



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: My introduction to the Family Law field, specifically domestic violence law, through working at Life Span has been nothing short of amazing. My onboarding and introduction into clerking for a nonprofit legal, immigration, and counseling organization has trained me to conduct trauma-informed intakes and be aware of clients' intersectional challenges as they navigate the justice system. I have familiarized myself with Life Span's inner workings and attorney expectations of clerks to maximize my efficiency and usefulness to the organization. I have observed two court hearings, both order of protections. Observing court hearings for orders of protection has been informative and eye-opening. Understanding not only the administrative side but the strength it takes for survivors to show up to their OP and status hearings have been extremely moving. Joining the entire legal team at Life Span for the weekly intake meeting, where the team decides which cases to take based on capacity issues, I learned how difficult it can be to hear the intimate and horrifying facts of domestic violence and sexual assault cases. As difficult as it was to hear the case intakes, I noticed how eloquently and intently the Life Span team spoke about the cases and the survivors. I am excited to continue my summer and complete my own intakes at Life Span!

Update 2: Throughout the first half of my summer at Life Span I have learned so much about the legal field and myself. I have really enjoyed going to court and seeing how attorneys and judges interact with one another. Recently, I was observing court and found myself very shocked at how a judge interacted with the attorney at my work and our client. The judge used forceful and abrasive language and tones while speaking towards our client. Working in the domestic violence field has challenged preconceptions that I didn't even know I had towards women and more specifically survivors of DV. It made me very upset to hear a judge interact with a survivor in an atmosphere that is scary and one in which she didn't speak the language and wasn't familiar with the legal system in general. This situation made me reflect back on my preconceived notions and possible biases and realize, especially in the legal field, that bias really



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affects the outcomes of cases and how people perceive the legal field in general. This summer has solidified my desire in wanting to help marginalized and oppressed people navigate the legal system with an open mind and empathy. I am constantly encouraged by the attorneys and staff at Life Span to look at our clients' stories with the knowledge that these are real people going through really difficult times and anything that we can do to lift some of the burden off their shoulders is going to positively impact their case and their lives.

Update 3: My experience at my Life Span clerkship has been nothing short of informative and inspiring. I have continued shadowing intakes and client calls with staff attorneys. Through watching the attorneys interact with clients, I get an informal training on trauma-informed language and advocacy skills that I could likely not find at a larger firm. I have been to court about 4 times now and it has been both challenging and thrilling. Having the opportunity during my 1L summer to visit the general courthouse and the domestic violence specific courthouse in downtown Chicago is an amazing opportunity. I have observed hearings, motions, and pre-trials and all have given me an insight into the different aspects of Family law. It has been somewhat difficult for me to handle the extremely complex subject matter of the domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking cases, but as I heard more from the attorneys at Life Span on how they deal with vicarious trauma and how to limit it as much as possible, I have been able to compartmentalize the work in a much healthier way. I have greatly enjoyed speaking with clients on a regular basis whether via email or over the phone. I have helped clients with their discovery requests and answer opposing counsels' discovery requests and interrogatories. I work very closely with the paralegals at Life Span to ensure that our clients are getting their cases moved through the system as quickly as possible. The most difficult part has been coming to terms with the slow speed at which the court systems moves and how the bureaucracy negatively impacts one's experience moving through the justice system, especially in the DV world. I am extremely grateful to be at Life Span and I am excited for the rest of the summer!

Update 4: At the end of my summer, I can say that I am very satisfied by my experience at Life Span. By shadowing attorneys, assisting paralegals, and drafting documents used for cases, I have learned so much! I am so grateful to have made such wonderful professional connections that have taught me so much about law but also about how to conduct myself within the legal profession. My mentors at Life Span taught me not only transferable legal skills that I will take to all future legal jobs, but also how I want my future jobs to feel. I know the culture of legal aids is different than larger firms, but through my time at Life Span, I learned that law firms can be warm, inviting, welcoming, and supportive. Through a female-led staff, I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from young female attorneys how to conduct myself in the courtroom, with difficult clients, and combative opposing parties. Learning those skills in addition to the legal skills is a unique takeaway that I am grateful to have experienced.



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Final Reflection: At the end of my internship, I am so grateful to say that I have improved so much in both my legal and professional skills. Thanks to EJA empowering me to clerk at a legal aid, I experienced the work of an entry-level associate and given tasks that attorneys themselves do regularly. I shadowed court, drafted motions and pleadings, and conducted client intake and referral calls. Going to court was invaluable to me as someone who had never observed a circuit level court proceeding. I am so grateful to have been involved in the many cases that have resulted in obtaining a protective order, a divorce, or an allocation of parental responsibilities favorable to Life Span's clients. Working with a nearly all-female legal team has shaped my expectations and boundaries for the rest of my legal career. I was also able to work alongside other clerks to collaborate on drafting documents, researching niche legal topics to support clients, and participate in trauma informed trainings. Overall, I am so grateful to have worked at a legal aid my first summer in law school as I believe it allowed me to do assignments that I would not have been given if I were at a large firm. Thank you so much to EJA again for this opportunity. I sincerely hope that when I am an attorney, if I am not in a public service-oriented role already, that I prioritize pro bono work to continue the legacy of EJA.