



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Colette Cross
LAW SCHOOL	UC Law San Francisco
ORGANIZATION	Open Door Legal

Update 1: In the beginning of the week, my attorney supervisor was focused on propounding discovery, so she had me draft written discovery requests in the form of requests for admission, requests for production, and special interrogatories. I had never even read examples of these things, let alone written them, so it was exciting to immediately get to dive into new skills. My drafts were, of course, heavily revised and edited by my supervisor, but it was still exciting to play a part in something that got sent to opposing counsel. My supervisor even let me put my name on it and email the forms to opposing counsel.

I have also gotten to be part of several follow-up calls with clients and assisted my supervisor during those by taking detailed notes. Another thing I got to do that felt very meaningful was draft a written response to a grievance decision. My supervisor's clients had a grievance meeting with opposing counsel, and the grievance decision issued was extremely harsh and the reasoning given focused on several things that were not true or not entirely accurate. My supervisor wanted a written response on record explaining why those things were not true, and she had me draft that. Lastly, I attended a Mandatory Settlement Conference and got to see how they work and watch my supervisor expertly conduct the negotiation process while also supporting her client who was having a very difficult time.

Update 2: Last week, I got to be part of something that felt like my first big win. My supervising attorney had been in a long back and forth with opposing counsel on a notice-stage case. My supervisor was trying to come to an agreement with the opposing counsel that included the landlord not filing an Unlawful Detainer. The opposing counsel was resistant. She was set on filing an Unlawful Detainer but assured my supervisor that she was willing to come to a settlement agreement. My supervisor's clients did not want to risk it and wanted my supervisor



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

to keep pushing back on an Unlawful Detainer being filed. Another attorney at our organization suggested a Memorandum of Understanding as a way to come to a binding agreement without an Unlawful Detainer being filed. Shockingly, when my supervisor suggested that to the opposing counsel, the opposing counsel was open to it and asked for a draft of one to show her client. My supervisor was unfamiliar with Memorandums of Understanding and asked me to do research and draft one. I did research by asking questions to other attorneys at the organization who had written one and looking at examples from our database. I was able to write a draft and submit it to my supervisor. She (heavily) revised and edited it and got it approved by her clients before sending it to the opposing counsel. All in the same day, opposing counsel, the landlord, my supervisor, and her clients signed it. The terms ensured that our clients would not have an Unlawful Detainer filed against them and gave them enough time to move out! While it was largely my supervisor's work that made the final draft, I felt accomplished to have played a role in such an unexpectedly positive outcome.

Update 3: Since my last update, I have spent most of my time doing various forms of communication with clients. One of those forms is post-settlement letters. These are letters the organization sends to clients to clarify the terms of their settlement. This helps clients clearly understand what they have to do and what would be considered a breach and put them at risk of eviction. Writing the letters requires reading through the settlement and actually understanding it yourself (and checking your understanding with your supervisor), then separating out each point, and lastly writing it as simply yet accurately as possible. I have also been writing case closing letters which describe what the organization did for the client and clearly state that the organization and attorney no longer represent the client. These can only be written after a case is dismissed, so they happen less frequently than the post-settlement letters. Writing these typically involves going back through the case file to see the major events of the case and then synthesizing what it is the attorney did. Both the post-settlement and case closing letters also gave me practice in the more functional aspects of the job like how to weigh an envelope to be stamped using the machine they have, how to properly write a header, and how to record what has been done in the case files. Outside of these formal letters, I have also gotten to reach out to clients via phone and text to discuss updates from them, request information for discovery, and assist with rental assistance applications. Some of my supervisor's clients are starting to get to know me and feel comfortable reaching out to me directly, and I have really enjoyed getting to be someone they trust.

Update 4: Last week my supervisor had a huge success. I not only got to play some parts in the success, but I also got to learn a valuable lesson in perseverance. The client is one that has been with my supervisor since the start of my internship. She had previously come to the organization with an eviction case, for which my supervisor reached a settlement agreement. Unfortunately, due to many extenuating circumstances, the client breached the stipulated settlement



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

agreement. My supervisor took her on again to try to renegotiate a settlement agreement to avoid getting judgement entered against her. I have gotten to know this client through many phone calls and emails and have come to really like her. Sadly, despite rigorous efforts from my supervisor, opposing counsel filed an ex parte motion for judgement. The hearing was set for Wednesday, July 15. On Monday, July 13, my supervisor filed an ex part motion to continue opposing counsel's motion for judgement. My supervisor's motion was denied. My supervisor started preparing the client for the worst but did not stop striving to change the outcome. By Monday afternoon, we were communicating with the client about how she needs to urgently move out, at pretty much any cost, by Wednesday morning. This was a last-ditch effort to avoid judgement being entered against her by making it so that possession was no longer at issue. The only place the client could go was in Los Angeles, and she was panicking trying to prepare to move her family there in 48 hours. The client's son is disabled, so as another last-minute effort, my supervisor had me prepare a Reasonable Accommodation request to take the hearing for judgement off the calendar. Simultaneously, my supervisor reached out to the Tenants Right to Counsel listserv for emergency advice. Another attorney recommended trying for a stipulated judgement that would give the client until July 31 to move and allow Plaintiff to enter judgement against her immediately if she failed to move out. My supervisor had numerous phone conversations with opposing counsel trying to convince him to sign the stipulated judgement. Against all odds, my supervisor was able to convince him and got the stipulated judgement signed at 4:00pm on Tuesday. My supervisor was able to get the hearing the next day taken off calendar. Her success was a huge inspiration to never accept a bad outcome and to keep trying until the last second. It was such a relief for the client to have more time and a huge win overall.

Final Reflection: My summer internship with Open Door Legal was a monumental experience for me. Following 1L year, I was feeling burned out and found myself questioning whether law school was the right choice for me. I had lost track of my central motivation for coming to school: leveraging my access to education to help people who did not have the same privilege. After my first day in the office at Open Door, I felt a renewed energy and was confident that law school is the right path. Getting to watch the way the attorneys worked for their clients, I was immediately reminded of my goals and hopes for my career. This reinvigoration and centering of my purpose only grew throughout my summer there. It was also powerful to observe the attorneys collaborate with each other and advocate for themselves and their clients to the executive team. I saw that social justice lawyering does not just include intakes and trial preparation, it also requires constant advocacy to get the necessary resources and support to best serve the client.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

I learned so much from my supervising attorney. She directly taught me countless practical lessons in California civil procedure, negotiating tactics, and local subsidized housing. I got to write written interrogatories to propound discovery, interact directly with clients, and conduct research to inform our strategy. On top of that, I also learned from observing her how to talk with clients who are going through a traumatic experience, how to carry yourself around opposing counsel, and how to set boundaries with work to keep being the best attorney you can be.

A lot of the clients we worked with left a lasting impact on me, but there was one in particular that I find myself thinking about often even after the internship has ended. She is a client I wrote about in a previous reflection, when my supervising attorney had persevered through a seemingly hopeless situation and struck a deal with the opposing counsel that saved the client from an eviction judgement being entered against her. That deal included her moving out by a certain date. She reached out to let us know that while she had been able to move out, she had to move her and her autistic son into her car. Reading her email, I felt such a rush of emotions. I felt relieved that she had been able to move out, because had she not, an eviction judgement would have been entered against her causing her to lose her housing choice voucher and making finding housing near impossible. I also felt immeasurable sorrow for her and her child. I felt overwhelming rage at the landlord and landlord attorney who had put her in this situation, and the housing system that gave them the power to do so. The situation illuminated the nuance of what a "win" can be in public interest lawyering and gave me perspective for what I may hope to achieve.