



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

LEGAL SERVICES FELLOWSHIPS

Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Madeline Zuschnitt

Law School: The George Washington University Law School

Organization: Ayuda

Week of June 15, 2020

I am so excited to be writing my first EJA Fellow Update!

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, this summer is a difficult time for all of us. What I have come to realize however, is that for many families, this has made life which was already very challenging, nearly unbearable. With Ayuda, I am working with low-income immigrants who are victims of domestic violence. These men and women fall at least 300% below the Federal Poverty Guideline. Before the pandemic, they were struggling greatly, and now they are fighting for survival. This is why providing legal aid is so important.

At Ayuda, many of our clients do not have access to internet, smart phones, or Zoom. We are limited in our communicative abilities and are forced to be creative in the ways in which we support our clients given our remote status. I am so thankful to be working with an organization that cares so much about its community and its clients. Thank you EJA for helping to support me and my summer work!

Week of July 6, 2020

I cannot believe that it is already time for another #EJAFellowUpdate! I am so thoroughly enjoying my experience with Ayuda that this summer is passing by very quickly. Since my last update, I have been able to participate in various substantive writing projects for Ayuda. However, the work which I am most proud of is my work with our clients. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many new stressors into the lives of our clients, and I am proud to say that Ayuda helps to provide a bit of peace of mind.

This past week, I attended my first Zoom hearing. Before the hearing, my supervisor and I had our own Zoom session with the client, and she was extremely nervous. Her Wi-Fi was a bit unstable, and she had several children in the home with her. It was so challenging for her to find a quiet place to actively listen and engage in the hearing. After settling into a corner of her apartment, we talked her through the likely outcome and process of the hearing and helped to calm our client. In the end, the hearing yielded a favorable result for our client.



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One of the most amazing parts of working with Ayuda, and why I am so thankful for Equal Justice America, is the ability that I've had to work with clients on an intimate level. I've been able to see the role that Ayuda attorneys play beyond that of legal counsel. They are there to not only provide legal advice, but also to support the client beyond that. Our attorneys listen to the struggles of our clients, empathize with them, and support them in whatever way possible, whether that be on a personal level, or referral to an outside organization that can assist with their specific problem. It is truly an incredible organization to be a part of.

Week of July 27, 2020

It's hard to believe that my time at Ayuda is soon coming to a close! These past nine weeks have been extraordinary, and I am very excited to share my latest #EJAFellowUpdate. Since my last update, I have been able to work closely with supervising attorneys on drafting several important motions and prepping for a remote trial. My case load has expanded to eight cases, and I am getting to interact with clients more and more every day. Every time I connect with a client, I am reminded of why organizations like Equal Justice America and Ayuda are so important.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still very much an issue for many, if not all, of our clients. Ayuda has continued to offer not only legal support, but social services as well. One experience I would like to share is that of my recent trial preparation. Over a period of one week, I was able to work on all the relevant trial documents for one client and spent hours on the phone/ Zoom connecting with our client, helping to calm her nerves, prepare her, and listen to her. It is impossible to overstate how important it is to have organizations that can provide this level of dedication and support to clients who otherwise would not be able to seek legal representation. On the day of the trial, we once again connected with our client to give her an extra boost of confidence and support. After the trial was postponed for technical reasons, our client was understandably disappointed, and her attorney and I spent time connecting with her over Zoom to support her in both an emotional and legal sense. By the end of our call, our client was feeling better. It was an incredible learning moment for me.

My experience at Ayuda thus far has been so rewarding, and beyond anything that I could have hoped for. I feel so lucky to be surrounded (virtually) by individuals dedicated to leaving a positive mark on this world. I am thankful that Equal Justice America is committed to doing the same, and am so grateful that they helped to make this summer internship experience a possibility for me.

Week of August 10, 2020

I can't believe it is time for my final #EJAFellowUpdate! What an incredible experience this summer has been. From my first day to my last day, I feel as if I have grown exponentially both on a personal level and as a law student. All of this was made possible by Equal Justice America. My last few weeks with Ayuda were spent digging into various discovery projects and finalizing a very important reply brief for one of our clients. While I felt enormous pressure to create great work product before my fellowship finished up, I also felt extremely lucky to be able to work on these assignments.



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In my final two weeks, I was also able to work side by side with one of my supervising attorneys on a CPO matter from start to finish. I was on the call for the intake and consult, and then worked on amending the CPO petition, filing said petition, and working on various trial documents (although I would be finishing the internship before any discussion of a trial). I was even able to talk with the client on my own, using my Spanish and getting the hang of appropriate client interactions. I was honored that my supervisor trusted me enough to allow me to interact with a client without any supervision. It was exhilarating and a perfect culmination of everything that I had learned over this summer!

I am so thankful for the experience that I've been able to have with Ayuda, and thankful to Equal Justice America for making it possible. Because of this experience, providing direct legal services to low income immigrants is no longer something which I view simply as a potential internship experience, but now as my ultimate career path as well.