



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Casey Hemphill

Law School: University of Pittsburgh

Fellowship: KidsVoice

Entry 1:

My first EJA Fellowship Update comes one week after the City of Pittsburgh celebrated PRIDE Month and the first few weeks of serving as a Certified Legal Intern at KidsVoice. As I celebrated my third PRIDE, I thought about the members of the LGBTQ+ community that I have had the privilege of witnessing step up for the most vulnerable in our region, those being the children dependent on the Allegheny County child welfare system that I am fighting for. Particularly, I think fondly upon my experience at Adoption Day at the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas - Family Division, which I have been told is vastly considered the happiest of days at the Courthouse. I attended with several attorneys from KidsVoice and I witnessed the adoption ceremony for a 2-year-old child that KidsVoice had served as the Guardian Ad Litem for since his birth. At this ceremony, this adorable youngster officially got his forever family in his two new moms, after a rough start to life. His new little family had the support of his new aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins in the Courtroom that day. This formation of a forever family was only one of the many inspiring instances where I have had the privilege of witnessing my siblings in the LGBTQ+ give someone else's biological child hope for a better life. What I have seen is the embodiment of the *American Spirit*, and the untold moments of privilege in the form of hope and pride that come from being identified as part of a community that is -not- typically considered to have privilege.

Entry 2:

My second EJA Fellowship journal entry will convey my experience as a volunteer at the Wellness Expo hosted at the 412 Youth Zone in downtown Pittsburgh. My opportunity to volunteer came as a part of my Fellowship with KidsVoice. 55 young people, ranging in age from 13-23 with about ¾ of adolescents being ages 19-23 registered for the event. Further, the young adults overwhelmingly represented former or present clients of KidsVoice who were there because they feel empowered to strive for the best for themselves. Among the professionals and programs available to engage with these young adults at the Expo included: Allies for Health



and Wellbeing, Tobacco Free Allegheny, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Adolescent Medicine, the Bra Ladies, Auberle's Employment Center, Educational Liaisons, and a professional meditation coach. I had the fortune of taking advantage of the programming put on in the process, which allowed me to learn about the projected health effects of the Juul and even try mediation. I was able to take the information I learned and empower the people in my life to live healthier lives, and I was inspired to see so many former and current KidsVoice clients taking initiative to give themselves the best life they can have. I know that the support they have received from KidsVoice in their young lives has been critical to getting these youngsters to this point.

Entry 3:

In my time as an EJA Fellow with KidsVoice, I have experienced the untold benefits of public service, which I am privileged to know. Though, for my third journal entry, I will discuss mental health and emotional regulation in civil service work. After all, intrinsic to serving organizations supported by Equal Justice America is personal sacrifice for the greater good of our communities, states, country and -hopefully- our world. For example, in a single day at my Fellowship, I have gone from working with the Allegheny County Office of Children Youth and Families' Investigators to locate clients that have been missing for months to attending a pre-adoptive home visit with a client exuding hope and warmth as they near being legally adopted into their forever family. This work requires significant emotional control and diligent mental health upkeep to function through the emotional swings of the tasks. Further, it is extremely important to monitor mental health else I wouldn't have the energy to help the next child in need. I have found that daily exercise before work, surrounding myself with people who bring me light and laughter, and maintaining personal goals outside of work are among the tools that significantly help me devote my balanced energy to the vulnerable youngsters that need me, while I am at work.

Entry 4:

Before I took the position with KidsVoice this summer, I was posed with a few offers and someone gave me the advice, "do what will make you a better person and a better lawyer." Taking that piece of advice and trusting my instincts, there was no question what my decision would be. Given the backgrounds of the young people I worked with, some might think that the kids have no choice but to place their trust in the staff attorneys at KidsVoice who were working on their behalf and funded by the County. Although, many of the youngsters I fought for were -at least- slow to award their trust to me or my colleagues. See, these kids are the ones that are used to unkept promises from the people in their lives who they should be able to rely on to provide them with a strong foundation of safety, love, encouragement, and support.

So, I was honored every time a youngster placed their trust in me that I would use my position, power, and abilities to make them stronger. I knew their trust with a certain subtle degree of fear in my gut. I was



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cognizant and cautious that I could not and would not let any of the kids down. I did my best to hear them, see them, believe them, and then take the deepest understanding that I could render of their lives to advocate for their best interests. I know I was instrumental in the progress toward major hallmark events for certain kids, like legal adoption into their forever families. I, initially, measured my success and gratification in my role from achieving progress toward such milestones for many of the kids. Yet, what I came to realize is that the greatest privilege and success came through those moments that kids placed their trust in me. They believed in me to make them stronger and in doing so they made me stronger, and that is one of the greatest gifts that -not only- public service has to offer, but that humanity has to offer. That is why I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked for KidsVoice through the help of Equal Justice America, the advice I received before accepting this Fellowship, trusting my instincts, and most of all - to the children that put their trust in me. I was made a better person and will be a better lawyer because I was an Equal Justice America Fellow.