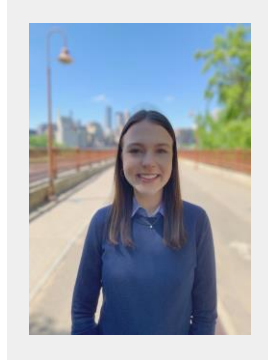




Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Sydney Goggins

Law School: University of Minnesota

Organization: Center for Disability and Elder Law

Entry 1:

This summer I am happy to be working for the Center for Disability & Elder Law in Chicago. My internship has been incredibly hands on and because of that, I have learned a lot in a short period of time. CDEL provides low income elderly and disabled folks in Cook County, Illinois with pro-bono legal services for a wide range of legal issues. With the majority of clients being at high-risk for contracting COVID-19, the work CDEL performs is crucial. Since starting at the end of May, I have accumulated a case load of ten clients. Their legal issues are varied but include drafting wills and transfer on death instruments, securing guardianship over an elderly individual, helping with power of attorney and health care documents, and more. Every day I get to know these individuals better and they share with me the most intimate aspects of their lives, which I greatly appreciate. Because of this work, I have been chosen as an Equal Justice America fellow. EJA Fellows help the 80% of people living in poverty who require civil legal services but do not have access.

Entry 2:

While working at the Center for Disability & Elder Law, I have seen a different side of the current pandemic. Our clients are high risk for contracting COVID-19 which presents unique challenges especially when combined with other marginalized identities such as race, religion, socio-economic status, gender, or sexuality.

I am assisting on a case where a person agreed, before COVID, to move out of their home within a specific time frame which fell during the stay at home order in Illinois. Due to their age, this individual is high-risk, therefore moving was not a safe option. Our job now is to convince the court that by staying in their home, they were not violating the agreement because it was too much of a risk to move during a pandemic.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

LEGAL SERVICES FELLOWSHIPS

The people who are the most negatively affected by COVID-19 are marginalized folks. The pandemic has left older adults, low income folks, and people of color with high rates of infection. The law has not quite caught up to that reality. Organizations like CDEL and other non-profits provide opportunities for pro-bono legal representation and assistance to those at the intersection of marginalized identities.

Entry 3:

The first year in law school provides little opportunity to explore the law in the real world. The cases we read lacked mention of identity, social dynamics, and injustices. After my first year, I felt unfulfilled. What has reinvigorated me this summer is building relationships with my own clients at Center for Disability & Elder Law. I typically serve 15-20 clients at a time. I create Wills, Power of Attorney documents, handle some aspects of litigation, and assist with guardianship cases. The majority of our clients are high risk, meaning they now experience less interaction with the world than ever before. While my main job is to assist them with legal issues, many of them just need someone to talk to. Those relationships were missing from my first year of law school. As lawyers, connection is everything. We have to get to know our clients, empathize with them, and understand the surrounding context of their situation. That could mean a pandemic, socioeconomic status, race, gender, religion or sexuality. Nobody hires a lawyer when everything is going well. As the people who are there at a time when individuals need more support than ever, lawyers have to be ready to engage, understand, and help.

Entry 4:

Last week I finished my internship with the Center for Disability & Elder Law. I feel grateful for the experience and relationships I developed with co-workers and clients. I handled everything from wills and transfer on death instruments to power of attorney and guardianship cases. The most important take away was how to translate complicated legal terminology to more understandable terms for clients. What I realized is how inaccessible the law can be, especially for low income clients with varying levels of education, potentially living with a disability, or are working around the clock to support their families. Those folks do not always have the time or resources required to do legal research and find a solution to their problem. That is why direct legal aid non-profits, like CDEL, are crucial. In an industry full of marginalization and exclusion, groups operating specifically on making the law accessible and free to anyone who needs it, are doing human rights work.

I am so proud to have worked for CDEL this summer and would highly recommend to anyone looking for summer jobs in law school or undergrad!