

Placement: Voices for Georgia's Children
School: Emory University School of Law

This summer, I had the privilege of interning with Voices for Georgia's Children, an organization dedicated to advancing laws, policies, and actions that improve children's lives. My work mainly included two projects. First, I worked on Voices' Landscape Analysis report by researching elements of Georgia's child welfare system, drafting and reviewing various sections of the report, and editing for consistency, clarity, and accuracy. Second, I helped plan and execute the 2024 CHINS Convening, an event that brought together CHINS Coordinators statewide and other interested parties to discuss challenges, successes, and recommendations for CHINS work. My work for this event included securing a location; creating a registration form and sending invitations and information about the event; fielding questions from registrants; and, on the day of the event, proctoring a small discussion group and dispersing travel credits at the end. Outside of those two projects, when I had extra time on my hands, I watched recordings of various child welfare-related hearings, as that was an experience that other interns were getting that I was not, and I wanted to see some of what court looked like, which was very helpful.

Both projects were fulfilling in their own ways, but my favorite of the two was putting together the CHINS Convening. From the very start, I was meeting with people like the Statewide CHINS Coordinator, a recent doctoral graduate who studied CHINS, and the DJJ Legislative and Community Liaison. This was a great way to force myself to become comfortable as an intern around people who are in those kinds of positions, something that helped when the event came around. In preparing for this event, I used my skills with technology to ease the burden of my supervisors in organizing it. I created a registration form that fit our needs, including questions about need for a travel stipend, dietary needs, what registrants hoped to gain from the event, and information about the event shared in all the places registrants could think to look. I was then able to organize responses by how they answered certain questions so that we could ensure all needs were met. Accessibility is an important aspect of all things, and one that I care deeply about, so I did my best to help make registration and attendance as accessible as possible.

At the Convening, I realized that I had neglected to send out the room that the event was held in; I had only sent the section of the building. I checked in with my supervisor and then went to direct people from the entrance to the correct room, which meant attendees were still able to arrive to the room on time. The event itself went very smoothly. People got to know each other, talk about CHINS issues, and share resources and ideas each county has been working with. During lunch, attendees were split into small groups to discuss specific issues, and I served as a proctor for a few groups. One group was doing a good job self-facilitating, so I focused on another group that was not interacting much. I asked questions to guide the conversation and prompted participation between attendees, and was glad to be able to do so without feeling awkward or pushy. The meetings at the beginning of the project with individuals in important positions helped me to feel comfortable interacting professionally with people at the event.

When it came time for the groups to share their discussion points, I took notes for Voices' Landscape Analysis report, in order to incorporate suggestions and challenges in that report.

Throughout the summer, I learned about Georgia's programs, policies, and people. There were many things that surprised me in a good way, compared to my experiences and knowledge about other states' child welfare systems, such as the independence of the Office of the Child Advocate, the somewhat common understanding that child welfare should not be a partisan issue, and the efforts to include mental, behavioral, and developmental health in a more holistic view of child welfare. Other things surprised me in a negative way. For example, I learned how CHINS legislation has very little direction for counties to use in administering their CHINS programs. This has led to inconsistent application of CHINS policies, CHINS youths being treated like delinquent youths, and confusion for CHINS workers, judges, attorneys, DFCS workers, and others across the state. It was also surprising to see Georgia's paternity laws in action in the hearings I watched; we learned about it in Family Law I, but I was surprised to see how many fathers were deemed by law to be putative and lacked visitation rights unless they were married to the mother at the time of birth or if they established paternity, rather than allowing some to rights by the simple fact of their longstanding parenting of the child.

My work this summer helped Voices towards their goal of completing their Landscape Analysis report by November. I efficiently completed assigned tasks and worked on many aspects that would have been set aside for a bit otherwise, so this work saved the organization time down the road. My work putting together the CHINS Convening also helped this goal because the Convening was funded by Voices' grant money, partly to be able to collect insights for the Landscape Analysis report, as there is little research or information on CHINS in Georgia at this time. The Landscape Analysis will provide policy recommendations based on the research done for each section of the report, which will hopefully affect policies and legislation.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Voices this summer as an ESCAP intern, and for the multiple opportunities we have received to learn, network, and work in child welfare and juvenile justice fields. I have learned a lot about myself, Georgia child welfare, and the professional community.

Placement: Christopher W. Yokom, Fulton County Juvenile Court
School: Emory University Law School

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to serve as judicial support staff to the Honorable Judge Christopher W. Yokom of Fulton County Juvenile Court. I originally sought a judicial placement through ESCAP to further diversify my experience in the world of child welfare. As my previous experiences were rooted in policy research and advocacy, I felt very strongly about seeing policy in action in the juvenile courts to gain a deeper understanding of how the judicial system impacts children in need. My expectations were not only met, but they were far exceeded! I have learned so much from the dedicated judges and staff at the Fulton County Juvenile Court, and this summer has only ignited my passion for child welfare further.

