



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: So far, I have had the opportunity to meet with clients in person and over the phone to directly offer answers and support in this time of uncertainty. The first client I worked with was renewing her DACA, which led me down a rabbit hole of the history of the program and its continued uncertainty. The renewal process itself is straight-forward, however DACA's existence in the future cannot be promised. In such unpredictable times, the client I met with still held hope that someday things could change and a path to a permanent status would appear for her.

The next client I met with, and will meet with again in a few weeks, is renewing her green card. Even simple forms like these renewals can open up doors for USCIS to scrutinize an applicant's past, and each form's submission comes with warnings of the risks to noncitizens that may be associated with the applicant. In the face of all of this, the client was still excited at the prospect of applying for citizenship in a few more years.

Another client I'm working with is applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for her children. Although it puts her at risk, she still chose to move forward with the applications for her children because it's worth it for her kids to have a chance at a more stable life here in the US. She is completely selfless, incredibly caring, and devoted to her children.

Hope that things will get better and more paths (or more forgiving regulations) will appear is a common sentiment around the office, shared during staff meetings and by emails sharing small wins. It's important to stay optimistic in order to continue offering stabilizing and necessary legal advice and services for the clients to come to us.



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I have been shocked at the impact of a simple intake interview on clients: once uncertain energy becomes calm as soon as their burning questions are answered. Conversing, explaining, and planning the next steps for a client is incredibly rewarding, and even more so are the heart-felt thanks I receive as I say goodbye. Just Neighbors offers incredible services from the most attentive and knowledgeable team, and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity to learn more from my supervisors about successful client management skills and to participate in the upcoming clinic for community members.

So far, I've learned so much about immigration law and have seen first-hand the impact of just a single phone call on the wellbeing of a client. I'm looking forward to continue learning more for the rest of the summer, and for meeting and offering support to many more clients to come.

Update 2: Since June 8th, I have been exposed to even more client interactions, all of which have deeply moved me and cemented my interest in immigration practice. I have been able to oversee almost all aspects of a U-Visa adjustment of status, which has been incredibly rewarding and informative. Once someone has a U-Visa, they must wait four years to adjust status to a legal permanent resident. That four-year window is a hard deadline, but after an application is sent to USCIS it can take over a decade to be adjudicated. In the face of waiting even longer for more stability, my client is incredibly resilient, kind, and patient. I learned from her to have faith in the system, even when it seems to be crumbling before our eyes.

What most stands out to me is that there are even more people eligible for our services, and for other low-income immigration law providers, which will either never know of their eligibility because of a lack of information, or who are unable to find relief because of the incredibly strict evidence requirements that are being rolled out (especially in cases involving domestic violence). I know that I don't have physical documentation of many aspects of my life, but USCIS requires immigrants to, first, know about the requirements for the relief they are applying for, and second, to actually maintain documents for years while they wait for the next step in the process. While I am able to tell our clients what they need to track down, sometimes the documents are at a different court, or are with a family member who moved, or were destroyed by water, or were simply misplaced. When I become frustrated at my inability to help, I remember my U-Visa client continues to have faith in the system. Somehow, someday, something will work out.

I also participated in a clinic put on by Just Neighbors in a church in Falls Church, where there was a concurrent free medical clinic. The purpose was to be a resource for members of the community who had questions, whether they were specific to a certain pending case or avenue for relief or not. I was amazed at the turnout. While we did fill out intake forms for some potential new clients, most of the people who showed up had simple questions and just needed



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someone trustworthy to ask. There is another clinic this week I am looking forward to attending so that I can gain more exposure to talking to clients and learning what sorts of information about the immigration process in general will be useful to have on hand.

Update 3: Since June 22, I have participated in another clinic and met with more clients. At the clinic, I met my first refugees and had a conversation about their experiences with the US immigration system. Throughout the appointment, like most other clients I've spoken with, they expressed their gratitude for our help and left the clinic hopeful for the future.

I was also able to meet with a family whose young daughter was the victim of a crime which qualified them for a U-Visa. Even through the process of rereading their declarations about the terrible event, they were in good spirits and also hopeful that the future would be brighter for their whole family.

As I observed a Master Calendar Hearing, I smiled as the Immigration Judge terminated deportation proceedings for two brothers who had been granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Usually, the Immigration Judge will continue the proceedings because Special Immigrant Juvenile Status is "speculative" due to the long wait for a visa. Although they weren't clients of Just Neighbors, the small victory gave me joy.

