

During my immigration law field placement at Sanctuary for Families, I had the opportunity to engage in a variety of tasks and assignments that enabled me to develop an understanding of immigration law and its legal processes. While at my placement, my duties ranged significantly with a strong focus on assisting clients and supporting ongoing cases. Below is a detailed description of my responsibilities and observations throughout the placement.

Case Review and Analysis

At Sanctuary for Families, I was tasked with reviewing immigration cases, which consisted of analyzing the clients' history and associated documentation. In doing so, I reviewed an asylum case to gather a thorough understanding of the client's background and the historical details of the case. Working closely with the case files to ascertain the specific facts surrounding the case, I was able to build a foundation that would assist me in analyzing and handling future actions and legal strategies on behalf of other asylum applicants. I also reviewed Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases, which involved analyzing the clients' case histories to assess their merits. Eventually, I was able to work alongside the attorneys to complete the necessary court forms for a SIJS case, including court forms for a supporting Guardianship application on behalf of the SIJS client.

Another major assignment included reviewing an ACS case, where I conducted an in-depth analysis of the documentation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation. For my supervising attorney, I created a synopsis of the ACS case history, which was later used for the development of a U Certification filing.

U-Visa and Special Certifications

During my fieldwork placement, I learned how to request U-Visa Record certifications, which is a crucial step in obtaining relief for certain crime victims. In completing these tasks, I reviewed U Certification filings for past clients, which gave me valuable insights into the procedures and requirements for these filings. Additionally, I was able to learn and understand the significance of thorough documentation and timely submission. I also developed familiarity with U-Visa requests and the necessary certifications required for case success. Accordingly, I was able to familiarize myself with the ins-and-outs of each legal form and the challenges involved in the process of obtaining U-Visas and other special certifications.

Legal Research and Memoranda Drafting

Legal research also formed a significant part of my assignments. In particular, I conducted research for various legal issues—for example, the effects of an immigration status on the eligibility for state ID, and the rights of immigrants when interacting with law enforcement. For each research assignment, I drafted a memorandum, in which I outlined the findings and potential implications for each client. Through my work on these assignments, I was able to expand my knowledge of the protected rights each client had in different situations. Additionally, I was able to satisfy my goals of (1) improving my legal writing proficiency by drafting legal memoranda; and (2) gaining a thorough understanding of key immigration statutes and policies such as asylum laws and removal proceedings.

I also investigated potential loopholes for status adjustment for asylum applicants. I analyzed relevant laws, regulations, and case law to identify strategies for arguing why some applicants without status nevertheless met the criteria to receive a status adjustment. I

documented my results and drafted legal memoranda on my findings, thus allowing the legal team to effectively strategize potential approaches for clients seeking status adjustment.

Client Interaction and Case Development

Another critical component of my placement involved client interactions. I was able to observe client intake meetings, which provided valuable real-world exposure to the process of gathering essential information from clients about their case. In each intake meeting, I watched the lead attorney inform the clients of their rights and the precautions they should take in ensuring that they are not stopped, questioned, or detained by ICE, which helped me learn the protected rights of immigrants in the United States. I also participated in interviews with clients and their key witnesses, preparing written declarations that captured their personal stories and legal issues in support of their applications. As a result, I was able to satisfy my goal of developing my client interviewing and counseling skills by practicing effective client interviewing to gather detailed and sensitive personal information while building trust and confidence.

In addition to client interviews, I reviewed clients' government records obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. This involved carefully assessing the records to identify key pieces of information relevant to the clients' case. In turn, I was able to provide synopses to the lead attorneys, which in effect helped guide them in their decision making and actions.

Court Filings and Strategic Discussions

In addition to client-focused work, I also gained hands-on experience in preparing court filings. I also helped compile complete filing packets, ensuring that all required affidavits,

identifying documents and legal arguments were included and appropriately organized.

Accordingly, I became familiar with formatting filings and deadlines for submissions to both immigration courts and USCIS.

Meetings and Debriefs

I participated in weekly virtual debrief meetings with the attorneys working on the Immigration Intervention Project at Sanctuary for Families. In these meetings, the attorneys discussed complex legal issues in pending cases and provided updates on the law in accordance with the change in administration and its policies. During these meetings, I took detailed notes and observed litigation and advocacy strategies. These sessions helped me grasp a firm understanding of how court filings are strategically planned, adapted, and aligned with broader case goals.

Conclusion

Overall, what was most unique about my learning process during the externship was how heavily it was driven by real-world application as opposed to the more theoretical focus of my other law school courses. In a traditional classroom setting, learning is usually centered around reading case law, analyzing appellate decisions, and discussing legal principles in a controlled environment. However, my externship experience demanded that I quickly adapt those academic skills to real-world situations that had immediate consequences for real clients. Additionally, unlike class assignments where the main goal is to demonstrate understanding for a grade, my externship work had real-world stakes, which made the fieldwork more fun, engaging, and worth learning as I felt like this is something I could apply to my career no matter which practice area I end up choosing.

My fieldwork experience strongly reinforced my commitment to practicing public interest law. Working directly with immigrant clients and seeing how often they are treated unfairly by the system reinforced my desire to advocate for marginalized communities. I now feel even more certain that I want my career to center around public interest advocacy and systemic change.