



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Ryan Durazo

Law School: American University Washington College of Law

Fellowship: Ayuda-Immigration Intern

Entry 1:

Over the next few months, I'll be sharing my experiences as an Equal Justice America Fellow working with Ayuda, an incredible non-profit that provides legal, social and language services to immigrants in the DMV area. It's been fantastic to find a non-profit with a strong focus on work-life balance (almost all the staff are parents of young kids!) and one that's working to bring into the practice those who have a direct stake in the wellbeing of the immigrant community.

Moreover, I can't even begin to explain how talented and committed the other interns are. I doubt Ayuda and organizations like it could meet their goal of recruiting dedicated legal interns who have a stake in serving the immigrant community without fellowships like Equal Justice America.

Entry 2:

My time with Ayuda has definitely taught me the importance of a wholistic approach to legal services. A confidential conversation with an attorney may be the first time a client is willing to share their deeply personal struggles, whether it be a traumatic event that forced them to leave their home country or an obstacle to meeting their basic needs here in the U.S. Ayuda really understands that legal status can't solve every problem, and I've seen what an amazing job they do at offering clients social services.

The unpaid nature of legal internships limits who can participate in public interest law, and Equal Justice America works to provide fellowships to ensure experiences like the one I've had this summer are accessible to all.



Entry 3:

It's hard to believe today's my last day at Ayuda! My biggest takeaway from the summer: more than anything, an effective immigration attorney needs to understand how people work. More times than I can count, I've seen a client tell an Ayuda attorney a sanitized version of their story, only for the attorney to intuit that something was wrong and dig deeper to get the details that transformed an impossible case into a viable one.

Trauma is omnipresent in the work immigration attorneys do; it's impossible to be an advocate without a strong understanding of how to navigate it. And the staff at Ayuda are skilled at catching trauma in clients most would overlook because of gender and cultural expectations; never have I met advocates so good at getting teenage boys to open up and talk!

Entry 4

For my last post as Equal Justice America Fellow, I've been reflecting on my time at Ayuda and the mission of Equal Justice America: to address systemic barriers to legal services. As incredible as the work Ayuda does is, they can only serve a fraction of the need for affordable services in Maryland, DC, and Virginia. However, it's so important to remember, that this need for complex and costly immigration services wasn't always there: every new barrier to climb, every fee charged, every RFE, every deportation proceeding, is the result of a conscious policy decision. And as the demand for services continues to grow, there are only really two options: fund more orgs like Ayuda to bridge the gap, or to change policy to shrink the size of that gap in the first place.

Please consider donating to Equal Justice America today so that the next generation of law students can continue to have access to summer fellowships like mine.