



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: After a busy and rewarding 2L year, I am excited to be spending my summer back in New York at Center for Family Representation in the Immigration Department! CFR's mission to reunite families resonates with me and I've been learning important advocacy skills from talented attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates. In a few short weeks, I have been able to observe family court, see the landscape of immigration and family law change before my eyes as BIA and circuit court decisions roll in, and start sitting in on client calls and drafting motions to secure visas and prevent removal. As the summer goes on, I am looking forward to getting more involved in the cases I've been assigned, getting face-to-face time with clients, learning their stories, and learning how to best support them.

I am also proud to be an Equal Justice America Fellow this summer. It is an honor to be supported by an organization that believes in the power and importance of legal aid. Organizations like CFR bring balance to the legal system by offering pro bono legal services to all who deserve dedicated advocates and informed legal advice without the exorbitant price tag. My dream before law school was to serve my community and fellowships like EJA make it possible for me to fully dedicate myself to the public interest during my summers!

Update 2: These past few weeks at CFR have been so amazing! I've gotten to lead client calls and sit in on meetings about new cases. It's incredible to read these clients' stories and get to know them without even meeting them face to face but knowing that I can be an advocate in their corner. Right now, we are about to file a client's motion to terminate removal that I got to take the first pass at a few weeks ago. Soon, I will be attending a hearing for his asylum case. In his home country, he resisted recruitment from local gangs, and his entire family became a target. He was able to escape and brought himself to New York to claim asylum. Since then, he's become a father to a young daughter and is fighting to make a better life for her.



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Another client's case really speaks to me. After her brother was killed by organized crime in her home country and her ex-partner abandoned her and her child because he was born disabled, she came to the United States to seek asylum and medical help for her son. Despite the barriers she has faced, she has remained committed to getting her son the supervision and care he needs and making way for them to live safely. I am currently working on her son's Special Immigrant Juvenile visa application and am constantly in awe of what people will do for their families.

It has been such a whirlwind the last 5 weeks at CFR and I can't believe I'm already at the midpoint. My supervisors have been so encouraging and helpful and I can't imagine a better place to learn how immigration practice actually works!

Update 3: Over halfway through the summer and it has been such a pleasure working with CFR! For the past two weeks, I have been working on an urgent project to prepare an evidence packet for a client's asylum application. She came to CFR after learning that her deadline to submit all supporting information for her application was due in 30 days. We have been working nonstop to make sure that her packet is complete, persuasive, and responsive to all the new changes in the law regarding asylum applications. I have been researching country conditions, how certain changes in asylum applications affect the client's priority date, and the struggles that asylum seekers who are turned away face when going back to Venezuela. I am looking forward to seeing how this case turns out and I am optimistic that we will be able to show that changing country conditions don't necessarily mean safety for those who had to flee.

I have also been entrusted with making client calls and preparing a guardianship application, which has allowed me to meet and speak to one of the most resilient women I have ever met. It is clear to see that this work is difficult, both logistically and emotionally, but the clients and their dedication make it worth it.

The recent Supreme Court decisions on asylum and TPS have been devastating but it is heartening to see that no one at CFR has given up or even faltered. Even in an era where the immigration courts, state courts, and federal courts seem to be turning their back on our clients, it is amazing to see that we never will.

Update 4: In the last few weeks of my summer internship, I have been so privileged to be fully immersed in CFR. From putting together a U-visa application from start to finish all on my own and preparing a memorandum on a complex new legal issue, to appearing on the record on behalf of our clients twice in one week, I have gotten a wonderful glimpse into what my life could be like as an immigration attorney.



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My first appearance on the record started with meeting our client, a young woman who was forced to flee her home country after a series of traumatic encounters with armed militias who threatened her family. When she arrived in the United States hoping for asylum, she was met with more violence at the border, leaving her with lifelong scars, physical and mental. To add insult to injury, she was served with an erroneous Notice to Appear and haled into immigration court. I was able to briefly present her case and assert that CFR would be preparing an asylum application for her. After court was adjourned, I saw her breathe a sigh of relief and smile before we got back to work, filling out the preliminary details of her asylum application. Although our time together was short and a language barrier separated us, it was great to know that we, as an organization, could be there for her in this moment and advocate for her the way she needed back in her home country and at the border. Playing a small part in her case meant the world to me and I'm grateful to my supervisors at CFR for trusting me with this great responsibility and allowing me to take a huge step in my journey to becoming a litigator. This was just one of the many moments in the last week where I have gotten to see and feel how important direct services are, how much attorneys can change in these systems, and how much the attorneys I get to work with care. It has been nothing short of inspiring.

Final Reflection: I started my internship in the Immigration department at Center for Family Representation excited, but I am completely ignorant of the ins and outs of New York State family law or even the way it tied into immigration. I was nervous that I had gotten myself in way too deep with a role I wouldn't be able to fully understand. But it was clear to see from the detailed and engaging orientation and the passion that all of our supervising attorneys, social workers, and family advocates showed from day one that they were committed to teaching us how to be there for our clients.

I started off compiling and mailing U visa applications—a form of relief that allows undocumented crime victims to start their path to naturalization. Immediately, I started learning about the paths that brought people to this country, the events that brought them to family court, and their wishes for their futures and the futures of their families. I continued, learning how to file Special Immigrant Juvenile Status applications and asylum applications, support and represent clients in family and immigration court, and simply relate to people during one-on-one conversations about their pasts, their cases, and what they wanted out of our representation. Even in the first few weeks, I felt the impact of the work CFR was doing and felt like a valued part of the organization.

However, I still struggled with the role. Having no experience in family law or public defense, I occasionally found it difficult to figure out what the effect of a certain charge would be, how to make a compelling argument for a client in this anti-immigrant political climate, or even how to



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decipher all the acronyms on a report from child services. For a while, I struggled in silence, trying not to show that I was less prepared than I wanted to be. But of course, my supervisors let me know that this was the normal learning curve and that their doors were always open for my questions. I appreciated walking through problems with them and getting their feedback, all along learning about the complexities of family and immigration law that I couldn't get from a textbook. By the end of the summer, I had filed countless USCIS applications, interviewed multiple clients on my own, filed a brief that I drafted, and even appeared on the record in both family and immigration court. During my last week, I was glad to learn that a client I had been working with to file for sole guardianship of her son had had the family court case against her dropped, clearing the way for a favorable court decision for her guardianship application. Like always, it was worth it to see that our clients trusted us to have their best interests in mind.

My summer at CFR showed me that I could see myself having a fulfilling career in immigration law. Even with the difficulties navigating changes in the law, I can't help but appreciate the atmosphere that CFR has fostered. I never saw a CFRian stay down for too long; after a harsh BIA decision or a court denial of a motion, my supervisors immediately started thinking about how to move forward and argue harder. I hope to take that drive with me. I learned that it is emotionally and mentally difficult to thrive in this space, but it's all the more possible when you're surrounded by people who believe in what they're doing and want to serve their communities. I'm glad that EJA helped me to have this experience. The commitment that EJA has to supporting students in public interest reminds me of the commitment CFR had to their clients, and it inspires me to work hard and stick to my goals of making the world a better place, one legal representation at a time.