

Name of host organization: Community Activism Law Alliance

Name of supervisor and contact information: Bindhu Vijayan, bindhu@calachicago.org

Work schedule and total number of hours worked: M-F 10am-6pm; 400 hours

During my time at Community Activism Law Alliance (CALA), I was able to gain knowledge about the immigration system, procedures and laws. During my ten weeks at CALA I was given eight clients each of which had unique immigration issues. I guided two clients through U-visa applications because they were victims of crimes in the United States. I was able to file these U-visa claims with Department of Homeland Security after working closely with the clients over the ten weeks. I was also given two asylum cases both of which needed briefs written to plead their cases to the court. Each had a unique story but both were fleeing their home countries because of fear of persecution. Both had been targeted because of their minority ethnicity and had caused them to be threatened and beaten by people in power. I was able to meet with these clients and hear their stories, and both have pending asylum petitions and are awaiting their interview with United States Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). I also helped complete an adjustment of status petition for a mother of five who had lived in the United States for over 20 years. She was able to file her adjustment of status to change her immigration status from Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) to naturalized citizen based on her 21-year old U.S. citizen child. I worked closely with the mother and her children in the preparation of this filing and was able to send it to the Department of Homeland Security before the end of my internship.

On Mondays, I traveled to Mano a Mano in Lake County to conduct intake and follow-up appointments with my clients. This proved to be the most exciting and most challenging part of the summer. I loved working with the clients and the folks at Mano a Mano throughout my ten weeks. However, there were many clients who we had to turn away because the law doesn't allow everyone to naturalize or gain immigration status. Watching folks break down because they feel like they have no hope, and no legal answers was devastating for me. This is always the hardest part of public interest work because you cannot help everyone, but it never gets any easier telling someone no.

In sum, I greatly enjoyed my summer working with Bindhu, so much so that I decided to stay on as a fall extern this year. I am now much more familiar with immigration law and procedures and am still learning some of the complexities. CALA is an awesome place to work because you really feel like a part of a family. It really is a community environment. The attorneys are incredibly kind and helpful, and I always felt I had a manageable caseload. I would most certainly recommend this internship to other students.