As judicial support staff, my primary responsibilities were to attend delinquency and detention hearings – alternating each week – and take detailed notes, as well as draft orders. I attended everything from a competency evaluation, on the delinquency side, to a contested termination of parental rights, on the dependency side. The orders I worked on ranged from continuances to adjudications, and I was required to review my own personal notes, the judge’s notes, and sometimes watch recordings of hearings to ensure the information reflected in those orders was accurate and appropriate. The most important advice I received from my supervisors, generally speaking, but also primarily in regards to drafting orders, was to ground myself in the law. Therefore, when drafting orders, I always began by looking up the applicable Code section, and based my draft around the clearly-stated law and necessary elements for a ruling. This proved to be an incredibly effective way of tackling orders to emphasize the legal standards afforded to children and parents.

Outside of the day-to-day tasks of attending hearings and drafting orders, I also had the opportunity to work on some meaningful research projects. During my first week in chambers, I was asked to update the Court’s resources for the timeline of hearings, as a few changes to the Code were passed this most recent legislative cycle. This was particularly interesting, as I spent this past spring at the Georgia Capitol tracking child welfare legislation through the Barton Center’s Legislative Advocacy Clinic. Updating the resources that the Court uses daily to reflect the changes that I witnessed real-time was a very full-circle moment.

An additional research task that I completed throughout the summer was briefing cases coming out of the Georgia Court of Appeals related to child welfare – both dependency and delinquency. Seeing how these cases were handled on the appellate level was so interesting, and it was a new perspective after spending the entire summer strictly in juvenile court. In a similar vein, I had the opportunity to attend a Georgia Supreme Court oral argument on a case centered around mandatory transfers to juvenile court. Reading the party briefs for this case, familiarizing myself with the record, and hearing the oral advocacy at the Supreme Court level made me realize how high up these issues can go in the court of law; they far supersede juvenile court, and they impact people greatly.

Some of my final research tasks included completing case-specific memos, at the direction of the judge, often consolidating case information and synchronizing it with various judicial standards outlined in the Code, such as the Designated Felony Act, Motion to Transfer to Superior Court, and various elements of crimes. Again, grounding myself in the law, I found these tasks fascinating as a way to familiarize myself with the mindset of a judge. Additionally, I worked on a few overarching questions and projects, including 1) how DFCS removal from the home affects temporary guardianships and temporary custody agreements, 2) whether a PPH Order is considered a final order for appellate purposes, and 3) compiling resources for the Fulton County's Student Attendance and School Climate Committee's Protocol.

Outside of the courtroom and chambers, I also had the honor of witnessing some of the rehabilitative programs in action. Specifically, Judge Yokom and his staff oversee the Alternative Solutions Creating Excellence Not Detention (ASCEND) Program, which "seeks to reduce recidivism and foster rehabilitation amongst high-risk youth in the community through the implementation of evidence-based programs, facilitated in an accountability court model" (<https://fultonjuvenilecourt.org/programs/#ascend>). I had the chance to sit in on staffing meetings, which involved judges, judicial staff, community partners, nonprofits, and probation services, and saw firsthand how deeply these parties care about the kids served by this program. I believe in the rehabilitative nature of juvenile court, and seeing the dedication of a team committed to a singular cause was inspirational. Outside of ASCEND, I also had the chance to attend various events hosted by the Court and probation services, and seeing the community come together to uplift impacted youth and celebrate their successes was a huge motivation to me throughout the summer.

Despite all of the exciting projects I had a chance to witness and work on throughout the summer, my favorite opportunities were my final project materials. At the beginning of the summer, Judge Yokom's Judicial Staff Attorney, Margaret Riley Schweizer, asked that I complete a final project and become an "expert" on a case by the end of my internship. While amassing the knowledge necessary to become an "expert" on a case, I had the chance to look through case information in the Court's database, DFCS's reporting system, and meet with the assigned Child Attorney. Additionally, I was able to witness several hearings for the case throughout the summer. Doing a deep dive into one case in particular allowed me to study the multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach to child welfare, as I reviewed information housed by various entities, all with the same goal of promoting a child's best interests.

For my final project, I immediately knew that I wanted to conduct research on the Georgia Consent Decree that was the result of the *Kenny A. v. Sonny Perdue* litigation, which Dekalb and Fulton counties entered nearly 20 years ago. I first became aware of the *Kenny A.* Consent Decree through the Barton Center, as I worked on a research project alongside the Policy Clinic during the fall of my 2L year, and the entire concept was intriguing to me. During my prior research, I reviewed several Consent Decrees across the county, but I hadn't yet delved into the intricacies of *Kenny A.* nor explored why the counties have yet to reach compliance despite the lengthy time of monitoring. I knew this gap in personal understanding and research was where I wanted to devote my time for my final project.

While researching *Kenny A.* for my final project, I had the opportunity to attend a stakeholders meeting. The plaintiffs' council led the meeting, which brought together various child welfare experts in the community. We discussed the current status of the consent decree and the areas yet to meet compliance: primarily, the lack of recruitment and retention of competent DFCS caseworkers. As I researched the consent decree more, and looked to the most recent status reports, this is an issue that continues to keep DeKalb and Fulton Counties under judicial supervision. The State refuses to grant more funding to DFCS, which means that the Department is simply unable to offer caseworkers the salaries and support needed to effectively serve in those positions. Previous efforts by the State to address this issue have not worked, and I worry that compliance will not be met until the root issue of funding is addressed.

