



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:

Name: Max Spivak

Law School: DePaul University College of Law

Fellowship: DNA-People's Legal Services, Inc.

Entry 1:

I am pleased that Equal Justice America agreed to provide funding for my time here at DNA-People's Legal Services in Window Rock/Fort Defiance, Arizona, the administrative capital of Navajo Nation. DNA is an acronym for the Navajo phrase *Dinébe'iiná Nábiilna be Agha'diit'abii*, which translates to "attorneys who work for the revitalization of The People." With offices, attorneys, and advocates working across Navajo Nation and the Hopi and Jicarilla Apache Nations, DNA provides free civil legal services to low-income native American clients who otherwise could not afford attorneys. Over the past two weeks, I have worked mainly on cases in which agencies and retailers target Navajo individuals with predatory interest rates, harassment, or administrative entanglements. I visited Crownpoint, New Mexico's Family and District Court for Eastern Navajo Agency client intake, and recently assisted in DNA's work with Navajo Nation's Division of Aging and Long-Term Care Support for a community engagement day focusing on elder conservatorship, elder abuse, probate, and consumer issues. Today I am attending New Mexico Legal Aid's legal fair at the McKinley County-Gallup Eleventh Judicial District Court for local residents to receive legal advice from attorneys and advocates. If you are further interested in the work I am doing or about Navajo Nation, in particular, please reach out! This is powerful country, and I am honored to be here and lend a hand this summer.

Entry 2:

I am pleased that Equal Justice America agreed to provide funding for my time at DNA-People's Legal Services in Window Rock/Fort Defiance, Arizona, the administrative capital of Navajo Nation. I have been privileged to serve DNA in a wide-reaching capacity, notably with in-depth research into the Navajo Nation Code; the laws of New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah; and with assisting clients with family matters, consumer exploitation, land rights, and administrative inconsistencies. I traveled to the Navajo Nation Courts at the Ramah Judicial District and To'hajilee Judicial District, two non-contiguous communities in New Mexico under Navajo jurisdiction, for local client outreach and intake. I have learned some Diné (Navajo) words, and I am honored to have some Diné life ways shared with me.



Diné Pride is today and tomorrow, and it is considered the largest indigenous Pride celebration. With this, I also want to touch briefly on the historic and current epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in the United States and Canada. Canada conducted an almost three-year-long independent inquiry into the pervasive and heartbreaking issue, and they recently released a 1,200-page report unabashedly calling it a settler-colonial “genocide.” With harrowing statistics, well-supported epistemologies, and the proliferating term, “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women,” this genocide also disproportionately affects the 2SLGBTQIAP community, and that cannot be overlooked. The report, “represents...an extraordinary act of truth-telling and national reckoning involving at least 2,380 participants, almost 1,500 survivor and family member testimonials, and 24 public hearings.” I am blessed to harness my passions and put them into practice in legal aid, and I am excited to continue learning and lending a hand in the upcoming weeks.

Entry 3:

I am pleased that Equal Justice America agreed to provide funding for my time at DNA-People’s Legal Services in Window Rock/Fort Defiance, Arizona, the administrative capital of Navajo Nation. My work with DNA has taken me across Navajo Nation, the country’s largest federally-recognized tribal land, and this past Tuesday I visited DNA’s office on the Hopi Tribe’s reservation in Keams Canyon, Arizona. The Hopi reservation is fully surrounded by Navajo Nation, and it is a beautiful area consisting of three mesas and 12 villages. There, I visited the Hopi Tribal Court and met with Chief Judge Karen Pennington and Judge Delfred Leslie. I am assisting the Hopi Tribal Court in their preliminary stages of developing a Veterans Treatment Court to better serve former and active military members of the Hopi community. I recommend checking out this link for a very brief overview of veterans treatment courts, a crucial progressive and effective model for justice: <https://justiceforvets.org/what-is-a-veterans-treatment-court/>. I will also be working on developing *pro se* forms for guardianship issues for the court and for the villages who each possess their own methods of sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Back at my home office in Window Rock, I continue to work on consumer issues relating to exploitative yo-yo financing, predatory interest rates, and unfair trade practices; family matters involving custody, child guardianship, child support, domestic violence, and establishing paternity; and land disputes around home-site leases and grazing permits in Navajo Nation, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. I have assisted clients with corrections of records and name changes, probate and adult guardianship documents, and my legal writing and research skills have improved with petitions, writs, responses, memos, and letters of all sorts.

Entry 4:

I am pleased that Equal Justice America agreed to provide funding for my time at DNA-People’s Legal Services in Window Rock/Fort Defiance, Arizona, the administrative capital of Navajo Nation. As my legal internship winds down, I have been reflecting on my recent experiences working in legal aid, and I am honored to have



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been welcomed into this new setting with trust and responsibility. I learned more than I could ever have imagined with my large case load and extensive client involvement, and my work afforded me new skills and strategies for approaching complex legal issues and sensitive client matters. My passions for tribal law, legal aid, and assisting those who need it most are stronger, and I am excited to see where my future takes me. It has been an immense privilege to study Navajo Nation and Hopi case history and laws, and to celebrate the existence and importance of some of the strongest tribal justice systems on this continent, Turtle Island.

I was invited to attend the Little Big Medicine Sundance in the breathtaking forested high-desert of Wheatfields, Arizona. With citizens of the Navajo Nation, Lakota and other Sioux groups, and several other Turtle Island tribes, the week-long sundance encompasses the traditional methods of prayer and healing practices. I was only able to go on the last day when chiefs and elders broke their four-day fast and piercing, other men were pierced, and the final adornment of the tree of life was finished. Everything was intricate, intentional, and truly beautiful. I wish I was able to spend more time there, but with the smell of sage-filled buffalo skulls, the cedar tins and cedar pit constantly burning; the sounds of the sacred songs and drums; feeling the mud and clay on my feet, eagle wings across my face, and talons on my head; and after everyone's warmth and hospitality, I will be forever grateful for the special invitation.

I owe an endless "thank you" to my colleagues and friends that support me with my law school and legal career endeavors, and I look forward to visiting everyone at DNA's Window Rock/Fort Defiance, Chinle, and Farmington offices.