



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: Today marks the start of my second week as a legal intern with Urban Justice Center's Free to be Youth Project. I have learned so much in these two weeks and have hit the ground running working on five client's cases! I have received training on applying for asylum and assisting clients who have been arrested and am getting to immediately apply the knowledge I have learned in these training courses representing clients.

I am primarily working with immigrant clients filing for asylum because of the persecution they have faced as an LGBTQ+ person in their home country. I went from knowing very little about applying for asylum, to drafting and filing a client's asylum application at the end of last week! I am also helping a few clients change their name and am grateful to be able to assist them in legally affirming their authentic selves.

Additionally, I have had the opportunity to be involved in the greater New York City LGBTQ+ community by tabling at the different boroughs pride festivals to raise awareness about the free legal services the Urban Justice Center can provide to houseless LGBTQ+ youth. I am so grateful for the opportunity to work for an organization that cares so deeply about the queer community and is putting in the work on the ground to help queer youth live robust, fulfilling lives.

Update 2: I have officially completed the first month of my internship with the Urban Justice Center! In the past two weeks I have had the opportunity to meet with lawyers from Queens Legal Services to get training on how to assist clients facing eviction. I also met with social workers who trained us on how to help our clients navigate the complicated bureaucracy of the New York City welfare system. I really appreciate how the Urban Justice Center prioritizes bringing in experts within different legal fields to train their interns, as working in direct services requires being familiar with so many different kinds of law.



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This month I went to the Ali Forney Center and Streetworks to do legal intake. The Ali Forney Center is a wonderful organization who provides homeless LGBTQ+ youth with transitional housing and job readiness training. Streetworks is a similar organization, while not LGBTQ+ focused, and is a drop-in center that provides people experiencing homelessness with meals, showers, medical care, mental healthcare and sexual health screenings. Streetworks and Ali Forney are leaders in the New York City shelter system, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside them to help our clients survive and thrive.

Update 3: This month during my internship at the Urban Justice Center I have had the opportunity to meet with multiple trans-youth seeking asylum and help them prepare their I-589 applications for asylum. As someone who has always been interested in immigration law but has never had the opportunity to do immigration work because of my limited language skills, I am very grateful to UJC for giving me this opportunity. I am gaining countless opportunities to brush up on my Spanish, practice my client counseling skills and learning how to quickly turn around an application for asylum. In addition to asylum applications, I am learning about how to apply for Special Immigration Juvenile Status or SIJS and how to remove conditions on a green card. Urban Justice Center is opening my eyes to the world of immigration law, and I hope to be able to do immigration law in some capacity in my future legal practice. As pride month comes to a close, I am feeling extremely grateful to be working in an environment that supports me as a young LGBTQ+ law student both personally and professionally.

Update 4: I have had a busy past couple weeks as I wrap up my internship at Urban Justice Center. I have helped prepare three client's applications for asylum based on the persecution they faced in their home country because of their sexual orientation and filed one name change order. I am grateful to my clients for sharing their stories and letting me be apart of their journey to live authentically as a queer person.

I also went to the Manhattan Civil Court for the first time and learned that the clerks more often than not use arbitrary standards to evaluate whether or not to file someone's name change order. I was treated with respect and allowed to have a name change filed because I was acting as a legal representative. But members of the public were not treated with the same respect. Given the steps NYC has taken to streamline the name change process, should in theory be very easy to file pro se. I hope that by continuing to advocate for trans people looking to change their name, the system will garner more respect for the people it serves.

Update 5: On Friday, I completed my internship with the Urban Justice Center's Free to be Youth Project. I could not be more grateful for this experience and the opportunity to grow as a legal professional. In the past, I have found it hard to feel safe to show up as my authentic queer self at work. But at UJC, my queerness was celebrated. It was extremely liberating to be able to be supervised by likeminded LGBTQ+ people in the legal profession, and work with other LGBTQ+ people to support our clients who are also members of the community. The Urban Justice Center's Free to be Youth Project centers and celebrates queerness, with our client population being LGBTQ+ youth who are experiencing homelessness. All of the legal work I did this summer helped in some way to ensure my clients were able to live safely as their authentic queer selves.



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Throughout the summer, I was responsible for ten clients and assisted them on a variety of things ranging from applying for asylum based on their sexual orientation to applying for work authorization and filing for a name change. One unique aspect of being a young legal intern working with the Free to be Youth Project was that my clients were often very close in age to me and were going through similar experiences coming to terms with their identity as a queer person. Being the same age or younger than my clients was extremely nerve wracking at first and I felt intense imposter syndrome. But thankfully because of my amazing supervising attorneys, I was able to quickly gain confidence in the work I was doing and it ended up being a blessing in disguise that I'm a younger legal intern. Because I'm a young queer person, it was easier to build rapport and relationships with my clients, because I was able to relate to the experiences they were going through and ask them questions based on my own experience.

My work at Urban Justice Center skyrocketed my confidence counseling clients and helped me get over my anxiety when doing intakes with clients. I gained unparalleled experience in direct legal services and immigration law and got to work with inspiring legal advocates who have dedicated their lives to supporting the queer community through their work. I cannot say enough good things about my time at UJC and am feeling inspired and reinvigorated as I begin my final year of law school.