My research on *Kenny A.* showed the intricacies of the child welfare system and how many interested parties are involved in the lives of children in need. Moreover, while the vastness of the system can lead to inefficiency, it is necessary to ensure all of the diverse needs of these kids are met. This was one of the most surprising discoveries of the summer: the multidisciplinary team is necessary, but it also has to work together to be efficient and actually deliver on promises. For example, there is a need for policy reform, but there also has to be education as to what practices are changed; that education has to extend to the entire state, not just metro-Atlanta; that education has to extend to other departments outside of the Court, such as to DFCS and DJJ; and when the rules are not followed properly, there has to be a course of action to correct the system. There is a need for dedicated professionals at every step of this complex process, and as I learned from my *Kenny A.* research, recruitment and retention of these professionals is gravely needed.

Throughout the summer, I reflected greatly on my own goals and vision for myself working in the field of child welfare in the future. Coming into this internship, I was under the impression that I had to immediately pick my path upon graduating law school, and I would stay on that path for the rest of my career. I have since learned that could not be farther from the truth, and there are various spaces to occupy and move between in one's career. I have my supervisors to thank for that revelation. Judge Yokom began his career working as a juvenile probation officer, before pivoting to the serve as a Child Advocate attorney. After taking a break from the child welfare field, primarily working as a mediator, he returned to preside on the bench. Likewise, Staff Attorney Schweizer began her career in the Office of the Child Attorney before taking on a judicial staff role – and she also participated in ESACP and the Barton Center Clinics during law school. From these two role models and mentors, I've seen that you can make an impact in kids' lives in a variety of roles, and one's career journey can be ever-changing.

My day-to-day work of attending hearings and drafting orders allowed the judicial staff to work on other responsibilities and projects throughout the summer. The Fulton County Juvenile Court never sleeps, and I saw firsthand how the dedicated staff members are constantly working to improve the system. Taking on some of the smaller tasks allowed my colleagues to put substantive time towards rehabilitative programs, sit on committees, attend meetings, and

efficiently get through the Court calendar. I was honored to support them in this way! Additionally, I hope the research I completed throughout the summer will help keep my colleagues informed on the most current law and procedure.

Some of my research will definitely inform courtroom practices – particularly the updates to the Court’s resources for the timeline of hearings and case briefs on appellate rulings. Regarding my final project, I hope it will serve as a resource for others in the child welfare field to see what is still yet to come for *Kenny A.* compliance. There will need to be some massive undertakings from DFCS to meet compliance, and it’s up to the entire child welfare community to advocate for those changes. The money allocated to *Kenny A.* monitoring is money taken away from the child welfare system as a whole, and as a community, we must come together and advocate for systemic changes and support structures to meet the standards set nearly 20 years ago. I hope my final project can serve as a piece of that conversation, and I hope to stay involved in efforts in the future. This summer has solidified my desire to pursue a career in child welfare, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds!

Placement: Fulton County Office of Child Attorney
School: Emory Law University School of Law

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to serve as judicial support staff to the Honorable Judge Christopher W. Yokom of Fulton County Juvenile Court. I originally sought a judicial placement through ESCAP to further diversify my experience in the world of child welfare. As my previous experiences were rooted in policy research and advocacy, I felt very strongly about seeing policy in action in the juvenile courts to gain a deeper understanding of how the judicial system impacts children in need. My expectations were not only met, but they were far exceeded! I have learned so much from the dedicated judges and staff at the Fulton County Juvenile Court, and this summer has only ignited my passion for child welfare further.

As judicial support staff, my primary responsibilities were to attend delinquency and detention hearings – alternating each week – and take detailed notes, as well as draft orders. I attended everything from a competency evaluation, on the delinquency side, to a contested termination of parental rights, on the dependency side. The orders I worked on ranged from continuances to adjudications, and I was required to review my own personal notes, the judge’s notes, and sometimes watch recordings of hearings to ensure the information reflected in those orders was accurate and appropriate. The most important advice I received from my supervisors, generally speaking, but also primarily in regards to drafting orders, was to ground myself in the law. Therefore, when drafting orders, I always began by looking up the applicable Code section, and based my draft around the clearly-stated law and necessary elements for a ruling. This proved to be an incredibly effective way of tackling orders to emphasize the legal standards afforded to children and parents.

Outside of the day-to-day tasks of attending hearings and drafting orders, I also had the opportunity to work on some meaningful research projects. During my first week in chambers, I was asked to update the Court’s resources for the timeline of hearings, as a few changes to the Code were passed this most recent legislative cycle. This was particularly interesting, as I spent this past spring at the Georgia Capitol tracking child welfare legislation through the Barton Center’s Legislative Advocacy Clinic. Updating the resources that the Court uses daily to reflect the changes that I witnessed real-time was a very full-circle moment.

An additional research task that I completed throughout the summer was briefing cases coming out of the Georgia Court of Appeals related to child welfare – both dependency and delinquency. Seeing how these cases were handled on the appellate level was so interesting, and it was a new perspective after spending the entire summer strictly in juvenile court. In a similar vein, I had the opportunity to attend a Georgia Supreme Court oral argument on a case centered around mandatory transfers to juvenile court. Reading the party briefs for this case, familiarizing myself with the record, and hearing the oral advocacy at the Supreme Court level made me realize how high up these issues can go in the court of law; they far supersede juvenile court, and they impact people greatly.

