

Dan Ruben

Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Thank you, and everyone at Equal Justice America for contributing to my funding this summer so that I could volunteer full time for an organization that I am honored to have worked for. This summer I refined my advocacy skills while working as a Law Clerk for the Eviction Defense Collaborative (“EDC”) in San Francisco, California. I worked with a team of dedicated attorneys and volunteers to assist *pro per* defendants in responding to, and defending against, eviction lawsuits within the City and County of San Francisco. San Francisco is in the midst of an undeniable housing crisis which brings thousands of people to the EDC’s clinic every year. The need for, and importance of EDC’s work cannot be overstated. The EDC’s main goal is to ensure that people do not end up homeless, in doing so, the EDC fights an uphill battle every day. My main goal while working at the EDC was to ensure that every client that I spoke to felt heard and important when entrusting me with very personal and sensitive information.

As a Law Clerk, a lot of my time was spent conducting client intake interviews with people from all over the city facing a variety of different problems under the overall umbrella of eviction. During intakes, I was tasked with facilitating efficient interviews in a manner that would respect each individual client’s unique, fact-specific situation. This interviewing experience taught me how to be able to empathize with my clients, gather facts, and to issue spot all simultaneously. I learned that I could do all three things with the same level of attention and did not need to decide which task to prioritize. The majority of the client’s names and faces may fade, but I will never forget their stories. The last day of my summer employment with the EDC, I had the saddest case that I had all summer. I felt powerless, and drained, because there was absolutely nothing that the EDC could do for this person but refer him to another agency that

may or may not be able to do something. While challenging to end on such a melancholy note, it strengthened my resolve to return to the EDC to volunteer in the future.

The most important thing that I learned from my time at the EDC this summer was to celebrate small victories. Every day I saw small victories and I enjoyed them all; from a client that I was worried would not come back returning during the scheduled time with the requested paperwork to a client's overdue answer being completed and filed prior to the other side's filing of a default judgment. These were the small victories that served to overshadow even the saddest of cases. But I did not learn of favorite victory until a couple weeks after my internship ended, when I read on the EDC's website that a client I had worked with over the summer had won his case and would be able to stay in his home. This client, a man who came off as more concerned with how the EDC staff was feeling than his own troubles, is an elementary school teacher who was facing his landlord's fourth attempt to evict him in less than one year. This client, because of the EDC, is not homeless.

Kaleigh Aucoin

Law School: UC Hastings

Legal Services Organization: Eviction Defense Collaborative

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