



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Children's Law Center of Minnesota

Update 1: I am excited to share that I was awarded an [Equal Justice America](#) fellowship to help fund my summer internship at the [Children's Law Center of Minnesota](#)! I worked for CLC before entering law school and my time with the organization was part of what inspired me to pursue a legal education. I am so excited to be back at CLC as a legal intern!

These first few weeks, I have been working on research related to the Indian Child Welfare Act and Minnesota Indian Families Preservation Act. I came into this research at an exciting time as new legislation amending MIFPA was just passed earlier in May! I am currently drafting an ICWA/ MIFPA practice point to be used by CLC's volunteer attorneys. It has been great to delve deeper into an area of law that I personally find very important within the child welfare system. I have also had the opportunity to observe court several times. One highlight from last week was getting the chance to do some quick research on the fly when an ICWA-related issue came up during a hearing. I have been inspired by how CLC's attorneys advocate for their youth clients and am excited to continue learning about best practices for representing youth in foster care.

Update 2: Along with continuing to do research on the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Minnesota Indian Families Preservation Act, I have been able to engage in more direct representation of CLC's clients as a certified student attorney. Last week, I represented a pair of siblings in a permanency review hearing. Although I have observed court multiple times, it was a different experience to actually speak to the judge and for a client. I felt very prepared thanks to support from CLC's staff attorneys. I am looking forward to appearing at more hearings throughout the summer.

I also was able to attend my first visit with a client. This experience highlighted some of the hard realities of representing youth who have experienced trauma and spent many years in the foster care system, as our client was struggling with her mental health at the time of the visit. I really appreciated getting the chance to meet with this client and will have the chance to represent her



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at her next hearing.

So far, my experience as a summer intern has been very rewarding and am looking forward to the rest of my summer with CLC.

Update 3: I have been working on finishing up another research project related to ICWA and MIFPA. Coming into this internship, I had some background knowledge about ICWA and MIFPA, but it has been rewarding to learn more about how they work in practice in Minnesota. I believe ICWA and MIFPA are very important pieces of legislation that help preserve Indigenous families and help promote Tribal sovereignty. I anticipate that the research I am doing at CLC will not only help CLC's volunteer attorneys have a stronger understanding of the spirit of ICWA and MIFPA but will also help me in my future practice.

I was also able to appear in court again last week. This time I appeared in an Emergency Protective Care hearing, which was a slightly different experience than appearing in review hearings for our clients. I am excited to meet with this client and represent him in another hearing next week. I am very grateful for the opportunity to appear in court on behalf of CLC's clients.

It has been great to be back with the [Children's Law Center of Minnesota](#) this summer and I appreciate all of the support I have received so far from CLC's staff.

Update 4: These last few weeks closing out my internship have been very busy but also rewarding. I switched gears from research on ICWA and MIFPA to research on sibling contact and placement for youth in foster care. The Children's Law Center represents many sibling groups and ensuring meaningful contact between siblings is a common priority for CLC clients. It was interesting for me to explore the legal basis for sibling contact as it is not an area that I had looked into before.

I also had the experience of representing multiple clients in court on a single calendar day. It was exciting to experience what a true day in court feels like for an attorney at CLC. This was an exciting culmination of my time as a certified student attorney. I now feel pretty comfortable appearing at a variety of different hearings. I am very appreciative of the guidance I received from the attorneys at CLC.

This week ended with a staff get-together to say goodbye to CLC's summer legal interns. I am appreciative of the friendly and collaborative environment that CLC fosters among its staff. It has been great to see familiar faces from when I was a legal assistant at CLC and also meet new members of the team this summer.

Update 5: Reflecting on my summer internship, I first want to express gratitude to the Children's Law Center for my internship experience this summer! Working with this organization further solidified my interest in working in family law with youth clients. Because I had previously worked with CLC before starting law school, I came into the internship with a good foundational



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understanding of the child protection system in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. I believe this allowed me to really dig deeper into understanding the nuances of the child protection system, focusing specifically on the Indian Child Welfare Act, the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, and various statutes related to foster care sibling contact and separation. Through my research, I have gained a better understanding of how the various priorities in the child welfare system both work together and sometimes conflict with one another. The “best interests” of a child (the touchstone of the child welfare system) is extremely case-specific, and various players in the system may have different understandings of what truly determines these “best interests.” Something that has struck me in particular is how the emphasis on achieving quick permanency for children in foster care can sometimes conflict with other priorities, including retaining strong connections to siblings, culture, and birth families. I hope to continue doing work to further understand how these priorities can be successfully balanced in the child welfare system.

I am also very grateful that I got a chance to interact with CLC’s youth clients and represent these clients in court. When I was a legal assistant at CLC, I was not client-facing. It was exciting to be able to actually meet clients in person, instead of just reading through their court documents. Attending client meetings with CLC’s Youth Resource Manager and with CLC attorneys gave me valuable insight into how to interact with youth clients, who are often in the midst of very difficult times in their lives, in a meaningful, compassionate, and effective way. I am happy that I was able to express the wishes of these clients in court. It felt rewarding to help these clients voice their wishes for permanency and help them obtain resources, such as clothing vouchers, that they needed to feel more comfortable in their foster care placements. I really enjoyed my summer at the Children’s Law Center and hope to stay connected with the organization in the future!