



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: University of Virginia

Organization: Central Virginia Legal Aid Society

Update 1: It's hard to believe I'm already 3 weeks into my summer internship with Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, although given how much I've learned it actually does check out. Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS) is a legal aid organization located in Charlottesville, VA where I've been interning for the summer following my first year of law school at UVA Law. I specifically have been helping low-income clients with difficulties in eviction proceedings, navigating unemployment benefits, and other civil matters that require legal assistance. I've been so impressed with the amount of trust and autonomy I've been given in my internship so far - I've been trusted to communicate with our clients on an individual basis - something that as a law student I didn't know would be possible without supervision. Participating in primarily client communication work has been really eye-opening to hear our clients' stories from their own point of view, and makes me more motivated than ever to keep fighting for them. I am in awe every day of the attorneys I work with and their patience with our clients - they have truly dedicated their life to public service in their work and I am glad to have them as mentors for this summer. I'm looking forward to continuing work on some of our specific cases and hopefully seeing them through to the end of my internship!

Update 2: I am still having a great experience working with everyone at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. Last week I was able to come into the office to finally meet the attorneys I've been working with in person, which was a nice change from the virtual world we've been living in for the last year and a half! I was also able to participate in a few in-person client meetings, which was definitely a good learning opportunity and a great way to connect with the clients and better understand the details of their cases. Hearing directly from our clients really puts into perspective how much they appreciate our organization's help and it was great to put faces to names I've been communicating with via email. I am looking forward to potentially getting a few in-court experiences as well in the next few weeks, so stay tuned for more information there!

Update 3: I continue to be inspired by my colleagues and mentors at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, for their patience and dedication to public service. I have been able to go into the office more consistently lately,



which has additionally been a nice change from doing everything virtually. The past two weeks I have been given a little more autonomy in my role, which has been great to experience, and I was tasked with communicating with a handful of clients completely on my own about their unemployment benefits. Speaking with the clients over the phone or over email really helps remind me how important our work is, and how grateful members of the community are for our service. While it can be difficult at times when dealing with clients who are understandably frustrated or mentally ill, putting myself in their shoes allows me to really see what they are feeling and completely understand any frustration or pushback they have towards me.

I additionally worked on a helpful handout for another attorney detailing the changes in Virginia expungement law over the next few years, as well as what the process looks like today for someone looking to get their record expunged. Not only did this project allow me to participate in making a handout that will now be passed onto our clients in the future, but it also gave me an opportunity to learn about the changes in the expungement law, and how difficult it is to currently have something from your record removed, even if you were never actually convicted and it was a mistake. I am very appreciative of projects like this for giving me a chance to learn about specific areas of law I wouldn't have thought to research prior to the assignment.

I am looking forward to doing some shadowing of attorneys in different groups this week, and even hope to accompany one or two to court!

Entry 4:

It is hard to believe my summer experience at CVLAS has drawn to a close. My last few weeks at CVLAS were jam-packed – I was able to accompany two attorneys to court on completely different matters (one a domestic violence case and another a consumer goods case), which was a great learning opportunity to see in person. I also really enjoyed connecting with the clients we were helping – it really makes a difference to speak with them face to face. While I hadn't worked much with the domestic violence group of CVLAS until the last week of my internship, over the last few days I was able to sit in on numerous client meetings in that group, which was extremely interesting and eye-opening to hear our clients' stories. That particular group handles cases that can be difficult to hear about, especially knowing it's all happening within the Charlottesville community, but it does make it even more rewarding to help our clients reach a resolution.

The rest of my time that was not spent in court or sitting in on client meetings was predominantly spent wrapping up the open cases I had been working on for the earlier part of the summer. I spent some time emailing the clients I had developed relationships with to let them know my internship was ending (and giving them another main contact at CVLAS), and going through my caseload with my primary supervisor. I definitely learned a lot over this summer, and really appreciated the fact that CVLAS represents clients in all sorts of legal aid cases, allowing me to see many different areas of law. Thank you to EJA for making this summer experience possible, and to CVLAS for teaching me about so many different areas of law and letting me help make a difference in our clients' lives!