I finished working with a client on her declaration for her children's Special Immigrant Juvenile Status case. After four hour-long phone calls, we completed the document together. Reading all that had happened to her family was very difficult for her and for me, but it also served as a reminder for her that she had already overcome so much in her life, and that she was at a turning point: her and her family's life could only get better from here.

In the weeks that come, I am looking forward to seeing more hope on my clients' faces and internalizing that feeling myself.

Update 4: I continue to be amazed at both my clients' and my supervisors' resiliency. Not only has every client I met with - without fail - thanked me profusely for taking the time to speak with them and address their concerns while filling out paperwork, but they also are incredibly more optimistic than I am about the future of legal representation for immigrants in the US. My supervisors, too, are optimistic that better times are just around the corner. This is why I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to engage with the community I hope to serve in the near future: I have even more passion for this line of work now that I know that there are people who will be relying on me to aid them in navigating the confusing US immigration system.



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Since my last update, I've continued meeting with clients, conducting intakes with new clients, and (nearly) finalized two summer research projects. I've kept up with a client who is applying to adjust status from that of a U-Visa derivative through email as we try to compile documents from every month of the last four years to prove her physical presence for the required amount of time. Each time we communicate, she adds in an emoji or phrase of good luck and thanks. Her favored sign off is " 🙏🌟," which never fails to bring a smile to my face.

I have also been lucky enough to work on three naturalization applications for a father and two of his children. They have been clients at Just Neighbors for the last ten years - my supervisor was their lawyer 10 years ago when they were granted asylum, then when they applied to adjust their status to permanent legal resident, and now for their naturalization petitions. Although I am only getting involved near the end of their immigration journey, their resilience throughout the years long process was tangible. When we informed them that they'd have to likely wait 8 months to a year before their applications were adjudicated, they mused together that the wait isn't that long, and surely worth it.

In keeping with the theme of good news, I also had the opportunity to serve as an interpreter for an adjustment of status interview for a family-based petition. I am lucky to have had an easy and pleasant introduction to USCIS officers. During an adjustment of status interview, there is a variety of admissibility questions that an officer may ask, such as prior involvement in activities related to smuggling, terrorism, or other crimes, which means the interview's length is always uncertain. However, my client's interview was over after just a few questions, and the officer even approved the application at the end of the interview - normally, officers will let the applicant know that a decision will be sent out and delivered within a few weeks. My client and I were ecstatic that she had been approved with no problem, especially given that USCIS had circulated a memo earlier in the summer directing officers to be more stringent about granting adjustment of status from within the US and to instead favor consular processing. All that to say, although it was a small victory of permanent legal status for one person, the moment encapsulated the feeling of hope I've been nurturing all summer that someday - perhaps even now - things can get better.

Final Reflection: I never considered myself a pessimistic person, but I find myself focusing even harder on the little (and big!) wins than the potential losses these days. This summer, I have had a hand in three research projects, a DACA renewal, a U-Visa adjustment of status application, a SIJ case in Maryland, a U-Visa case in Maryland and Virginia, three naturalization applications, and permanent resident card renewal. Throughout each project and every week, I was reminded that celebrating successes makes it easier to fight through the challenges and keep the faith that the worst will not come to pass.



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In my first week, I was exposed to DACA, which has been in limbo for years. The client I met with was used to the uncertainty and even joked about it. She'd been under DACA status for as long as she could remember and counted herself lucky that she hadn't become eligible for a more permanent form of humanitarian status. Uncertainty, for her, was better than certainty if it came with trauma for her or her family members. This first meeting set the tone for the summer, to let the uncertainty simply be uncertain and enjoy the peace that remains.

Next, I met with a client who needed to renew her permanent resident card (also known as a Green Card). She was quite possibly the sweetest, most softly spoken woman I'd ever met. She was so excited to apply for naturalization in a few years, even as she lamented what she'd been seeing on the news. Our goodbye was particularly extended, in no small part because I simply enjoyed speaking with her and she couldn't possibly let the last words be anything but her "thank you." The application was sent off a week ago after we received the translation of a letter we'd attached as evidence came back, and she will receive her new green card in about 18 months (more or less, depending on how adjudication times change in the next few months).

The most meaningful experience I was exposed to was drafting a client's declaration for her Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) petitions for her children. After hearing her story, I was moved by her strength and perseverance in the face of so much adversity in her home country and her ability to remain hopeful and full of love for her life and family. Across about four meetings, I spoke with her about the circumstances of her ex-partners and how they had treated her young children. Although the facts were appalling and difficult to speak about, she remained clear headed and focused on the outcome: even if she were to experience some vestiges of pain from the past, her kids would be sure to benefit from it because the actions of her ex-partners were so clearly abuse, neglect, and abandonment, which will allow her children to pursue SIJS petitions with USCIS. SIJS status includes a path to citizenship, which she was excited for. She wants stability for her kids, more than anything, and has done everything in her power to make it so. I am so inspired by her and am sure I will remember her resiliency my whole life. Working with her only proved that I am in the right place, and I am looking forward to meeting and supporting others like her for as long as I can.

