



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1:

Two weeks into my Equal Justice America Fellowship at MetroWest Legal Services, I've already learned that some of the most important advocacy happens before any legal document is drafted. As I've begun meeting with clients and working on immigration cases, I've been struck by the amount of trust people place in their attorneys. Many are sharing deeply personal experiences and navigating incredibly difficult circumstances. It's a responsibility I don't take lightly. These first two weeks have challenged me to become a better listener, ask better questions, and think more carefully about what it means to advocate for someone effectively. I am learning that legal aid is not just about providing legal services, it's about helping people feel seen, heard, and supported. I'm incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for making this opportunity possible and to the team at MetroWest Legal Services for investing in my growth as a future attorney.

Update 2:

What happens when someone's immigration status is tied to the very person harming them?

One month into my summer fellowship at MetroWest Legal Services, I've had the opportunity to work on a variety of immigration matters. But today, I want to share a little about the case I've been entrusted to help lead this summer: a VAWA self-petition.

For those unfamiliar, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) allows certain survivors of abuse by a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident spouse, parent, or child to petition for immigration relief independently, without relying on their abuser to file on their behalf. Despite its name, VAWA protections are available to eligible survivors regardless of gender. As I prepare for client conversations, I've been learning from a clinical social worker about trauma-informed advocacy.



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One of the biggest lessons so far: before someone can tell their story, they need to feel safe enough to share it. I've also learned that to be a steady advocate for others, you have to take care of yourself, too. Secondary trauma is real, and caring for your own well-being is part of showing up well for your clients.

Legal aid is often associated with paperwork and court filings. But this experience has reminded me that at its core, it is about helping people access protections that the law has made available to them and ensuring they don't have to navigate that path alone. Thank you for following along on my fellowship journey. More reflections to come.



Update 3:

One of my favorite parts of this summer internship at MetroWest Legal Services has been learning how each practice area works together to expand access to justice. As part of the program, we're attending trainings led by each unit, gaining insight into the unique role each plays:

Housing Unit: Assists tenants and homeowners with eviction defense, foreclosure prevention, and issues involving subsidized housing or homelessness.

Immigration Unit: Represents victims of crime and domestic violence in matters like asylum, U/T visas, and deportation defense.

Family Law Unit: Provides legal advocacy for survivors of domestic violence, handling restraining orders, child support, custody, and divorce.

Elder, Benefits and Education Unit: Helps clients navigate government benefits (e.g., MassHealth, SNAP, SSI, SSDI), school/student rights, and age-related legal issues.

Medical-Legal Partnership: Collaborates with local health care providers to address legal needs that affect health.

One insight that stayed with me from this morning's training with Attorney Lisabeth Jorgensen from the Family Law Unit was the importance of identifying what is actually in dispute. Good advocacy isn't about fighting every issue, it's about understanding a client's priorities, recognizing when litigation is being used as another form of abuse, and focusing on the outcomes that genuinely improve a family's safety and future.



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I'm incredibly grateful to be learning from advocates who approach this work with both legal excellence and deep compassion. This internship is generously funded by Equal Justice America, whose investment in public interest legal internships is helping train the next generation of legal advocates committed to expanding access to justice.

Update 4:

"Psychology is just white people magic."

One of the highlights of my Fellowship at MetroWest Legal Services has been our intern training series. We recently had a fascinating training led by Robert Lae Wild on culturally responsive practice: an approach that challenges professionals to understand clients within their own cultural contexts rather than through our own assumptions.

Who gets to decide which ways of understanding healing are considered "science", and which are dismissed as "superstition"? Every client has a framework for making sense of their experiences. Our role isn't to replace that framework with our own. It's to approach it with curiosity, understand it, and, when necessary, help translate it into language that institutions can understand...without losing the client's truth in the process. Because sometimes the most important question isn't, "Is this true?" It's, "What does this mean to the person sitting in front of me?"

I'm curious to hear your thoughts. Vote in the poll below and share your perspective in the comments.

What matters most in culturally responsive practice?

- Listening before explaining
- Understanding cultural context
- Challenging my own assumptions
- All of the above

Final Reflection:

A week after completing my Fellowship at MetroWest Legal Services, I keep thinking about how strangely time behaves in legal aid. Ten weeks can feel impossibly brief, yet somehow hold countless drafts, difficult questions, shared lunches, laughter, client conversations, and stories that quietly rearrange the way you understand the law...and yourself.

Throughout the summer, I shared updates about the matters I worked on and the lessons I was learning. Looking back now, however, what stays with me is not a particular form, filing, or research assignment. It is the privilege of briefly entering another person's story and being



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trusted to handle even a small part of it with care. The law often asks people to translate the most complicated chapters of their lives into tidy boxes, dates, and legal standards. This fellowship taught me that a lawyer's work is sometimes to help make that translation without allowing the person to disappear from the page.

The summer also changed my understanding of competence. I thought becoming a capable lawyer primarily meant knowing more and answering faster. I now believe it also means knowing when to pause, when to ask another question, when to listen longer, and when someone needs clarity more than complexity. Some days, progress looked like completing a difficult assignment; on others, it looked like identifying the right question, accepting thoughtful correction, or helping a client leave a conversation with a little more confidence than when it began. And occasionally, it looked like coloring during crafting lunch.

I am deeply grateful to my direct supervisors, Attorneys Kathrine Reynolds and Cathleen Dinsmore, whose mentorship combined high standards with extraordinary generosity. They trusted me with meaningful responsibility, strengthened my judgment, and created room for me to learn without being afraid of what I did not yet know. I am equally thankful to the entire MWLS team for welcoming me into a community that practices advocacy with rigor, creativity, and heart.

Through EJA's mentorship program, I also had the privilege of being mentored by Attorney Joanne M. White, a longtime family law attorney. Her wisdom helped me think beyond the summer and consider the kind of lawyer and person I hope to become. My sincere thanks go to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible, and to Boston College Law School and its public-interest community for preparing, encouraging, and investing in me.

I now begin a Family Court judicial clerkship, stepping into a different area of law and a different seat within the legal system. Yet I do not feel that I am leaving this summer behind. If this fellowship taught me anything, it is that wherever the law takes me next, humanity must remain at the center of the work.

P.S. After ten weeks in immigration law, I can confirm that the mug's assessment of the practice is legally and factually well supported. 🥰💧🚲