Some of my final research tasks included completing case-specific memos, at the direction of the judge, often consolidating case information and synchronizing it with various judicial standards outlined in the Code, such as the Designated Felony Act, Motion to Transfer to Superior Court, and various elements of crimes. Again, grounding myself in the law, I found these tasks fascinating as a way to familiarize myself with the mindset of a judge. Additionally, I worked on a few overarching questions and projects, including 1) how DFCS removal from the home affects temporary guardianships and temporary custody agreements, 2) whether a PPH Order is considered a final order for appellate purposes, and 3) compiling resources for the Fulton County's Student Attendance and School Climate Committee's Protocol.

Outside of the courtroom and chambers, I also had the honor of witnessing some of the rehabilitative programs in action. Specifically, Judge Yokom and his staff oversee the Alternative Solutions Creating Excellence Not Detention (ASCEND) Program, which "seeks to reduce recidivism and foster rehabilitation amongst high-risk youth in the community through the implementation of evidence-based programs, facilitated in an accountability court model" (<https://fultonjuvenilecourt.org/programs/#ascend>). I had the chance to sit in on staffing meetings, which involved judges, judicial staff, community partners, nonprofits, and probation services, and saw firsthand how deeply these parties care about the kids served by this program. I believe in the rehabilitative nature of juvenile court, and seeing the dedication of a team committed to a singular cause was inspirational. Outside of ASCEND, I also had the chance to attend various events hosted by the Court and probation services, and seeing the community come together to uplift impacted youth and celebrate their successes was a huge motivation to me throughout the summer.

Despite all of the exciting projects I had a chance to witness and work on throughout the summer, my favorite opportunities were my final project materials. At the beginning of the summer, Judge Yokom's Judicial Staff Attorney, Margaret Riley Schweizer, asked that I complete a final project and become an "expert" on a case by the end of my internship. While amassing the knowledge necessary to become an "expert" on a case, I had the chance to look through case information in the Court's database, DFCS's reporting system, and meet with the assigned Child Attorney. Additionally, I was able to witness several hearings for the case throughout the summer. Doing a deep dive into one case in particular allowed me to study the multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach to child welfare, as I reviewed information housed by various entities, all with the same goal of promoting a child's best interests.

For my final project, I immediately knew that I wanted to conduct research on the Georgia Consent Decree that was the result of the *Kenny A. v. Sonny Perdue* litigation, which Dekalb and Fulton counties entered nearly 20 years ago. I first became aware of the *Kenny A.* Consent Decree through the Barton Center, as I worked on a research project alongside the Policy Clinic during the fall of my 2L year, and the entire concept was intriguing to me. During my prior research, I reviewed several Consent Decrees across the county, but I hadn't yet delved into the intricacies of *Kenny A.* nor explored why the counties have yet to reach compliance despite the lengthy time of monitoring. I knew this gap in personal understanding and research was where I wanted to devote my time for my final project.

While researching *Kenny A.* for my final project, I had the opportunity to attend a stakeholders meeting. The plaintiffs' council led the meeting, which brought together various child welfare experts in the community. We discussed the current status of the consent decree and the areas yet to meet compliance: primarily, the lack of recruitment and retention of competent DFCS caseworkers. As I researched the consent decree more, and looked to the most recent status reports, this is an issue that continues to keep Dekalb and Fulton Counties under judicial supervision. The State refuses to grant more funding to DFCS, which means that the Department is simply unable to offer caseworkers the salaries and support needed to effectively serve in those positions. Previous efforts by the State to address this issue have not worked, and I worry that compliance will not be met until the root issue of funding is addressed.

My research on *Kenny A.* showed the intricacies of the child welfare system and how many interested parties are involved in the lives of children in need. Moreover, while the vastness of the system can lead to inefficiency, it is necessary to ensure all of the diverse needs of these kids are met. This was one of the most surprising discoveries of the summer: the multidisciplinary team is necessary, but it also has to work together to be efficient and actually deliver on promises. For example, there is a need for policy reform, but there also has to be education as to what practices are changed; that education has to extend to the entire state, not just metro-Atlanta; that education has to extend to other departments outside of the Court, such as to DFCS and DJJ; and when the rules are not followed properly, there has to be a course of action to correct the system. There is a need for dedicated professionals at every step of this complex process, and as I learned from my *Kenny A.* research, recruitment and retention of these professionals is gravely needed.

Throughout the summer, I reflected greatly on my own goals and vision for myself working in the field of child welfare in the future. Coming into this internship, I was under the impression that I had to immediately pick my path upon graduating law school, and I would stay on that path for the rest of my career. I have since learned that could not be farther from the truth, and there are various spaces to occupy and move between in one's career. I have my supervisors to thank for that revelation. Judge Yokom began his career working as a juvenile probation officer, before pivoting to the serve as a Child Advocate attorney. After taking a break from the child welfare field, primarily working as a mediator, he returned to preside on the bench. Likewise, Staff Attorney Schweizer began her career in the Office of the Child Attorney before taking on a judicial staff role – and she also participated in ESACP and the Barton Center Clinics during law school. From these two role models and mentors, I've seen that you can make an impact in kids' lives in a variety of roles, and one's career journey can be ever-changing.