Another longer project has been a U-Visa adjustment of status. The application's paperwork is straightforward, albeit lengthy due to the multitude of admissibility related questions regarding terrorist activities and the like, but the real reason the application takes so long to prepare is the proof of physical presence. My client has been in the United States since September of 2023, and USCIS's preferred way to prove this fact is to include a document from each month which includes the date, the applicant's address, and the applicant's name. However, finding physical documents from a time where you were in a new place, surrounded by new people, unable to



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work or attend school, and unfamiliar with the language is a tough ask. The client I worked with was a trooper – she went to visit family she'd stayed with, friends she'd texted, and went through her online shopping history to find documentation of each month. We remained in contact through email, which never failed to brighten my day. I'd ask if she'd find anything else, and she would reply with exactly who she'd talked to about what, and if there were any trails she was following up on. She also never failed to wish me good luck with my day or apologize for any inconvenience she may have caused. These applications, too, take a long time to process, but I will keep her in my mind and hope that only good things come to her.

The two U-Visa cases I assisted on were nothing short of tragic. In one case, a client's son had been killed and in another, their daughter sexually assaulted. I learned that the most difficult part of U-Visa cases (which was not a problem in these instances, thankfully) was finding a law enforcement agency willing to sign off on the form required by USCIS, I-918B. While there are usually established liaisons at agencies who know how to properly complete the form, sometimes a region or county has fallen through the cracks or changed policies, making it harder to find a certifier. After form I-918B has been signed, the U-Visa application must be submitted within 6 months. That means any evidence, including letters of support, evidence of cooperation or assistance with the investigation or prosecution, and medical or mental health expert testimony must be compiled within a relatively short window. My responsibility for both these cases was to read back the statements of the applicants and ensure they were correct, as well as to call various offices to ask if they had any documentation that could aid the applications. Both families were exceedingly thankful that Just Neighbors had taken on their cases and were obviously still struggling with grief. I am thankful that I had an opportunity to contribute to their cases, even if just for a moment, because I was exposed to challenges, I should expect when I practice someday and introduced me to strategies for working with clients who are survivors.

My research projects – although in themselves involved no client-communication – were perhaps the most robust way I contributed to Just Neighbors. As a law student, I have access to case-searching software (Westlaw and Lexis) which allows me to view recent cases from both federal circuit courts and administrative courts, such as the BIA and EOIR. My first project was a survey of the state of asylum law with regards to claims based on a particular social group. JustNeighbors had a client with a particular social group imputed to him, and the case law in the 4th Circuit had just clarified in 2026 that imputed particular social group claims are cognizable. I first started with a description of asylum, then began applying the standards to the client's facts. The imputed group was one based on employment, which is generally not cognizable, however the 6th Circuit had also recently granted asylum to a former nurse based on her particular social group of former nurses. It was a great legal writing exercise for me, and I've been told that it will be helpful in the course of briefing both this client's and others' asylum claims, at least until



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the standard changes again. My next project was about the stop-time rule and hardship analysis that came with an application for cancellation of removal. Like the asylum memo, it was helpful for my supervisor on this project to get the lay of the land with recent cases in the 4th Circuit and see how the BIA has construed "exceptional and extremely unusual hardship." With an updated memo on the BIA and 4th Circuit's current standards for cancellation of removal, my supervisor for this project said I had greatly improved her understanding of the application and gave her ideas for strategies for the clients' upcoming hearings. Finally, I took part in compiling cases on the standards for neglect, abandonment, and abuse in Maryland for the purposes of SIJS petitions. Just Neighbors has expanded their SIJS practice in Maryland and needed case-law references to refer to in filings. Although the research was admittedly less personally fulfilling as speaking directly to clients, I am proud that my work this summer will continue impacting future clients of Just Neighbors positively.

All in all, I could not have dreamed of a better summer internship. I was already concretely set in my path towards immigration law, and these experiences have further cemented it. Through the learning curve of the strangely numbered forms, to meeting with my first client, to saying goodbye to my last, each and every moment has given me hope and strength to continue pursuing immigration law to support and aid those who need me. I am supremely excited for what the future holds, and I cannot wait to return to this line of work in the near future.