



Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



Name: Karissa Phelps

Law School: Temple Beasley School of Law

EJA Fellowship: Support Center for Child Advocates

Entry 1: Week of 6/11/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Over the past month, I've been learning to navigate the ropes of the dependency court system in Philadelphia through my internship with the Support Center for Child Advocates. It has been really neat to witness the work of the Child Advocates and everyone involved to support children and families in the child welfare system.

Entry 2: Week of 6/25/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

I've gotten to meet many more foster parents through my work with the Support Center for Child Advocates. I've really enjoyed supporting and encouraging them in the hard work they do! Shout out to anyone fostering or considering fostering -- Thanks for providing a safe, loving space for a child whose world has been turned upside-down.

Entry 3: Week of 7/9/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

This week I am working on researching, writing, and presenting on the ability of trial courts to allow a child victim to testify outside of the presence of the defendant if the judge finds testifying in front of the defendant or open court would cause the child serious emotional distress. Our hope is to equip social workers and attorneys to support Philadelphia's prosecutors to push for the contemporaneous testimony of child victims and reduce the traumatizing impact on children of testifying about the crimes committed against them.

Equal Justice America makes it possible for me, and students like me, to make a meaningful impact while juggling hectic schedules, student loans, and passion for justice.



Entry 4: Week of 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Only one month left at the Support Center for Child Advocates. I am so grateful for the encouraging, supportive atmosphere I've been able to learn and grow in. What has struck me the most has been the incredible power the government has to identify unsafe children and remove them from their home. It is a power that must be used with great discretion, meanwhile there are a lot of uncertainties as no one has a crystal ball, and we all want children to be safe and healthy. The work parents, DHS investigators, CUA workers, Child Advocates, ACS attorneys, parents' attorneys, judges and everyone else involved in these cases is crucial to each child and parent's life and wellbeing. Grants like [Equal Justice America](#) make it possible for young attorneys to get into this work and I am so grateful I have had this opportunity this summer to make an impact in the lives of some families.



Equal Justice America
13540 E Boundary Rd, Ste 204
Building II
Midlothian, VA 23112-3943

August 16, 2018

Dear Equal Justice America:

This summer Karissa Phelps interned with us at the Support Center for Child Advocates. She worked closely with our social workers, staff attorneys, and volunteer attorneys throughout the summer in our work with children involved in the child welfare system in Philadelphia, PA.

Karissa shared a caseload with myself and one of our supervisors and contributed in a variety of ways to our work. Karissa coordinated with DHS workers, social workers, attorneys, school personnel, doctors and parents to advocate for the interests of foster children in a variety of settings. She contributed to the successful reunification of a client this summer with his biological mother after years of being in foster care and advocated for another child to move from a general foster home to the kinship home of her grandmother. She assisted in obtaining vital documents for a teen client to get a job, in getting the client into an alternative school setting for his academic success, and connecting him to key resources for older foster youth.

Karissa advocated for appropriate services for a family of five siblings facing issues of truancy and domestic violence. She supported volunteer and staff attorneys in permanency hearings and helped prepare witness testimony for a contested Termination of Parental Rights hearing. At the end of the summer, she researched and trained social workers on testimony by contemporaneous alternative method and how to advocate for its use in criminal trials where our client is a child victim or witness.

Thank you for your support of her this summer and supporting students like her to pursue careers in social justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracey Thomasey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Tracey Thomasey
Director of Social Work

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