My day-to-day work of attending hearings and drafting orders allowed the judicial staff to work on other responsibilities and projects throughout the summer. The Fulton County Juvenile Court never sleeps, and I saw firsthand how the dedicated staff members are constantly working to improve the system. Taking on some of the smaller tasks allowed my colleagues to put substantive time towards rehabilitative programs, sit on committees, attend meetings, and

efficiently get through the Court calendar. I was honored to support them in this way! Additionally, I hope the research I completed throughout the summer will help keep my colleagues informed on the most current law and procedure.

Some of my research will definitely inform courtroom practices – particularly the updates to the Court’s resources for the timeline of hearings and case briefs on appellate rulings. Regarding my final project, I hope it will serve as a resource for others in the child welfare field to see what is still yet to come for *Kenny A.* compliance. There will need to be some massive undertakings from DFCS to meet compliance, and it’s up to the entire child welfare community to advocate for those changes. The money allocated to *Kenny A.* monitoring is money taken away from the child welfare system as a whole, and as a community, we must come together and advocate for systemic changes and support structures to meet the standards set nearly 20 years ago. I hope my final project can serve as a piece of that conversation, and I hope to stay involved in efforts in the future. This summer has solidified my desire to pursue a career in child welfare, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds!

Placement: The Honorable Judge Du
School: Mercer University School of Law

Over the past ten weeks, I have had the privilege of acting as a mini staff attorney for the Honorable Judge Du. My projects have challenged me to become a better writer, analytical thinker, and compassionate advocate. My main role has been writing orders on termination of parental rights, motions, custody, and visitation. When I was not drafting or researching, I was taking notes and observing court proceedings, as well as participating in discussions in chambers to determine rulings. I also conducted research projects about evidence questions, directed verdicts, and burden of proof requirements in a legitimation proceeding. Further, I compiled all legislative updates from this year's legislative session to assist the judicial staff in moving forward of how to closely follow the Code. When I learned of the tasks I would be doing, I was eager, as I knew my work would be impacting real people in real time. And I am grateful to say that over the course of this summer, I have written nine orders that were all filed with the Court, the most significant being two orders terminating parental rights. The confidence the judicial staff instilled in me to beneficially participate in their efforts allowed me to gain experiences I never thought I would be allowed to be a part of at such an early stage in my career.

There are, of course, many transformative moments I can recall, both happy and sad. However, a few stick out in my mind. First, a kiddo who had just graduated from high school came in for a Judicial Review. He had not had a graduation party or been celebrated in a way he deserved. But, he was so proud, and his one request for the Department was for them to assist in framing his diploma. Judge Du stopped him in his tracks, stepped off the bench, and came down to wrap him in a big congratulatory hug. The smiles on both of their faces were unforgettable, because even though he had gone through a rough childhood, he knew Judge Du had always had his back. So much so, that a strong relationship had formed. I learned that even when the lives of these children are really tough, Judges can form bonds and be their cheerleaders when they need it most.

Another positive moment was when a mother came into Court to hopefully get custody of her daughter. Originally, her daughter had been taken from her due to substance abuse and mental health issues. However, this mother had been a model participant in Mental Health Treatment Court and had maintained negative drug screens. While this process will still be a transition, the look of relief when Judge Du ordered the return of custody of her daughter to her was encouraging. This mother had overcome the impossible and was a perfect example of what the child welfare system is supposed to do: support the reunification of families by providing services and support.

There were many hard moments too. We saw a case that was deemed torture, one where a child died, and another where other family members did not make it. We also saw cases where parties were not delivering on their duties, and I was grateful to see Judge Du hold them accountable. These children deserve more, and the Judge is the one who often has the most discretion to step in when others are failing. However, even in the terrible moments, I felt inspired that I was a part

of a Court that was making a difference in children's lives by being the guardian to step in to protect them from abuse and neglect.

In addition to the particular cases and tasks I completed, I also learned about best practices in child welfare. Judge Du's courtroom was always shining even in the tough times. When children walked in, they were allowed to play with any of the toys and even take one home with them when they left. There was also a wall of supplies that foster children and families were allowed to take. Another best practice I saw often used was speaking directly to the child and always allowing them a chance to be heard in a proceeding that is all about them. Even if what they wanted to say was a simple "thank you", I always saw the comfort they felt being in Judge Du's courtroom. These trauma-informed practices went above and beyond, and I was astonished at the care Judge Du showed these families each and every day.

