

## **Christine Choong**

This summer, I had the opportunity to work at the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP). NWIRP is the largest source of comprehensive immigration legal services in Washington State for low-income immigrants and refugees. Specifically, I was working with the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) unit, providing immigration services to immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and other crimes.

The internship was a very fast-paced and hands-on experience. My main areas of focus were U Visas (victims of certain crimes), T visas (victims of trafficking), and VAWA petitions (abused immigrant spouses and children of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents). NWIRP provided us with comprehensive legal training on the specific visa petitions that we were assigned to work on. Over the course of 10 weeks, I completed 5 emergency visa petitions for our high needs clients, including a deaf client and a client that the organization had been working with for a decade. I also conducted research on niche topics such as reciprocity rules for United States/China, and the immigration consequences of having juvenile records. Furthermore, I learned how to navigate tough conversations with the clients by using trauma-informed advocacy skills. This helped me build trust with my clients through transparent communication and utmost sensitivity.

In addition to preparing immigration petitions, I also had the chance to visit Seattle Immigration Court with an attorney and learned how to serve legal papers to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I also went to King County District Court to request court dockets for our clients. This was an interesting experience because it was my first time visiting the courthouse and my first exposure to “cimmigration”, which is the intersection of criminal law and immigration law.

Prior to law school, I spent almost a year working with the International Rescue Committee’s Naturalization Unit in San Diego, and I found it very helpful to have background knowledge on how a legal aid organization operates.

I also have been completing the internship in hybrid format which allows me to have flexibility on some days and be able to connect with my colleagues in-person. The entire team was incredibly welcoming and supportive. Everyone was so knowledgeable and generous to share insights with me. My supervisor is especially supportive, we have our weekly check-ins to discuss my projects and she provides me with good feedback so that I can monitor my performance goals. I also really appreciated the “Self-Care Days” our team had once a month, where we would do fun activities together. We often would have open conversations about mental health, and I learned that working with trauma survivors can cause secondary trauma for attorneys too. It is so important to practice sufficient self-care strategies to be our best self for our clients. I am glad to be working with an organization that cares for the well-being of their employees.

Last but not least, this internship was made possible by the generosity of PILF. Through this grant, I was able to continue my commitment to advocating for underrepresented communities. I am confident that this summer experience has not only helped me hone my practical legal skills, but it also reminded me to speak from a place of compassion, kindness and empathy. Too often we underestimate the power of those things, all of which have the potential to turn a life around. I hope to carry these values with me for the rest of my legal career.

