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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: The first week at my tenant legal defense internship I was able to participate in intake of clients at housing court. First, I observed the attorneys conduct intake of potential new clients and then I conducted intake with an attorney observing my work. It was clearly an emotional and difficult time for the clients, and I enjoyed being able to assist them in the first step of providing them with legal aid. At the intake stage we explain to them that we are not their attorney yet, but that we are obtaining information to determine whether we can take their case.

I also have had the opportunity to observe the attorneys in court which has educated me on housing court procedure. Since most housing court cases settle, I observed many discussions with the landlord attorneys to come to an agreement of either payment or move out with the hopes of avoiding trial. I helped check in with the court staff and assisted the attorney with writing stipulations. The attorneys have been generous with their time and helpful in their feedback. I am looking forward to the remaining weeks and to meeting even more clients.

Update 2: I have had the opportunity to observe a full eviction trial, which has helped contextualize what I learned in civil procedure and introduce me to the rules and customs of housing court. I was especially interested in observing the direct and cross examination of witnesses and the dynamics between opposing counsels. Since trials in housing court are rare, I feel like this has been an incredible opportunity to see what this kind of trial looks like and compare it to what I know about criminal trials.

The staff at HCC have been extremely kind and generous with providing support and knowledge on the topic of housing law and I have attended several trainings. I have also continued providing direct client work through phone calls and home visits. My favorite part so far has been interacting with clients and helping them to feel confident in their legal representation,



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especially since they are dealing with a multitude of hardships. I have found the clients to be polite and grateful for all the hard work that the attorneys do for them and that goodwill is palpable towards me too.

Update 3: I recently broke my ankle and have not been able to engage in my internship in the same way that I have previously. However, my office has been so kind and understanding about my situation and have let me work remotely for the time being. While working remotely I have still been able to engage with clients over the phone, especially through initial client interviews after they have completed intake with us at the courthouse to determine if we can take them on as clients. I enjoy connecting with people and giving them the reassurance that someone cares about their case and wants to make efforts to support them. I have also helped out with writing projects such as doing research for a motion to amend an answer and drafting direct examination questions for one attorney's upcoming trial. Getting to meet the client and do a home visit before writing the direct questions was very useful for the drafting process and allowed me to understand the client's perspective and style of talking. I look forward to my injury healing and getting more opportunities to visit the courthouse and learn through observation.

Update 4: My internship has continued to be interesting and fulfilling. I helped prepare a tenant for trial through preparing direct examination questioning, attending a home visit, and legal researching. When we were at the trial the tenant realized that he was not understanding the proceedings and what the witnesses were saying. English is not his first language, but he had been able to communicate well throughout the preparation. Once we realized he was struggling to understand, the attorneys made sure that the judge was aware and they postponed the trial so that they could have time to find an interpreter for his language. This was an interesting moment because it showed how clients need to be prioritized and protected through our representation. The client was very apologetic, and we made him feel comfortable in knowing that it was a good thing that he told us and that we want to make sure he can understand his trial.

Final Reflection: Reflecting on my internship this summer I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn from such amazing attorneys and be able to work with clients who were in need of their services. Working for a small non-profit was wonderful because they were very hands-on and I got to know everyone, which I think would be more difficult at a larger organization.

Before law school I worked at a housing non-profit in London and so I went into this internship with experience working with clients and some knowledge about the eviction process in the UK. I was curious to see the cross-national differences and found that the "right to counsel" in New York City is very similar to the barrister representation that tenants facing eviction are given in



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the UK. While the technicalities of the law are unique to each place, I found that the clients faced the same struggles with unaffordable housing, their own mental health struggles, and a confusing legal system. My favorite part was getting to know the clients and trying to be a reliable presence while going through this stressful time in their life. I received good feedback from clients that I was approachable, and they appreciated that I really took my time with answering their questions and making sure that the attorney was receiving the information she needed from them. I often used an interpreter to communicate with clients, and it was a team effort to make sure that the clients were understanding their cases and legal rights.

I do think the fact that I broke my ankle in the middle of the internship affected the amount of court observations, home visits and lunch times I was able to complete and share with other staff. However, I am so grateful of how understanding everyone was about letting me work remotely and I still feel like I was able to see such a wide range of the work that they do that it did not ruin the internship by any means.

I went into the internship heavily considering working in housing law after school and I believe this experience was positive and showed me a career path that I can legitimately see myself following.