



Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



Name: Nicole Mary Ang

Law School: Cornell Law School

EJA Fellowship: New York Legal Assistance Group –
Matrimonial and Family Law Unit

Entry 1: Week of 6/11/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Two weeks ago, I began my summer internship in the Family Law Unit of the New York Legal Assistance Group, a nonprofit organization here in Manhattan. Because this is an unpaid internship, I am privileged to be receiving funding from Equal Justice America. At NYLAG, we serve low-income New Yorkers who have been victims of domestic violence, and provide civil legal services that enable them to find safety and gain financial independence. Working with this particular demographic has been something that I have wanted for close to a decade now; knowing that every bit of work I do goes to changing someone's life for the better is so rewarding, and I could not ask for a better opportunity. I will be posting several updates throughout the summer, and while sharing what I've done is exciting, I would also like to take this opportunity to raise awareness about domestic violence issues and the intersections that play into the structural constraints these survivors face. Today, I'd like to highlight a key misconception surrounding domestic violence: **it doesn't always leave visible scars**. Often, most people think of physical violence when they think of domestic violence (see, e.g., Rihanna), but there are many ways in which domestic violence can surface. It is a pattern of control that can manifest through, for example, financial restrictions, emotional denigration, verbal threats, and the use of institutions like the court and immigration systems to instill fear and retain power. There is no one clear way to "spot" a victim. It is important to listen, and to let survivors tell their own stories.

Entry 2: Week of 6/25/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

In America, the only class of people who cannot be deported are U.S. Citizens. Yes, even legal permanent residents (otherwise known as green card holders) do not hold a one-and-done, one-way ticket into this country, because there often are conditions attached to the green cards and must be renewed periodically. Between the travel bans (executive orders), tweets, ICE, detention centers, jacket designs, and now *Trump v. Hawaii* (and, tangentially, *Korematsu*), it is very easy to become so disparaged and want to tune everything out. But not everyone has the privilege of ignoring these problems. For some, their world has already come crashing down with the slam of a metal gate, with the cries of their children, with the sound of metal on metal as they are cuffed and led away. For others, it is impossible to not live in a heightened state of alert and anxiety about their safety in this country (yes, even those who have valid status.)

As I mentioned in my previous update, immigration status is used as a means of intimidation and control in domestic violence situations. Often, abusers will threaten to call the police and report any invalid or undocumented status of the abused party. Often, those who are abused may not be aware of any remedies they may seek out, such as U visas (for crime victims), T visas (for victims of human trafficking), and Battered Spouse Waivers (to remove conditions on their green cards.) Such threats may be accompanied by the presence of a weapon in the home, sometimes brandished while those threats are made, or accompanied by physical or sexual abuse. Sometimes, the opportunity to attain valid immigration status is used like a "carrot" to convince and compel victims to stay with their abusers and comply with their demands (e.g. sex, children, money), allowing the abuser to retain power and control over the abused by never actually following through on their promises.



While the number of immigrants who require legal services may appear to be rising, the number of immigrants actually coming forward to ask the courts for help and protection has decreased. This is because of the very real fear that ICE agents will arrest them once their status has been put on the record. Indeed, this is something that some of my colleagues have witnessed first hand. However, this does not mean that we should stop looking to help. Equal Justice America funds law students who provide a vast array of legal services across many different domains. At NYLAG, the Immigration Protection Unit works to serve this high-need community. As someone in the Family Law Unit, I get to work on U Visa and Battered Spouse Waiver applications.

Entry 3: Week of 7/9/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Can't believe I'm already more than halfway through my summer internship!

Domestic violence-related information tidbit #3: not all orders of protection are made equal. Orders of protection can be issued in Family Court, Criminal Court, or Supreme Court, and each are acquired through different processes. The degree of restraint in these orders also vary, from ordering that a party refrain from committing certain actions against the protected party/parties, to excluding a party from a home and ordering that s/he fully stay away from the protected party/parties.

Last Thursday, I got to spend the entire day at the Kings Family Court in Brooklyn as part of the [Courtroom Advocates Project](#) with other interns from the Family Law Unit at the [New York Legal Assistance Group \(NYLAG\)](#). In this project, we assist members of the public who have come into family court without an attorney and are seeking to obtain an order of protection. Because it was the day after the Fourth of July, we did not expect to see a lot of people in the courthouse. However, the holidays can be a tense time for those who live in households with domestic violence in terms of safety planning, heightened stress from traveling/organizing family visits, and the potential for increased drug and alcohol use, all of which can place both adults and children in heightened danger.

On this day, I helped a young girl who had been physically assaulted by her boyfriend acquire an order of protection for herself. We spent the morning interviewing her and drafting a Family Offense Petition on her behalf, and appeared in front of a judge that very afternoon as Student Advocates. By the end of the afternoon, her aggressor could no longer approach her or the places she frequents. Knowing that I leave work each day having made a direct impact on someone's life is a feeling that I hope I continue to experience as I advance my legal career. Thank you to those who have been liking and sharing my posts, engaging in discussions, and who have donated to this summer's EJA campaign! Your support truly means a lot to me. Hope everyone has a great week ahead!

Entry 4: Week of 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

"Have you ever felt uncomfortable in your physical or sexual relationship with _____?"

"Has _____ ever restricted your access to money, friends, or family?"

"How?"

"Where?"

"When?"

"How many times?"

"Were any of your children present?"

Over the past ten weeks, I have had to ask questions like these more times than I can count. Asking people to open up to a complete stranger just so that I can record the first, worst, and most recent instances of domestic violence hasn't always been easy, and some stories hit harder than others. This summer has taught me so much not only about the law, but about human dignity, respect, compassion, and humility.

Today may be my last day at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), but the skills I've acquired will continue to follow me as I continue to grow and learn, and I hope to be able to continue engaging in discussions around these issues, and to be able to continue helping these communities in some way shape or form. Thank you so much to everyone who donated to my campaign, liked my posts, and supported me throughout this summer. Thank you also to Equal Justice America for this fellowship. All of your support means so much to me, and I will always be grateful.

August 21, 2018

Kate Toman
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Ms. Toman,

My name is Tuozhi Lorna Zhen and I am a supervising attorney with the New York Legal Assistance Group's Matrimonial and Family Law Unit ("FLU"). This past summer, from May through August, I was Nicole Ang's supervising attorney.

FLU represents domestic violence survivors in family and matrimonial litigation in the Supreme Court and Family Courts in New York City in family offense, custody and visitation, child support, spousal support, and matrimonial actions. We also represent clients in domestic violence based immigration applications, such as VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) petition, Battered Spouse Waiver applications, and U-Visa applications, as well as coordinate with law enforcement and District Attorneys with any ongoing criminal actions in which our clients are complaining witnesses. Nicole, like the rest of our summer interns, was tasked with interviewing clients, drafting petitions and applications, conducting legal research, and providing litigation support to ongoing court cases.

Nicole was a welcome addition to our unit. She prepared two uncontested divorce actions during her time at FLU and also provided valuable litigation support work. She drafted interrogatories and discovery demands, and prepared legal memoranda on a variety of issues. Nicole showed a real interest in litigation work, and excelled at our mock trial at the end of the summer. She was diligent, open to feedback, and had a great attitude about her work. She also demonstrated great sensitivity and empathy working with our clients who are all survivors of trauma.

It was a pleasure having Nicole intern with us this summer. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at tlzhen@nylag.org or by phone at 212-613-5074.

Sincerely,



Tuozhi Lorna Zhen, Esq.
Supervising Attorney
Matrimonial and Family Law Unit