



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

**Summer 2026**

## EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



|                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
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| <b>ORGANIZATION</b> | Legal Aid Society of San Diego        |

This summer I had the opportunity to intern with the Legal Aid Society of San Diego with the help of the Equal Justice America Fellowship. Over the past 11 weeks of volunteering at the Self-Help Clinics in the San Diego County courthouses, I was able to gain valuable, hands-on experience with assisting self-represented litigants. Working in legal aid means that you have to learn quickly and be malleable to changes whenever they may happen. After I shadowed a few client-participants, the supervising attorneys gave me the opportunity to conduct my own interview and fill out legal paperwork. It was overwhelming; however, the gratitude I received from the community member and the sentiment of fulfilling work was rewarding.

I recall interviewing a domestic violence victim who was seeking a renewal on her restraining order against her former boyfriend that was going to expire within days. I was amazed by her strength to retell her story and found her to be admirable. Working in the self-help clinics that specialize in restraining orders has taught me to be strong, no matter what challenges or curveballs life throws at me.

Legal aid provided me with the opportunity to work directly and hands-on with client participants, learning how to navigate difficult conversations and situations was something that I was able to build on the entire summer. Many community members came to us at one of the most difficult times in their lives, to file a restraining order or an answer to an eviction lawsuit is undoubtedly stressful. For most people that our organization served, they were unfamiliar with legal processes and was the first time they came to get legal assistance. Helping client participants navigate these uncharted waters and giving them support throughout the process was incredibly fulfilling.

I have found that I am most effective when I take the time to explain not only what a client needs to do, but why each step is necessary. By communicating legal information in a clear and accessible manner, I am able to help clients better understand their circumstances, make



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informed decisions, and leave the clinic with greater confidence in navigating their legal matter independently. When working with Spanish-speakers, not only do I have to translate these legal documents to them but explain to them in plain terms what it means. For example, when dealing with restraining order matters, I was trained to explain the legal grounds of what the judge looks for when granting a restraining order: physical abuse, threats of physical abuse, or an escalating pattern of harassment leading one to fear for their safety. "Acoso" is harassment in Spanish, however, this translation never did a satisfactory job to explain the legal definition of harassment. Throughout the summer, I learned how to better explain legal terminology to Spanish-speakers by being mindful through cultural competency.

One of my most memorable moments from my internship was when I was working with an elderly Spanish-speaker who was filing a restraining order against her husband of 33 years. She explained to me the amount of abuse she withstood throughout their entire relationship and how she endured it for the sake of her children. The night before she came in, she finally decided to call the police on her husband after a DV which they proceeded to arrest him for. They informed her of the legal options which was the restraining order clinic. I worked on her paperwork and assisted her with finding other resources for DV victims. I remember after I sent her upstairs to file with the court clerks, she came back to thank me with a hug after her TRO was granted. I explained to her what the next steps of the process were and wished her the best of luck with everything. It was a moment that I felt like the work I did actually had profound impacts on people's lives. Although filling out paperwork and interviewing someone does not feel meaningful in the moment, her gratitude for my time made me changed my perspective on the work I was doing for her and other members of the community.

During my time at legal aid this summer, I built upon so many of my skills that I can carry throughout both my professional endeavors as well as my personal life. Navigating difficult situations and finding solutions for this is something I can take away from this internship by finding creative ways to resolve issues.