



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Camille Garcia-Flahaut

Law School: Temple Law

Organization: Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

Week of June 15th

I have completed my first two weeks with Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, in the Health and Independence Unit! With a global pandemic and racial injustice protests occurring, I am so thankful to be a part of this organization. Our orientation began with ways to talk to and advocate for clients with all types of legal issues from all different backgrounds. It was important to me that I was a part of an organization that could discuss everything that is happening and turn words into action!

I have been part of several discussions on both race and accessing public benefits during the pandemic—especially with many lower-income households in desperate need of emergency funds. I have already started researching the intersection of immigration status and access to benefits, and how to best advocate for our clients. I'm thrilled and impressed by the speed at which my organization puts together informative sessions on these constantly changing events and resources.

I look forward to continuing this work and diving more into helping people access the aid they need!

Week of July 6th

I have been working at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia for about a month now. I spend my time focusing on public benefits of all kinds— Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicare, Medicaid, the Emergency Assistance Program (EAP) for Pennsylvania and more! In the time of COVID, we don't have as many office supports as are normal. Pre-COVID, the attorneys could sit down with a client, read the application, and fill it out together and then send it in. During COVID, it has not been nearly as simple. Many of our clients do not have access to computers and



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scanners or the time to sit down and file an application. I spend a lot of time calling clients and trying to touch base, talking them through an application over the phone, sending them the application via regular mail, waiting for a return, for someone to pick it up from the office and then emailing it to the appropriate office. COVID has highlighted the urgency for public benefits but, also has impeded the speed at which cases can move to those who do not have all the technological resources.

COVID has created personal challenges for our clients. With many people losing their jobs, losing their ability to access childcare and fear of contracting COVID, families need all the help they can get! These government benefits provide a lifeline to families who are out of options and with the upcoming months being uncertain, we want to do everything possible to get them these benefits. Accessing and applying for benefits can seem daunting and complicated to many families. Some are not native English speakers, some struggle with physical and mental capabilities and others are hoping to provide stability for their children but, are new to the process.

I wanted to do this work this summer because I know there are many vulnerable populations unable to access the help they need without a bit of legal help and I wanted to be there as a support for people. I am the child of two first generation immigrants and I know there can be discrepancies in access to knowledge based on different groups. I am thankful for mentors, supervisors and support that came to my aid and I want to help other people in return.

I love what I am working on this summer because, I get to strategize with kind, thoughtful supervising attorneys, talk to clients regularly and see the impact that benefits can have on families, especially at this time.

Regardless of the barriers thrown by COVID, the attorneys and I work every day to ensure people are getting the best access and care they need, and I am thankful for this opportunity, in part thanks to EJA Funding!

Week of July 27th

These past few weeks at CLS I have been able to utilize both of my parental languages—French and Spanish. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Community Legal Services because they emphasize the importance of communicating with clients in their native languages—whether someone is personally fluent or if they have an interpreter present.

This summer, all of these conversations have taken place over the phone, where many social cues are harder to decipher. With one exception--the moment I start speaking in their language they seem to relax and are happy to switch straight to French or Spanish or continue to practice with the comfort of knowing that if they replace an English word for a native word, I will understand it.



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I have helped people with applications that are only available in English but, that I have been able to translate with them and answer questions regarding the reason for the questions.

This experience has been mutually beneficial honestly because, going back to my parental languages allows me to connect back with my different cultures as well. I feel a sense of comfort and connection when I switch to the language I was raised around and for this reason I am so happy to have found this niche in the legal community.

Week of August 10th

My internship at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia ended last week, and I will miss the staff and the work immensely. This summer was eye opening-- I learned how to navigate the various levels of bureaucracy and how to best advocate for clients through filling out applications and extensive follow up on every step of the process.

This summer tested both my emotional strength and endurance because, we did not always win a case for our clients. One of the hardest lessons is meeting a client, helping them apply and then either not being approved or at the end, the client decides to no longer pursue benefits because of roadblocks. The stigma for accessing benefits continues and it's important to educate ourselves and our fellow colleagues on the systemic difficulties people face. I did also manage to help win cases and apply successfully for clients and that was one of the best feelings! These wins included a successful benefits application, a reduction in an overpayment granted, and discovering several options to help someone keep their family home. These wins reminded me why I went to law school. I hope to one day continue to advocate for clients in some public interest scope and I want to thank you all for following my journey!