Finally, I learned about the aspect of a team. These were not traditional teams. They were made up of attorneys, caseworkers, foster parents, fictive kin, Judges, and guardians. Yet, I made the realization that sports teams reap the benefits of luxurious preparation and resources while these child advocacy teams experience the occasional code book or the infrequent already prepared order. Truthfully, football, soccer, basketball, or any other sports game does not truly matter. Sure, it may solicit growth, community, and health benefits, but at the end of the day who wins the game does not really matter. What is significant is where a child is going to sleep tonight or if they are going to be able to see their mother again. So, I beg the question, why are we not equipping these teams with the same resources? Why one team matters more than the other will continue to be a mystery to me, as well as Judge Du, but what I have concluded is that there are team members who I have worked with this summer who perform at incredibly high levels with minimal support. I consider them heroes, and I am privileged to have been able to learn from them.

I can confidently say I now feel burdened with knowledge. There may be career paths that offer different benefits, but a career in child welfare will always out fulfill the other paths. There is no other area of the law that deals with immigration, family law, contract law, and more all at the same time. Child welfare is both intellectually challenging and fulfilling all at once. And this knowledge I am now burdened with may sound negative. Quite the contrary, actually, this burden is enlightening and leaves me hungry for more. I cannot unsee what I have seen. I cannot unhear what I have heard. I am forever grateful to the ESCAP program and Judge Du for teaching me what it is like to be a professional in child welfare, and that I too, can do this work with a broken heart.

Placement: National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC)

School: Emory University School of Law

I remember feeling energized and excited for the summer during my interviews for my ESCAP placement. With everyone that I spoke to, I remember feeling that they were approachable, passionate, and excited to have an ESCAP intern. As I finish my internship, I can honestly say that I had a wonderful experience with the ESCAP program from start to finish.

This summer, I interned with National Association of Counsel for Children. In my internship, I spent most of my time researching legislative advancement in different states. My research focused on assisting the Counsel for Kids campaign, which advocates for policy reform in states that do not guarantee counsel for children in dependency, abuse, and neglect proceedings. Through my internship, I completed an article for the South Carolina Bar Journal on the right to counsel for children in dependency cases, researched legislation in different states pertaining to extending foster care services to age 21, and practice standards for child attorneys.

Because my placement was a hybrid format, I was worried that I would not have the “typical” summer associate experience, but through the ESCAP program I had everything I needed from the “typical” experience and more. I worked mostly remote but had in-person check-ins with my supervisor and multiple events and opportunities throughout the summer to meet the other interns and other professionals outside of my placement.

One of my favorite parts of my internship was getting to meet so many people who work in child welfare law in Georgia. The Georgia child welfare community is so close-knit, and so many professionals are eager to work with interns and share their passion for making a difference for children. I feel that this community is truly so passionate about what they do, and I loved feeling like I was making a difference.

Through the ESCAP program, I was also able to observe a termination of parental rights trial in court, tour the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy, and attend Lunch and Learn sessions with different attorneys throughout the state. I really enjoyed my Lunch and Learn sessions and getting to meet attorneys working in different areas of child welfare law and hear about their experience. For example, one attorney spoke about education and civil rights as it pertains to child welfare law. Another session was hosted by a Legal Advocacy Fellow with the Barton Child Policy Center. Another session was hosted by an attorney who represents DFCS.

Another highlight of my internship was the ESCAP training week in the beginning of the summer. I loved meeting the other interns and hearing from so many speakers in child welfare like judges, attorneys, social workers, staff attorneys, CASA volunteers, and former foster-care individuals sharing their lived-experience. I even got to observe a trial with my supervisor later in the summer where one of the judges that spoke at training week presided over the trial.

I really enjoyed my placement because I was able to see the impact that people have in this field. I enjoyed watching my supervisor get to present webinars to legislators, attorneys, and judges across different states and answer their questions about child welfare and counsel for children. I was also able to call different state administrative offices to check on the status of different bills and track legislation in this field.

One of the reasons I chose Emory Law was because of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center, which runs the ESCAP program. I wanted to go to law school specifically to do this work and learn from Professor Carter and the wonderful staff at the Center. Even as someone who wanted to go to law school to work in this area, I do not know if I truly understood the impact of this important work. Through the ESCAP program, I was able to meet professionals in child welfare law that have made such a tremendous difference in policy change and practice, and they are so passionate and eager to share that passion with students. I felt that my supervisor at my placement, Natalece Washington, and the ESCAP program staff were approachable, knowledgeable, and eager for me to have a positive experience. There were multiple opportunities with my supervisor and with Professor Carter and the ESCAP staff to check in about the work I was doing and receive feedback and support.

I know that my work will have an impact on future legislation because my supervisor will be able to use my research to help advocate for policy change in states that do not guarantee counsel for children.

I am so grateful to this program for the personal and professional growth awarded to me this summer. If I had to give any advice to the next class of students deciding if to apply for this program, I would say that if you have any interest in child welfare law you should absolutely apply. You will not be disappointed!

Placement: Gwinnett County Juvenile Court – Judge Robert Waller
School: Emory University School of Law

This summer, I had the privilege of being a judicial intern for Chief Judge Robert Waller in the Gwinnett County Juvenile Court. During my internship, I observed court proceedings for dependency cases, drafted court orders, and researched and drafted memorandums. By observing court proceedings, I learned about the rules of evidence, and the unique ways the rules of evidence apply to juvenile court proceedings. Through my research, I learned about the juvenile court's original jurisdiction for matters involving juveniles, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, and the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for immigrant children.

