. I discovered that building this trust is essential, as it forms the foundation for effective legal advocacy. This often meant taking the time to listen carefully, validating their experiences, and ensuring they understood that the legal process was there to protect and support them, rather than to judge or re-traumatize them.

In addition to legal guidance, I found that survivors often needed help navigating the complex web of services available to them, such as counseling, housing assistance, and protective orders. My role frequently extended beyond traditional legal advice to include connecting clients with these critical resources. I learned how interconnected legal and social services are in these cases and how crucial it is for attorneys to have a holistic approach that considers all aspects of a survivor's well-being.

Working with survivors of domestic violence also exposed me to the broader systemic issues that perpetuate cycles of abuse, such as economic dependence, lack of access to safe housing, and societal stigmas. These challenges reinforced my understanding of the multifaceted role that attorneys play—not only as legal advocates but also as allies who help survivors regain control of their lives and reclaim their sense of agency.



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I also spent a considerable amount of time assisting clients facing eviction, a widespread and pressing issue in San Diego where housing costs are high and affordable options are increasingly scarce. Many of the clients I worked with were on the brink of losing their homes, often due to circumstances beyond their control, such as sudden job loss, illness, or unexpected increases in rent. These individuals were not only facing the immediate threat of homelessness but were also navigating a legal system that can be overwhelming and intimidating without proper representation.

Working with these clients, I gained a deeper understanding of the systemic issues that contribute to housing insecurity, such as the significant power imbalance between tenants and landlords, particularly institutional landlords with vast resources and legal teams at their disposal. I saw firsthand how this imbalance often leaves tenants at a disadvantage, struggling to assert their rights or even to understand them fully. For many, the fear of retaliation or the complexities of legal jargon can prevent them from pursuing rightful claims or negotiating fair terms.

This experience highlighted the crucial role that legal aid plays in leveling the playing field for vulnerable tenants. By providing legal support, I was able to help clients better understand their rights, explore their options, and take proactive steps to protect their housing. In some cases, this meant helping them negotiate with landlords for more time or more manageable payment plans; in others, it involved preparing for court appearances to contest unjust eviction notices.

Throughout my internship, I gained practical skills such as drafting legal documents, conducting legal research, and preparing clients for court appearances. More importantly, I learned the value of clear and compassionate communication in legal practice. These experiences have equipped me with the tools I need to be an effective advocate and have reinforced my commitment to using my legal education to make a meaningful impact in the lives of others. As I move forward in my legal career, I will carry these lessons with me, determined to continue working for justice and equality.