



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Tamar Anna Alexanian

Law School: University of Michigan

Fellowship: Legal Aid Society - Individual Housing Unit

Entry 1: June 17, 2019

I have just finished my first two weeks working at the Legal Aid Society in the Individual Housing Unit in Harlem. I am living a few blocks away from the office, which has added to my experience. Although I'm new to New York, I already have a sense of the neighborhood that I live in and I get to serve people who live right next to me, quite literally.

My favorite assignment so far has been working with a client to submit public assistance paperwork. It is incredibly frustrating that these applications are so difficult to find and understand. I was glad to help my client, but also frustrated that many people are unaware of these applications and cannot fill them out on their own. I'm looking forward to doing more direct service work in the upcoming weeks.

Entry 2: July 1, 2019

I can't believe I'm rounding the corner of my fourth week at work. I've been spending most of my time doing research and short writing assignments so far. I've realized that I really enjoy doing direct-services work because it helps me remember why I went to law school in the first place. Each week, I get to help screen new clients in housing court. Although it's heartbreaking (hearing how horribly tenants are treated, watching sexism and racism unfold in the courtroom), I also feel most impactful and helpful in those moments. Many of the tenants are looking for someone to share their stories with, and I like being a good listener and also an advice-giver.

I was also surprised by how knowledgeable many clients are about landlord-tenant laws. The attorneys here say that it's because many of our clients have been in housing court before and become familiar with the legal language and defenses. I hope to be able to strike a balance between explaining the convoluted legal process to clients while not speaking condescendingly or assuming clients don't understand things when they do.



Entry 3: July 15, 2019

My favorite (and, in some ways, least favorite) part of each week is doing intake at court. Although these days sometimes feel slow (many people don't show up or don't want legal services or don't qualify in some other way), I really enjoy being able to advocate on behalf of clients. I cannot begin to imagine how difficult and scary it must be to walk into a courthouse; even though I've been through one year of law school, I barely stay afloat myself. I love trying to communicate clearly to our clients, finding the most efficient and effective way to explain the situation to them in a way that is understandable. I love being able to provide access to the law, something that I believe every person should have access to. Many of the landlord's attorneys are rude to our clients; it feels like they are bullies on the playground. One client last week looked at me, motioned toward the landlord's attorney we were working with, and said, "Why is she being so mean to me?" Although I was horrified at how the landlord's attorney screamed and spoke with our client, it felt good to be on our client's side, to act as a buffer in the situation. I have really enjoyed doing direct services work during court days.

Entry 4: July 29, 2019

My final two weeks of my internship are here! I can't believe how quickly it has flown by. Last week I had the opportunity to shadow a new attorney on a case that we were not expecting to go well. Although the case is far from over, we were surprised and delighted when opposing counsel agreed to an adjournment. This will give our client more time to financially prepare and possibly to apply for and receive public assistance. It has been such a pleasure to work with clients and know that I'm making a real impact on their lives through direct service work. I am so excited to pursue this career path in the future.