



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

My internship with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC) in Oakland, California, was a truly formative experience. Because LSPC is a support organization rather than a traditional direct-services legal organization, I did not work directly with individual clients in the conventional sense. Instead, LSPC provides legal education, advocacy, and resources aimed at challenging the family policing and carceral systems. This structure gave me the opportunity to understand legal work not only as representation, but also as a tool for organizing, education, and policy advocacy. More than anything, LSPC embodied the kind of work environment I hope to be part of in the future. The organization takes seriously its commitment to listening to and following the leadership of people most directly impacted by the carceral system. Many of the organization's leaders and staff have themselves experienced incarceration, family separation, or other forms of harm at the hands of these systems. That principle was not simply something I saw reflected in LSPC's mission statement; I saw it in the people I worked with every day.

My coworkers and colleagues taught me as much through their own experiences as they did through our work. They were the people standing beside me when we attended impromptu rallies and press conferences, but they were also the people who shared stories about their experiences while incarcerated and the ways they had fought to survive and challenge those systems. I was struck by the strength and resilience of the people around me. Some of my coworkers had participated in hunger strikes to challenge the conditions of their incarceration. Others had taught themselves the law while incarcerated so that they could represent themselves, challenge abuse, and hold the institutions that harmed them accountable. The most important lesson I took from my time at LSPC was the importance of listening. I learned that entering this work as a lawyer requires more than knowing the law or understanding a particular legal system. It requires listening to people who have experienced that system, understanding



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what they believe needs to change, and allowing their experiences and priorities to inform the advocacy and organizing that follows.

During my internship, I worked extensively on a reproductive justice project focused on the experiences and rights of incarcerated pregnant women. One component of the project involved developing a report that centralized information about the reproductive justice rights of incarcerated people and the practical barriers to accessing those rights while incarcerated. A second component focused on the role of doulas in supporting incarcerated pregnant people. In particular, I researched the logistics of bringing doulas into county jails and explored potential mechanisms for compensating doulas for their services, including reimbursement through county counsel and Medi-Cal. Much of my work involved submitting Public Records Act requests to obtain information from county agencies and correctional institutions. I also spoke with local organizations and doulas who have been doing this work for years to learn from their experiences and identify information that had already been gathered.

This work gave me firsthand experience with the bureaucratic and logistical barriers that can accompany public records research. Some requests required significant follow-up, and gaps in the available information meant that the report remained an ongoing project throughout my internship. We are continuing to build on this research and develop advocacy materials that can help doulas advocate for Memoranda of Understanding with county counsel and establish sustainable mechanisms for compensating their work.

I also worked separately on LSPC's Prison Letter Project, which develops chapter-based manuals that are distributed to incarcerated people and provide practical information about navigating legal systems, finding legal resources or representation, and advocating for themselves. For the chapter being developed during my internship, the focus was on parenting while separated from one's child. The chapter incorporated testimony from people who had experienced both the family policing and carceral systems firsthand. Interviewees included people who had been separated from incarcerated parents as children as well as incarcerated parents who had been separated from their own children. I helped facilitate these interviews, with an undergraduate intern shadowing me. The interviews also demonstrated how interconnected the family policing and carceral systems can be and how those systems affect not only incarcerated people, but also their children and families.

In addition to my project-based work, LSPC created opportunities for collective learning among staff and interns. We participated in a book club where we read *Inadmissible Evidence* by Evelyn Williams, which gave us another opportunity to think critically about the legal system, advocacy, and the experiences of people navigating incarceration from a radical organizing model like Assata Shakur.



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Overall, my internship at LSPC expanded my understanding of what legal advocacy can and should look like. I entered the internship expecting to learn about the law, but I left with a deeper appreciation for the importance of community leadership, storytelling, organizing, and listening. The experience showed me that some of the most important legal work happens alongside people who have already been fighting these systems long before a lawyer enters the picture. I hope to carry that lesson into my future legal work.