



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Brandon Church

Law School: UC Hastings College of the Law

Fellowship: Tahirih Justice Center, SF Bay Area

Entry 1: June 26, 2019

In our tumultuous political climate, it may have become easy (or even a survival tactic!) to brush aside negative news. Each new headline brings more unhappiness, and bright spots feel few and far between. This is particularly true of the ongoing immigration crisis, news of which is so ubiquitous as to become routine. It might be natural, then, to sometimes forget that the subjects of these stories are real people fleeing real crises.

For the past month I have been working at Tahirih Justice Center, which provides direct services, including legal representation, to immigrant women and children fleeing gender-based violence. I've helped file clients' applications for work permits and asylum and researched inadmissibility bars. The training and experience I am receiving here will be invaluable in providing counsel and support to future clients seeking refuge in America. They are more than just headlines.

Entry 2:

In my second month at Tahirih Justice Center, I have been working on two U visa cases. U's are granted to immigrant survivors of violent crimes inside the U.S., who assist law enforcement in investigating or prosecuting those crimes. Congress created the program to encourage law enforcement and crime victims to work together toward more-just outcomes. Ideally, this visa program will also foster more positive relationships between immigrant communities and advocates, and law enforcement.

When I decided to go to law school, I never really considered pursuing criminal justice work. Some of you probably know how interested I am in finding ways to resolve the rifts that mar our society and politics. Imagine my surprise to find that I really enjoy learning about this obscure bridge between immigrants and law



enforcement, who are so often portrayed at odds in our national discourse. And while no policy is perfect, I have enjoyed the opportunity to use this tool to work on behalf of our brave clients who refuse to be victims of gender-based violence.

Entry 3:

Research has been a big part of my job this summer at Tahirih. A few larger research projects have taken up most of my July. A couple of these have been “country conditions” work, gathering evidence about clients’ countries of origin.

These projects unfolded a bit differently than I expected. I’ve noticed that it’s not unusual for advocates to exhibit some “enthusiasm” upon finding evidence of persecution in a client’s history (when those facts strengthen the client’s case). Of course, we wish they were never persecuted at all, but documenting their experiences properly is essential to representing the client effectively. Country conditions research is like hunting down these unhappy facts on a macro scale: you want stats that show how bad it is back home, not how great. I found myself getting stoked to find statistics which, if I read them in a headline, would gall rather than excite me.

It’s not always fun to go digging in the darker corners of human experience, but it is important, and I am grateful to Tahirih for giving me the chance to do this work.

Entry 4:

Now that my summer placement with Tahirih Justice Center is finished, I thought I would use this opportunity to reflect on some of the big takeaways.

Work in immigration law, particularly in the human rights context, deals with a unique set of challenges. Many asylum seekers come to immigrants’ rights advocates after undergoing traumatic, damaging experiences. The consequences these experiences wreak on people’s mental, physical, and emotional well-being can be destructive, and should be preventable.