



## Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:

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**Law School:** Washington and Lee University

**Fellowship:** Legal Aid Justice Center JustChildren Program

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### Entry 1:

What a summer it has been so far. I have been working for two weeks and already I have seen and learned so much. I have worked on several projects ranging from public comment on our local public school system's proposed student code of conduct to research regarding children's healthcare. My supervising attorney has even allowed me to do several client-intakes. The research is very fun and interesting, but what has made this summer already such an incredible experience is meeting the clients we are striving to serve. Faced with hardships, our clients face each day with courage. Further, it is inspiring to see firsthand the energy and positivity that drives the attorneys in my office to do as much as they possibly can for each client. I look forward to an incredible rest of the summer.

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### Entry 2:

These last two weeks I have had the opportunity to get out of the office and take several field trips. My supervising attorney has taken us to so many different places and meetings, each one a great learning experience. I have visited a school to sit in on an IEP meeting where my supervising attorney helped advocate for the special education rights of one of our clients. I have visited a local public defender's office to hear first-hand accounts of the issues that plague juveniles in our justice system. And just today I visited the general assembly to sit in on the appropriations meeting, who heard from four different agency officials detailing the financial landscape of the state of Virginia and the different public systems within it. I feel very lucky to have these opportunities to learn both in and out of the office, and I look forward to the second half of my summer being just as enriching as the first.

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### Entry 3:

I just got back from visiting the juvenile prison. It was a harrowing experience. Before I embarked upon my legal career, I used to work with teens and young adults in my local community. I volunteered for a local nonprofit situated in a low-income area in my community where I facilitated a youth basketball program during the



weekends. Predictably, a majority of the kids and young adults who came out to play were kids of color. Our main goal in running this program was to give these kids a healthy, safe alternative to the rampant gang and criminal activity in our neighborhood. Returning from our trip to the local prison today, I can't help but think how the kids I met today remind me of the kids I used to work with. They were a little hardened, a little jaded, but with flashes of kindness, respect, and happiness doing their best to shine through the gloom. And unfortunately, our trip consisted of three white people from our office speaking to 19 children of color. None of these kids were bad kids. In fact, their positivity is inspiring given their situations. When our presentation was over, we all filed out of the cramped cafeteria. We went one way and the kids went the other. On the ride back, the three of us, my supervising attorney, the other intern, and myself, talked about the inequities of our prison system, both for juveniles and for adults. When we got back, I slid comfortably into my car, drove casually home with the radio on, and plopped onto my couch, cracking open a beer at the end of the day.

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#### **Entry 4:**

This is the last week of my internship. It has been an incredible experience working in a legal aid office. At the start of the summer, the organization put us through a mini bootcamp orientation in an effort to download as much public benefits knowledge into our heads. One thing that stuck with me all summer was this: the attorneys told us that all of the different legal aids across the country accomplish roughly only 18% of the country's total need. That was a startling statistic to hear on day one. Ten weeks later, I feel like I understand. The other interns and myself have worked incredibly hard. And we have watched the attorneys in our organization grind and grind. And yet, unfortunately we have had to turn away most of the prospective clients who walk through the door with nary more than a closing letter with a few bits of advice. The clients that we can help, our attorneys do a great job. But if there is one thing this summer has taught me, it is that we need far more funding for legal aid.

Lastly, thank you so much to Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity to do such good work this summer. As I stated prior, there just isn't an adequate level of funding for legal aid. Organizations such as EJA are doing a great service for those in need of service, and for law students willing to give their time to different public interest entities.