



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Christen Lee

Law School: Chicago Kent College of Law

Fellowship: Legal Aid Chicago, Housing Practice

Entry 1:

Back in April I was fortunate enough to be selected as one of this year's Equal Justice America Fellows, and now I'm working as an intern in LAF's Housing Practice Group. As part of my fellowship, I'll be making posts that will serve as updates and reflections on the work I'll be doing with LAF this summer. I've only been at LAF for two weeks, but I can already tell it's going to be a summer filled with some of the most gratifying work I'll ever do in my life. Eviction has been a hot topic lately; Matthew Desmond's book "Evicted" is a New York Times Best Seller and received a Pulitzer Prize. And on the Media's new series on Eviction, "The Scarlet E," promises to offer even more of an insight into the lives of those subjected to the (often very cold) machine that is Eviction Court in America. All HPG clients live in subsidized housing, so an eviction for them often means they will lose the only funding they have available to secure housing. That's plenty motivation for me to become the best legal advocate I can be and to work as hard as I possibly can on behalf of all my clients.

Entry 2:

Now, for me, the most frustrating aspect of 1L year was learning legal concepts in the abstract. I went to law school to help actual people with real problems, so it was often hard to stay motivated to learn the law. The cases were supposed to help, but I just couldn't see the connection between Ms. Palsgraf's accident, for example, and the reason I went to law school.

Legal internships and clerkships, however, have a way of bringing the law to life. Like I mentioned in my last post, this summer, I'm using whatever bit of law I learn to help low-income clients keep their home. It doesn't get any more concrete than that, and it's plenty motivation to learn the law.



But the other important realization I had these past few weeks had nothing to do with the law at all. Legal aid lawyers, to make their clients' lives easier, play many roles; they're accountants, social workers, therapists, investigators, movers, and, yes, even babysitters—to name only a handful. So, my important realization was this: the best legal aid lawyers aren't only good lawyers, they're good people!

Entry 3:

Over the last couple of weeks, I have had the opportunity to develop key lawyering skills while helping others. I drafted a motion to seal to help a client prevent the damage of an eviction filing from harming the client's chance to find safe and affordable housing. I helped draft motions aimed at preventing landlords from filing wrongful eviction in which proper procedure was not followed. And I helped negotiate a lease termination where the client was able to leave a dangerous housing situation.

Each of these actions not only helped me develop essential lawyering skills that I will use throughout the rest of my career. But they also gave me the opportunity to help people persevere and find healthy housing. I truly enjoy having the opportunity to help improve the lives of others while also becoming a better lawyer.

Entry 4:

This summer I was fortunate enough to appear in court on behalf of clients as a 711-law student, draft motions and present them in court, and further develop practical lawyering skills from a group of extraordinarily talented and experienced attorneys. I'm thankful to my supervising attorneys, co-interns, and EJA for making this spectacular summer of growth possible!

A career in civil legal aid, as fulfilling and important as the work can be, is not known to be financially lucrative. That also means there aren't many opportunities for students to secure paid internships. For many aspiring public interest law students, living expenses not covered with scholarships are usually covered with loans or by working a separate part-time job. Scholarships like EJA's Legal Services Fellowship give students the chance to spend their time learning and developing during internships with as little financial stress as possible, and are also immensely helpful in minimizing the amount of debt students accrue while in law school.