I found that the most surprising aspect of child advocacy was the interconnectedness of delinquency and dependency proceedings. Many children in dependency proceedings have had prior or pending delinquency proceedings. Children with active delinquency proceedings are occasionally appointed a Guardian ad Litem to represent their best interests as well as a defense attorney to advocate for the child's best legal interest. During the delinquency proceedings, the Guardian ad Litem would often request that the Gwinnett Division of Family and Children Services ("the Department") needed to be involved. The judge would often advise the Guardian that they would need to file a petition for removal to get the Department involved in a case. During both delinquency and dependency proceedings, the child is offered services to help rehabilitate the child. During dependency proceedings, the Department offers the child services to help assist the child with reunification with the family, and during delinquency proceedings, the court orders the child to receive certain services for rehabilitation of their offenses. I was pleased to learn that children and families are offered many different types of service. I was surprised to learn that children can remain in dependency and delinquency proceedings for a substantial amount of time, despite all the services offered to children and their families. Through my experience at juvenile court, I have started to think about different ways to shorten the length of time it takes to resolve delinquency and dependency proceedings.

My supervisor was Judge Waller's Staff Attorney, Rachel Lazarus. Ms. Lazarus influenced my perceptions about child advocacy work because she emphasized the need for reform in removal. Ms. Lazarus would often advocate that children should not be removed because of "poverty removals." This influenced me to analyze the reasons why we remove children differently. Judge Waller further influenced me because he focused on reunification. There have been many cases where the parent was inconsistently completing their parenting plan, but Judge Waller would be hesitant to terminate the parent's parental rights or grant a guardianship because the goal was reunification. It was so satisfying to help draft an order for a child to be reunified with their parent because the parent had finally completed their parenting plan. Through these influences, I now analyze the Department's reasons for removal and reasons to not continue with a reunification plan more critically.

During my internship, my work helped to ensure that court orders were completed timely and efficiently. I also helped to draft orders that were old and/or missing from a file to reduce the

court's backlog of orders. This helps the juvenile court system in Gwinnett County to run more efficiently. During my internship, I also researched and created informational documents regarding emancipation. This research will help the juvenile court system in Gwinnett County because it will inform judges on emancipation proceedings and help to streamline the process of an emancipation proceeding. It will also help juveniles understand their emancipation rights.

I further researched information regarding the court impleading and asserting personal jurisdiction over a non-resident, during dependency proceedings. My research will further help to inform judges on the statutory and constitutional limitations of impleading a third party and asserting personal jurisdiction over a non-resident, during dependency proceedings. This research will also help the Department in the courtroom because it will allow for the Department to add non-residents as a party without court assistance. It will also help the Department in the courtroom because it can implead a party in the jurisdiction of the court in the child's best interest.

Placement: DeKalb CASA

School: Florida State University Masters of Social Work, Masters of Public Admin

Introduction

This summer, I had the opportunity to complete my internship at DeKalb CASA, a nonprofit organization located in Decatur, Georgia. DeKalb CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates, and their primary mission is to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children under the protection of the juvenile court. As a CASA Volunteer, the goal is to ensure safe and permanent homes for each child as quickly as possible. DeKalb CASA accomplishes this mission by training and supporting citizen volunteers who serve as advocates for individual children while maintaining ethical behavior, respect, and confidentiality. Throughout my internship, I engaged in a diverse range of activities, including attending court hearings, participating in panel reviews, conducting policy analysis, researching various organizations, and performing home visits.

What Did You Learn About the Field of Child Advocacy Work That Surprised You?

During my internship, I encountered several surprising aspects of child advocacy work. One of the most notable revelations was the significant influence attorneys have on decisions regarding a child's placement. In numerous court hearings I attended, it became evident that state attorneys play a crucial role in determining the outcomes for children. I observed various parties involved in court proceedings, including the child advocate attorney, caseworkers, state attorneys, CASA supervisors, court-appointed special advocates, parents' attorneys, the judge, and sometimes even the children themselves, depending on their age.

Before joining this internship, I believed that the Department of Families and Children had the ultimate authority in deciding whether a child would be returned home. However, I was surprised to learn that state attorneys often have substantial sway in these decisions. Coming from Florida and having extensive experience in the child welfare system, I was astonished to see the behind-the-scenes dynamics and the numerous individuals involved in the decision-making process. Initially, I thought the primary parties were the caseworker, the child, and the parents' attorneys. I never considered the involvement of state attorneys or CAA'S. Additionally, I was unaware of the frequent debates and disagreements that occur among the various parties and how these disputes can prolong the resolution of a case. Factors such as the inability to reach a particular party, improper verbiage, or simple disagreements among attorneys can significantly extend the time it takes to close a case.

