



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Samar Amidi

Law School: NYU School of Law

Organization: East Bay Community Law Center

Week of June 15th

I'm so grateful to be spending my summer at the East Bay Community Law Center doing decriminalization of poverty work. Imagine you're living paycheck to paycheck, barely getting by, and you're rushing to work because you had to drop your child off and if you're late to work again you'll lose your day job. You get a speeding ticket. It's a few hundred dollars and you can't pay it. Because you can't pay this ticket, the fines add up, and your license gets suspended, not because you've been deemed an unsafe driver, but because you couldn't pay your ticket, and the fees for driving school. Now, you can't drive your car to pick up and drop off your child and for your side job as an Uber driver. You need that income, so you drive with the suspended license, risking further involvement with the system. This is an illustration of just one way that low-income people are disproportionately impacted by our current system. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to combat these systems and help people navigate them. If you want to help support this work and other really important equal justice work, please consider donating.

Week of July 6th

I am learning a lot about what it takes to manage many clients at one time, and what is necessary to support clients who are dealing with many other issues in addition to the issues that you are able to assist them with. My clients who need my help clearing traffic and parking ticket debt may be unresponsive and unreliable when it comes to providing me with information or documentation that I ask for, but it is never that they are being unresponsive because they are not seriously looking for solutions for themselves. It is often that they lack the resources they need to get that information. Maybe they do not have access to their own cell phone because they are in an inpatient drug rehabilitation program. Maybe they do not have documents from the court because they have been homeless and living in their car, and their car was towed with all of their belongings inside of it. This experience has really taught me to dig deeper and to always assume best intentions when working with clients, in order to be able to build trust and have them be honest about the support they need from me in order to do what they need to do for themselves.

Week of July 27th

I don't think I will ever get tired of the joy that comes from someone expressing their genuine appreciation for what you've done for them. I love working with my clients and I love that I am in a position



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to be able to lift at least some of their stress by assisting them. I have also learned a lot about how to deal with different personalities and when to set boundaries with clients, which I think is an incredibly important and valuable skill to have. Through our weekly case rounds at EBCLC, I have had wonderful opportunities to ask questions and hear other interns ask questions about how to deal with different issues that can come up while assisting clients, and hearing how seasoned attorneys deal with various issues has been very informative and helpful for me. I also had the opportunity to work on some advocacy for Berkeley City Council, alongside my EBCLC supervisor and a fellow intern and it is incredible to see how the impact of our legal work goes beyond just our clients within our office.

Week of August 10th

My relationship to race, gender, and economic justice in general has changed since the beginning of the summer, in the sense that I have never before been in a work environment that has facilitated continuous learning around these issues in the way that the East Bay Community Law Center has. I feel like I have been able to be more reflective on my privileges as a non-Black POC from an upper middle-class area, and that reflection has led me to become more publicly vocal about issues of racial, economic and gender justice than I have previously been, and to engage much more deeply in educating myself and others around me about the history of anti-Blackness and racial injustice in the United States. My positionality as a non-Black person with the privilege of being from an upper middle-class background, and with the privilege of being a law student, informs how I can be an accomplice to Black people in this moment, because I am in a position to push for systemic change in the historically very white, privileged place that I grew, a place plagued by a particularly insidious breed of racism that hides behind the guise tradition and history, Marin County. I am also working to be more conscious of what it means to ask for emotional labor from others, and what constitutes asking for labor, and to ensure that I am not burdening my Black friends with requests for labor.

Racial justice should inform every aspect of the legal services work that EBCLC does because the issues that our clients are facing oftentimes disproportionately impact people of color, and structural, systemic racism is a reason for that. Also, we need to be mindful of the impacts of racial injustice on our clients' previous experiences with the legal system and bring an awareness and understanding of that to our interactions with clients.

Whiteness shows up in my educational experience in law school often. Not only are the majority of law professors white men, but many of our textbooks are also written by white men and fail to bring up nuanced issues of race, class, and gender. I have been grateful to have professors who make a point to bring those issues up in the classroom, but I have noticed that the assigned readings on issues of racial, economic, or gender justice are often readings from outside of the textbook, because casebooks themselves often don't bring up those important contextual issues.

In relation to equity and inclusion, some things I will take from this summer internship experience are the importance of self-reflection, and the benefits of discussing difficult or challenging topics with others. Learning and unlearning goes farther when it is communicated with and discussed with others. I learned so much from listening to the other interns and to our Clean Slate supervisors during our weekly case rounds, and that is an experience I am incredibly grateful to have had.