



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Caitlyn Garcia

Law School: Brooklyn Law School

Fellowship: Brooklyn Defender Services,
Family Defense Practice

Entry 1:

For the past two weeks, I have been interning at Brooklyn Defender Services in the Family Defense Practice. I have attended invaluable trainings on the family court system, Article 10 abuse and neglect petitions, and how to best advocate for parents and families experiencing family separation. During intake, I observed how BDS' collaborative model provides families with both legal advice and social work assistance. I am currently advocating for my client's unsupervised visitation with her two-year-old daughter. My client is fully engaged in her mental health services, and I believe that unsupervised visits will move them one step closer to reunification. While family court aims to be rehabilitative, it often feels as punitive as our criminal (in)justice system. My BDS supervisors continue to bring humanity back into this work. I am grateful to be an Equal Justice America Fellow and for the opportunity to intern at BDS.

Entry 2:

As I continue interning at Brooklyn Defender Services - Family Defense Practice, I am reminded of the importance of client-centered advocacy each and every day. Our clients are the experts on their lives, and we must allow their voices to be heard. This week, we participated in a mock intake where we represented clients and made the most effective arguments on their behalf. I am excited to use these skills next week when arguing for my client on the record before a judge. Yesterday I observed a powerful summation by my supervisor in a visitation hearing in support of granting visitation between a father and his children. It reminded me that parents and children both have a fundamental right to time with one another, and we must not forget to explore all opportunities for engagement including therapeutic visits and supervised visits. It is important not to dwell on past incidents but rather to help families move forward.



Entry 3:

This summer is flying by! I cannot believe that I only have 3 weeks left of my internship with Brooklyn Defender Services - Family Defense Practice.

I have been working on an emergency hearing for my client, a single mother with five children. ACS is alleging concerns about the cleanliness of my client's home as well as medical neglect. My client has addressed these concerns. I cannot help to think that if she was not poor and in a shelter, she would not be in this system. How can we continue punishing the impoverished?

Another one of my client's cases just recently settled on the day that fact finding (trial) was set to commence. Our client was so emotional, most likely a combination of joy and frustration. I am glad that the case settled, but it should have been over much, much sooner. She was able to stay strong through it all.

Our clients have shown tremendous strength and poise while under intense scrutiny. They continue to inspire me to do this work.

Entry 4:

I wanted to thank Brooklyn Defender Services - Family Defense Practice for an amazing summer and hands-on learning experience! I also wanted to mention one highlight from this summer that will remain with me forever:

Last Friday my supervisor and I were able to prevent the removal of five young children into foster care. As we patiently waited for the judge's decision on an emergency hearing that started in June (mentioned in my previous post), I could not help but to be anxious. We had worked so hard to show the judge exactly what we saw: a single mother doing her absolute best to raise five children. I am beyond happy for this family and grateful to have been able to keep them together. Let us always remember the importance of family and avoid the trauma of separation when possible.