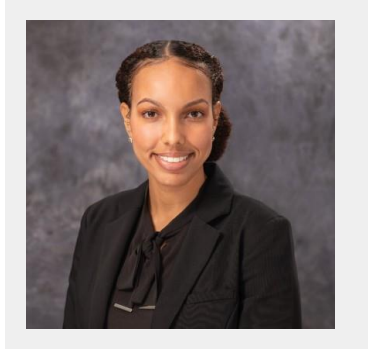




Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Britta Momanyi

Law School: Duke Law School

Organization: North Carolina Legal Aid

Week of June 15th

The past month has been a wake-up call for many Americans. As George Floyd's killing is transformed into a global movement for justice, many are left grappling with how they have benefited from and contributed to a system that has oppressed Black Americans, and what they can do to change it. Therefore, I am honored that this past month I have had the privilege of "walking the walk" and serving as an Equal Justice America Fellow in the Domestic Violence Unit of North Carolina Legal Aid.

This fellowship has enabled me to work alongside attorneys who contribute to equal justice for all every day by helping clients escape eviction, obtain domestic violence orders of protection, and access veteran benefits. They recognize that systemic racism permeates not only our criminal justice system but also the most basic necessities like housing and employment. Their palpable passion and tireless commitment demonstrate the type of attorney I hope to become. Therefore, I feel that in advocating for "my people," I have finally found my people – those who make it their life's work to promote equal justice for all.

Week of July 6th

COVID-19 has led to the closure of storefronts, restaurants, and even some courthouses, yet the North Carolina Domestic Violence Courts have remained open throughout the pandemic. The domestic violence that many families face doesn't stop when a pandemic sweeps our world. In fact, many endure increased violence during times when unemployment and stress levels soar. Therefore, legal advocacy can't stop either. In times when many are searching for security in an ever-increasingly uncertain world, I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to intern with North Carolina Legal Aid and help survivors of domestic violence find security in the last place where many feel safe – their homes.



Week of July 27th

I cannot attribute my commitment to serving those who face economic hardships and systemic barriers to any single experience. Instead, this commitment stems from my identification with the racial, socioeconomic, and veteran groups these barriers often affect. I have witnessed the often-inescapable pervasiveness of these barriers and the toxic oppression of poverty. Specifically, I have seen how the intersection between employment, housing insecurity, childcare costs, and medical necessities can create a situation where poverty defines someone's life, and obtaining legal support is a final attempt to overcome this cyclical circumstance. My ability to empathize with the lack of agency people in these circumstances frequently feel has motivated me to use the privilege of my education to advocate for, but at the very least, listen to people who are so often forgotten. That is why my Equal Justice America fellowship at North Carolina Legal Aid has been so valuable to me. In this position, I have had the opportunity to not only lend a listening ear to those we serve but also an understanding one.

Week of August 10th

Advocacy entails actively developing communication skills – many of which we incorrectly hold to be innate. My internship at North Carolina Legal Aid demonstrated this principle repeatedly. During the course of my internship, I have listened to clients describe the years of mistreatment they endured at the hands of an abusive partner or a predatory landlord. Listening to these stories was the first step; while extending empathy was the next (and most crucial) step. Although we take these communication skills to be innate, the fact is that they can and should be fine-tuned through training and practice. For example, in interviewing survivors of sexual violence, a trauma-informed interviewing process can mitigate the re-traumatization of the client. Additionally, active listening methods can be helpful to those working with marginalized communities who often go unheard. Unfortunately, uninformed and ineffective communication can do more harm than good, especially when it comes to advocating for marginalized clients. Therefore, as legal professionals, we need to take ownership of our communication skills and better advocate for our clients by actively working to understand them.