Witnessing state attorneys engage in lengthy debates with child advocate attorneys and parents' attorneys was eye-opening. While their intentions are to protect the child's best interests, I sometimes felt that their overprotectiveness could inadvertently cause more harm than good. Another enlightening aspect of my internship was discovering the extensive training and certification opportunities available to all parties involved in child welfare. Before joining DeKalb CASA, I was unaware of the multitude of training programs offered to educate individuals on

various topics, including obesity, dental health, PTSD, cultural awareness, brain trauma, complex trauma, and more. This aspect of the internship was incredibly valuable, as it highlighted the importance of continuous education for child welfare workers, parents, foster parents, and even professionals in related fields such as schools, nonprofits, and churches. I gained immense knowledge from these training sessions, which I can apply in various areas of my life. Understanding topics like brain trauma and PTSD has provided me with better skills and knowledge for engaging with individuals of all ages. These training sessions enhanced my ability to build rapport, understand, and effectively interact with people, making it one of the most rewarding parts of my internship. The knowledge I acquired will be invaluable throughout my career and personal life, enabling me to make a positive impact on the lives of those I work with and encounter.

Internship Highlights

During my internship at DeKalb CASA, I found several aspects particularly enjoyable and enriching. Attending court hearings was one of these highlights, as it allowed me to observe the legal processes and advocate for children's best interests in real time. Additionally, conducting home visits was incredibly fulfilling. These visits gave me the opportunity to get to know each child and their foster parents on a personal level. This face-to-face interaction was crucial in making sound and wise judgments about the children's needs and welfare. However, my favorite experience during the internship was the opportunity to attend numerous training courses. Often, internships view interns as temporary help, providing work that benefits the company in the short term. At DeKalb CASA, I felt that they saw me not just as an intern but as a future professional in child welfare and juvenile advocacy. They invested in my growth by providing a wide range of training opportunities that enhanced my knowledge and skills, regardless of the direction my career might take.

These training courses covered a vast array of topics, from understanding brain trauma and PTSD to the importance of cultural sensitivity and dealing with complex trauma. The knowledge I gained was not only applicable to my work in child welfare but also incredibly valuable in my everyday life and relationships. For instance, understanding brain trauma and PTSD has equipped me with the skills to interact more empathetically and effectively with people who have experienced significant stress or trauma. These trainings also emphasized the importance of rapport building and effective communication, skills that are essential in both professional and personal settings. By far, the most rewarding part of interning at DeKalb CASA was the depth and breadth of knowledge I acquired, which I can utilize for a lifetime. In summary, the comprehensive and thoughtful training I received at DeKalb CASA has profoundly impacted my professional development and personal growth. It has provided me with the tools to engage more effectively with children, families, and various environments, ultimately contributing to my overall well-being and that of those I interact with. This investment in my long-term growth was one of the best parts of my internship, as it prepared me to make meaningful contributions in the field of child advocacy and beyond impact on the Organization

Research

My research and work during my internship at DeKalb CASA had a significant impact not only on the organization itself but also on various stakeholders within the child welfare system. Throughout my time with DeKalb CASA, I dedicated a substantial amount of effort to researching different resources and organizations across Georgia that could benefit those involved in child welfare. One of my key research projects involved identifying organizations that provide housing and support for teen mothers. This research was crucial because it offered a lifeline to young mothers who needed a safe place to live while receiving the necessary support to care for their children and themselves. By compiling a list of such organizations, I provided DeKalb CASA with valuable information that could be shared with caseworkers and used to help teen mothers within the system. Additionally, I researched activities and programs specifically designed for children with behavioral issues. This was particularly impactful as it provided not only the child welfare sector but also foster homes, schools, and even churches with effective strategies and activities to manage and support children with behavioral challenges. The goal was to offer these children constructive outlets and resources that could help them thrive in various environments.

My research also extended to identifying resources for homeless individuals, people with autism, and members of the LGBTQ community. This comprehensive approach ensured that DeKalb CASA had a wealth of information to support a diverse range of needs. By doing so, I helped to highlight the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). For example, I discovered programs that provide specialized support for autistic children, which can be immensely beneficial for foster parents and educators in creating a nurturing and understanding environment. Similarly, by finding resources for the homeless, I contributed to a broader support network that could be utilized by caseworkers when dealing with children and families facing housing instability. The research I conducted had practical applications that extended beyond DeKalb CASA. It provided a valuable repository of information that caseworkers, child advocates, and other stakeholders could use to better support the children and families they work with. This, in turn, enhances the overall effectiveness and reach of the child welfare system in Georgia.

Overall, my research efforts during the internship were instrumental in expanding the resource base available to DeKalb CASA and other child welfare entities. By identifying and compiling a wide array of support services and programs, I helped to create a more robust and informed network that can better address the diverse needs of children and families in the child welfare system. This not only benefited DeKalb CASA but also had a ripple effect, positively impacting numerous parties involved in child welfare across the state.

All in all, I had an amazing internship placement this summer. This experience provided me with invaluable insights into the roles of various child welfare workers, including Child Advocate Attorneys (CAA), Guardians ad Litem (GAL), caseworkers, and more. The internship thoroughly fulfilled its purpose by offering hands-on experience that aligns with my career aspirations and interests in child advocacy. I am immensely grateful to Tara Daniels for giving me the opportunity to intern with DeKalb CASA and to Ms. Zimmerman for her ongoing support and guidance throughout my internship. Their mentorship and the experiences I gained have significantly contributed to my professional growth and reinforced my commitment to child

welfare work. As well as a huge thank you to the entire Emory ESCAP program employers for giving me such a great opportunity.