



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Allison Hart
Law School: Albany Law School
Fellowship: Sylvia Rivera Law Project

Entry 1:

For those of you who don't know, this summer I'm interning at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project as an Equal Justice America fellow. Yay!

Since I've arrived at SRLP I've been working to help transgender clients attain corrected birth certificates and other identification after they've legally changed their names. I can easily see how the legal barriers to self-determination in New York can seem insurmountable, from the legal fees to forms and court appearances. The requirement of publication is a particularly daunting barrier. In New York, unless the judge waives the requirement, anyone changing their name has to publish a notice of name change in a newspaper, which can put trans people at risk for violence.

Through my work with SRLP I hope to further expand my knowledge of the issues facing low-income transgender people and to in turn become a better advocate by learning from my clients.

Entry 2:

With pride month behind us, I'd like to use this update as a way to highlight how my internship at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project is making me reflect on the notion of queer community.

SRLP is a unique legal services nonprofit in that a key tenet of the organization is to foster community with those who access SRLP's services. Community organizing and advocacy are core tenets of the organization in addition to the provision of legal help, and all advocacy is heavily informed by the opinions, ideas, and experiences of transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people.



The way that SRLP achieves this is by fostering a community of "members" within the organization. Anyone who accesses services from SRLP is encouraged to attend membership meetings and make their voice heard. This way, SRLP provides a space for TGNCI people to have real influence in the advocacy efforts of the organization.

It has been an eye-opening and endlessly interesting experience for me to learn from those I have met so far, many of whom have been fighting for trans rights for decades. I have so much to learn from them and I look forward to spending more time in this space!

Entry 3:

One of the biggest joys of working at SRLP was interacting with clients. At the beginning of the summer, I was very shy and nervous about meeting with clients one on one. I hadn't had much experience working directly with clients before, and I was afraid I would make an irrevocable mistake or disappoint them in some way. But, of course, my fears were unwarranted! Being able to interact with those I was serving helped me to become a more empathetic and understanding legal professional. No case is successful without open communication between client and provider. It's important to focus on the job at hand, for sure, but listening to your client and understanding their point of view is essential.

Entry 4:

As I reflect on my time at SRLP, I am incredibly thankful for the experiences it afforded me. One of the things that made the biggest impact was the opportunity to interact with clients one on one. Whether we were going over the information on a name change petition, signing forms, or discussing the overall process of self-determination, I always learned from and enjoyed talking to the people who came to SRLP. Conquering fear is a huge part of learning to be an effective lawyer, in my experience, and as someone with a lot of social anxiety, this was a particularly big hurdle. I am now more confident in my understanding of the law, my ability to communicate with clients, and my ability to advocate for them in a respectful and effective manner.