



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Jon Quirk
LAW SCHOOL	Suffolk University Law School
ORGANIZATION	MetroWest Legal Services

Final Reflection:

I am writing to express my gratitude for the fellowship award I received from Equal Justice America in support of my internship at MetroWest Legal Services (MWLS) in Framingham Massachusetts this summer.

I chose to attend law school to study immigration, with a particular focus on asylum law. This was based on many hours of pro bono work I had devoted to asylum seekers as a corporate paralegal. Still, it was not without some hesitation that I left the workforce at 37 years old to return to school. Indeed, I was unsure whether public interest and legal aid work was something that I had the constitution for, as I had only had the most glancing perspective of it through my pro bono work.

My internship with MetroWest Legal Services was my first opportunity to experience legal aid as a working employee. This was to be the proving ground to demonstrate to myself that this is something that I am passionate about and that I can excel at. I am pleased to say that the decision to go to law school has borne out through my experience at MWLS.

As I reflect on the experience at MWLS, I recall most vividly the time spent with clients who were seeking asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, U-Visas, or some other form of relief from deportation. The practice of bearing witness to the immigrant experience and helping the client collate their story into an affidavit is at the heart of much of this work. It is an extremely delicate and fraught process to sit alongside someone as they recall (often for the first time) traumatic experiences of political violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence, economic precarity, and a host of other issues. It is no small thing when someone who does not speak your language confides in you about their circumstances after having only just met. The



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opportunity to hone this skillset alongside poised and seasoned attorneys was invaluable to me in my ongoing education about trauma-informed lawyering.

I think in particular of my client “M”, who came to the United States fleeing gang violence in his home country of Ecuador. M had had an unhappy childhood, being raised by abusive parents, and had few if any opportunities to flourish in his town. After fleeing the country, M subsequently enrolled in the local public high school here in Massachusetts and earned his diploma before being sidelined by a significant workplace injury. Since coming to the United States he had lost his older brother and caretaker to a tragic drowning incident. M came to MWLS seeking assistance obtaining special immigrant juvenile status, which would provide a temporary form of relief from deportation while he started the longer journey of obtaining permanent residency.

M did not have a means of getting to the office, so it fell to me to pick M up from his home and bring him to the MWLS office to conduct a series of interviews throughout the summer. M’s address was not familiar to me, but as I pulled up to his house I realized with astonishment that this young man was practically my neighbor. This seemingly anodyne observation crystallized for me how the clientele at MWLS were not an abstraction but were integrated into my local community and were an inextricable part of its functioning and vibrancy. It was galvanizing to realize that even after surviving gang violence in Ecuador and the journey to the United States, M is now contending with masked agents of the state roaming the streets searching for people that they can disappear with impunity. It was a distinct honor to play a small role in trying to ensure M’s continued safety in this country.

Being in law school at times feels like being stuck in the firefighter’s academy while I watch my neighborhood and the broader community go up in flames. Working at MWLS this summer was a crucial opportunity to step out of the sterile classroom environment and feel the urgency of the work. I thank Equal Justice America for supporting me in this pursuit and helping me clarify for myself what lies ahead.