

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

October 10, 2016

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I spent the summer working for The Legal Aid Society's Exploitation Intervention Project (EIP) in Manhattan. EIP provides holistic representation to people arrested for prostitution and related offenses in New York City by advocating for them in criminal court and connecting them to necessary services including immigration assistance, medical care, and educational and employment opportunities. Most of EIP's clients are indigent, and many are immigrants with few economic opportunities on account of their undocumented status.

My day-to-day work primarily entailed assisting my supervising attorney with direct client representation. We attended Human Trafficking Intervention Court to represent clients on a weekly basis, and sometimes appeared in other court parts to represent clients who had pending non-prostitution cases. In court, we checked in with social workers about clients' progress on their court-mandated counseling sessions, interviewed clients, negotiated with prosecutors, and resolved cases. I was able to put my Mandarin skills to use by helping to translate during interviews between clients and my supervising attorney. As I gained experience and confidence, I began to conduct my own interviews, in which I gathered the necessary details to resolve clients' cases with minimal collateral consequences and connect them to necessary services, and explained their legal options.

In addition to the immediate demands of direct client representation, I also worked on longer-term projects throughout the course of the summer. A significant component of EIP's practice is assisting survivors of sex trafficking to file 440 motions to vacate prostitution-related offenses from their records. I drafted several 440 motions and affidavits, piecing clients' narratives together using notes from their interviews with EIP, and researching relevant decisions under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and New York State Anti-Trafficking Law. I also contributed to EIP's outreach and education materials, including a national practice guide for lawyers who work with trafficking survivors.

My experience working for EIP was enriching, fulfilling, and at times challenging. In addition to developing a trauma-informed approach to engaging with clients, this internship required me to use strategies of self-care to process the traumatic experiences, suffering, and injustice that I encountered on a daily basis. One of the most positive aspects of my experience was EIP's incredibly thoughtful and client-centered approach to the work they do. Besides legal skills, I also gained perspective on what it means to be a social justice attorney and how to approach a social justice issue in a way that empowers individuals and communities.

I am extremely grateful to Equal Justice America for its role in enabling me to work for the EIP this summer. I would wholeheartedly recommend both working for The Legal Aid Society and applying for an Equal Justice America fellowship to any law student.

Sincerely,

Alice (Jiaman) Wang
Columbia Law School
Class of 2017