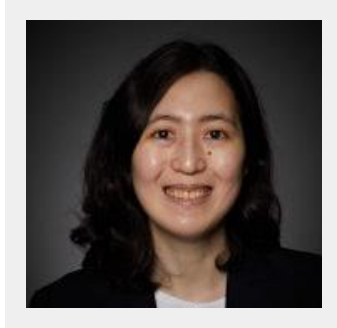




Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Hana M. Yampolsky

Law School: Cornell Law

Organization: Farmworker Legal Assistance Clinic

Week of June 15th

I'm currently spending my summer working with the U Visa team of the Cornell Farmworker Legal Assistance Clinic. We're working on putting together U Visa immigration applications for victims of crimes in the US, and these past two weeks have been full of firsts. I have hardly any experience with client interviews – much less so in Spanish, and certainly never over WhatsApp. But my clients and interpreter have been tremendously friendly and helpful as I've tried to work out a call schedule and Q&A format that would be effective for all of us. (For us, it looks like the trick is to ask short questions, make daily calls, take plenty of breaks, and use video when possible.) Now, our calls have become a highlight during these socially-distant times. Writing out the client declarations has also been an adventure. I can't go into details, but there are some factual contradictions that I didn't notice until I started writing everything out – so the next phone call (which is in half an hour) will involve clearing those up.

Week of July 6th

The two weeks since my last update have flown by in a blur. The learning curve for phone interviews and intakes – especially those involving an interpreter – is definitely real; I feel like I'm getting far more out of each call with my clients compared to a month ago. Lately I've realized that if people sound like they have something to say, it's worth letting them go on for a bit instead of sticking to the questions in a pre-made script. This is one of the advantages of phone and video conferences compared to exchanges by e-mail: you can get a better idea of what the client wants, even just by listening to their tone. Case in point, one of the calls I made through the Housing Hotline involved a student struggling with repeated aggressive calls from a landlord, which was a fact that certainly wasn't apparent through e-mail exchanges. I was afraid remote work would mean less human communication, and thus more anxiety on the clients' part, so I'm glad I've been able to provide some reassurance despite the distance.



Week of July 27th

I've been working through my two clients' declarations and cover letters for their visa applications these past weeks. We talked to family members, too. I thought the process would be something like, step 1, get a full declaration, step 2, move on to the cover letter, but there's a lot of reviewing and fixing the declarations – even though it's been two months since we first talked! Turns out building trust takes time, and clients are more likely to be honest the better you know them. (Which isn't particularly surprising, but I feel like I'm finally getting to experience it for myself.) Writing a cover letter after writing a declaration is such a bizarre feeling; I tried to give the declaration a voice that more-or-less mirrored my client's statements during our phone calls, but the cover letter feels like a bizarre mix of persuasion and voice – something I'm not too familiar with yet.

Week of August 10th

Here's my final update! After an incredible few months of working with my clients, interpreter, and supervisor, my clients' U Visa applications are finally ready to get shipped off to USCIS. We ran into a myriad of problems, particularly with forms – for example, one client's son signed his name differently from any of his listed aliases, while his wife had three slight variations on her last name across various identification documents, so we had to dive back into their forms and triple-clarify everything. We worked to finalize details till the very last moment, with WhatsApp messages and e-mails flying back and forth as we ran into problems with scanning and signatures and translated documents: it turns out the requirement for wet signatures during a pandemic can cause massive headaches, to say the least. But I think we all felt incredibly satisfied to be “done,” and despite the immense backlog that these applications will face, my clients seemed both hopeful and grateful.