



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Nooreen Reza

Law School: University of Virginia, '21

Fellowship: Equitable Neighborhoods at TakeRoot Justice (Formerly the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center)

Entry 1:

I started my internship with the Equitable Neighborhoods Practice of the Community Development Project on May 28th, and it's been an eventful two weeks! Our first week was filled with orientation sessions where we learned about the practice of community lawyering and legal practice to support social movements. (There are six other interns in the office with me, working with different units.) We mapped out our own hypothetical campaign strategies for case scenarios we were given, discussed anti-oppressive communication, and talked about our own goals and hopes for the summer. The first case I helped my supervisor with was on for oral argument during my second week. It was a complicated case that was years in the making, challenging proposed luxury residential developments in a low to moderate income neighborhood in Manhattan. I got to meet the tenants and organizers who had been mobilizing against the development since it was announced, many of whom showed up to the hearing. It was a marathon session consolidating three separate but related cases challenging the development, and at the end of the day the judge made his preliminary remarks strongly suggesting he would rule in our favor. It was super exciting to start off my internship with a (likely) victory. While waiting for the final written decision, we are working with the same groups on a long-term project that has been in the making for a decade, to create a special district in their neighborhood that will direct and regulate development according to the community's vision in the future. Now, I am working on researching city practices for another case for which we are hoping to file the petition very soon.

So far, I have been exposed to what community lawyering looks like in practice, which is the primary reason I wanted to work at CDP this summer. I hope I can have more opportunities to meet and collaborate directly with organizers and community members as the summer goes on.

Entry 2:

These weeks have been dominated by research, mostly. I am helping my supervisor prepare to file a case challenging an administrative determination on a zoning appeal that didn't go her clients' way. You can actually



read about the overall issue here <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/01/queens-target-jackson-heights-amazon-zoning-gentrification/580717/>. Since this is ongoing litigation, I can't really discuss specific details about the research, but it has involved a deep dive into the inner workings of a city agency, talking to an expert consultant, examining the zoning appeals board's record on the matter, and assembling lots and lots of charts and outlines. I am also working on putting together a presentation for our meeting with the community members and organizers we are representing in the case. They are all people who live or work in the working-class, immigrant community where the proposed commercial development is currently underway, stoking a lot of worry about displacement of tenants and pressure on small businesses.

I also got to attend a workshop on right to repairs in public housing that two of our housing attorneys presented at a development where my supervisor has had a long working relationship with tenants. The hope is to gather enough sign-ons from tenants to bring a case against the housing authority for failure to do repairs.

Entry 3:

Busy times! I spent a lot of time editing and putting the finishing touches on my presentation for our clients Monday evening. Since a lot of my time has been spent doing research for the case, it was exciting to finally sit down with our clients and discuss everything I had learned and strategized so far. We had a productive meeting and made a lot of plans for the next few weeks of preparing for the case.

Meanwhile, I've also been working on a potential legislative advocacy effort designed to help community challengers like our clients get a fairer deal in the overall process of challenging illegal real estate developments in their neighborhoods. Right now, I'm mostly trying to weigh the pros and cons of a few possible approaches to drafting a bill so all the partners working on it can come to a collective decision about the best way forward. I also got to attend another organizing meeting at the public housing development, where we met with tenants again to see how they were feeling about pursuing a case and what their questions were about the process. We held a mini-intake clinic for tenants as well, and I got to interview two tenants about the repair issues in their apartments and the other problems they were facing.

At the beginning of July, CDP separated from the Urban Justice Center and became its own organization, TakeRoot Justice. It's all the same people doing all the same work, but now independently! It has been interesting to observe the transition as an intern, and see the difficult technical sides of nonprofit administration.

Entry 4:

These last couple of weeks have been full of writing. After spending a lot of time immersed in the research for our upcoming case, it was time to start pre-drafting the court documents and synthesizing the arguments we want to make. So I have spent many hours writing, re-writing, and editing the draft petition, with feedback from my supervisor. In between, I also attended another organizing meeting at the public housing



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

LEGAL SERVICES FELLOWSHIPS

campus and brainstormed with the attorneys on the case about what FOIL (the New York State FOIA) requests we need to make to get the info we need about the problems at the development.

I have enjoyed my time at TakeRoot and feel like I have learned a lot about what lawyering for community-led development looks like in practice. This experience has definitely been horizon-broadening and will influence my approach to direct services as a potential tool of client empowerment and not just as the practice of “putting out fires.”