



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: This summer, I've joined the Legal Services team at Whitman-Walker Health here in DC as a Legal Intern. Already within my first week I've had the opportunity to experience how a passionate, resilient team can make a massive impact on the local community. Here at WWH, the legal team addresses a wide range of health-impacting legal issues, including immigration, public benefits, insurance denials, and name changes. In joining the team, I was excited to work on these diverse issues, but I've quickly learned they aren't as differentiated as I expected. Many clients are currently handling, or will eventually deal with, multiple issues spanning the WWH practice areas. This means that the legal team can build close, long-lasting relationships with clients, and by working across practice areas, each team member is well-versed in all of WWH's areas of expertise. I was lucky enough to see this in action while assisting Amy Nelson, Senior Director of Legal Services, in a client meeting. Amy was able to gather detailed information from our client regarding a sensitive Social Security matter through questions that were conversational and lighthearted. I'm excited to model this client-focused approach throughout the summer as I work with more WWH clients. It has been a great first two weeks of working with this fantastic team, and I can't wait to keep the momentum going!

Update 2: This week I had the honor of leading my first client meeting with the help of WWH's amazing Skadden Fellow, Chelsea Naylor.

While helping my client file for her legal name change, she shared that changing her name meant being able to start a new chapter of her life with hope for the future. Many people haven't considered the impact of having the wrong name or gender marker on identification documents, but for the transgender community, this often turns into a constant battle for visibility and recognition. As my client shared, receiving her legal name change will allow her to do things like starting a new job or opening a bank account without any of the shame that



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comes with bearing a name that doesn't reflect one's identity or appearance. What seems minor to some is life-changing for others, and it brought so much joy to get to walk next to my client and support her on this journey.

These are the experiences that make legal services work so fulfilling, yet they are a constant reminder of the individuals who either are unable to access or unaware of the supports that are out there for them. I'm grateful to be a part of a team that constantly strives to reach these populations and provide so much more than just legal representation to our clients as we work to see their full selves.

Update 3: After a month and a half with Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services, I've been able to experience the full range of emotions that come with client-centered work. I feel lucky to share in the bountiful joy with clients who are accessing name and identity document updates or getting help with their Social Security payments. At the same time, I've also shared in clients' frustration and pain as they navigate insurance denials for medically necessary care or are forced to recount past harassment just to get their court records sealed.

For one client, the process towards appealing an insurance denial has led to countless hours that the two of us have spent on the phone with her insurance company. As we work together to navigate what should be a simple process, I'm reminded that the times I feel frustrated on behalf of a client is exactly when the work I am doing is most meaningful. Being able to support my clients through both the wins and the struggles is what gives me the passion and motivation to continue this work, and I'm reminded of all the support and care that I can provide to others through my role! I'm looking forward to the rest of the summer with this fantastic team.

Update 4: Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association's Lavender Law Conference in Chicago. It was amazing to be gathered with so many attorneys and professionals who have dedicated their careers to serving the LGBTQ+ community. I'm especially grateful to the National Trans Bar Association for their work to provide programming and community space centered on uplifting trans professionals and developing future advocacy goals for our community.

I appreciated the opportunity to think critically about how different avenues for change-- including impact litigation, policy, and direct services-- each have a unique role in the broader movement for positive social change. When operating in conjunction with each other, each pathway is stronger than it would be alone. Lavender Law was the perfect opportunity to see how our work is intertwined. At the end of the day, everyone is fighting for the same outcome: positive results for our clients and communities. It felt powerful to see how my summer work has contributed toward both improving the lives of specific Whitman-Walker Health clients, while



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simultaneously furthering the movement towards broader equality and justice for LGBTQ+ communities.

Our wins are tied together, and having a space to celebrate, critique, and ponder the future of our movement was truly a highlight of my summer!

Final Reflection: Last week, I concluded my internship with Whitman-Walker Health Legal Services. After a summer with the team spent serving our amazing clients, I feel honored to truly be a part of the WWH family and quite sad that the summer passed so quickly.

In my final week, I contacted each of my clients to discuss their next steps, and I was amazed at how many clients I was able to support over the course of the summer. I conducted over 20 client intakes, filed four name change cases, drafted multiple insurance appeals, and assisted on two immigration cases. Despite my pride in the material aspects of my work, I am most fulfilled by the relationships I was able to build with my clients. One client who I worked with throughout the summer shared that her mental health challenges felt more manageable because she knew that she had advocates that would not stop fighting for her. Another said that her legal name change would help her finally start her life and carry her head high for the first time. Countless others were able to share their stories because they finally felt safe and affirmed. To be able to have even a small role in lifting some of the weight off my clients' shoulders was an absolute blessing. I was privileged to share in the joy that emerges when people are met with the respect and validation of their personhood that they always deserve but so rarely receive.

Each client win at WWH is made possible by a team of some of the smartest and most passionate people I have ever met. They trusted me to remember deadlines, manage my own caseload, and handle obstacles on my own. They showed me what it means to be an attorney, but most importantly, what it means to work in your own community and build connections that keep a legal services organization functioning. I will forever be grateful to these individuals who shaped me as a person, supported my growth as an advocate, and gave me the confidence to conquer anything that stands in my way. Endless thanks and gratitude to the Whitman-Walker Health team!