



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:

Name: Ariel Overton

Law School: George Washington University Law School

Fellowship: Tahirih Justice Center-Atlanta

Entry 1:

Over the past few weeks I have been working as a summer intern at Tahirih Justice Center in Atlanta. I have already learned so much about immigration law, about the immigration system in America and in Atlanta, and about direct client representation. The courageous women and girls that Tahirih Justice Center represents are some of the most disadvantaged people being processed through America's justice system. They generally do not speak English, they are not provided attorneys, and they face an ever-changing legal environment in one of the worst immigration court systems. The national average denial rate for asylum requests is 49%. The immigration court in Atlanta denied asylum 98% of the time. While these statistics are daunting, I am glad to have the opportunity to help our clients navigate such an adverse environment. I am proud to be an Equal Justice America Fellow and I will be posting updates such as this one periodically throughout my internship.

Entry 2:

My time at the Tahirih Justice Center has been an amazing learning experience thus far. I have learned so much about immigration law and direct client representation. One of the many great things about Tahirih is that the organization gives its clients both legal and social services. This is absolutely crucial when working with disadvantaged clients. It is very difficult for a person to fully participate in the legal process when they haven't eaten in days or don't have somewhere safe to live. I think that as practitioners and future practitioners of the law it is important to take a moment to consider external factors such as these before getting frustrated if a client is not being as easy to work with as you would like. I am so glad that I have the opportunity to work for an organization that takes such a client centered approach and I look forward to learning even more from the dedicated, compassionate staff at Tahirih.

Entry 3:

During my time at Tahirih, I had the opportunity to sit in on master calendar hearings, observe a merits hearing, and accompany a client to an ICE check-in. The thing that struck me most in all of these institutions is the huge disadvantage that most asylum-seekers face as non-English speakers. While they are afforded interpreters when in court, this system has its disadvantages. What if there is an interpretation error in a crucial part of the



testimony? Does it dilute and de-emotionalize a testimony to have it relayed back in another language by an interpreter? Is it disorienting to have an ICE officer ordering you to do something in a language you don't understand? Is it difficult to have to wait expectantly for the interpreter to translate the judge's ruling on your case? I cannot even imagine what it would feel like to have my future decided in a language that I didn't understand. I am glad that I was able to use my Spanish-speaking abilities to help our clients understand what was happening during their proceedings. I wish that every asylum-seeker was able to receive such services.

Entry 4:

My time at Tahirih taught me so much and gave me so much insight into the often-misunderstood world of immigration/refugee law. After finishing my internship at Tahirih, I attended a human rights law program at Oxford University. There, I was able to use what I learned from my internship to contribute to discussions in my classes filled with students from all over the world. This summer has been filled with amazing opportunities for personal and professional growth and I could not be more grateful to the staff at Tahirih Justice Center and to Equal Justice America for making it all possible.