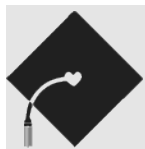


Legal Justice Advocate

2018 Equal Justice Works Fellow at
Community Legal Services. Sponsored by
Greenberg Traurig, LLP



Tracie Johnson

Ursinus College, Class of 2013



Describe your current position and the journey that led you here.

I had the opportunity to tutor in a women's prison through Bonner at Ursinus College. I cultivated a passion for criminal justice reform and public interest law. After graduation I wanted to keep doing service, so I went out for a position at Philadelphia VIP, an organization that connects pro bono services with the people who need it. I realized I wanted to be one of the lawyers making an impact on my community. I then worked as a Legal Intake Volunteer for the American Civil Liberties Union and applied to Temple University Law School.

While I was at Temple, I had wonderful internships every year. I got to work on youth issues, women's issues, expungements, and a few other areas. I was able to learn from every experience and deepen my understanding of so many issues. Now all of these experiences are coming full-circle. I am studying for the BAR exam right now and preparing to take on a position as the 2018 Equal Justice Works Fellow at Community Legal Services, sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, LLP. In that position I will be able to take an active role in working on issues I have cared about for so long, but previously lacked the context, knowledge, and skill to understand. Now I am ready to bring solutions to issues I have cared about for so long.

What makes your work meaningful?

I can give back to my community in ways that I would not be able to as an individual. By working with other legal teams and becoming an expert myself, I can influence laws that have real impacts on people. I think it is important to stay close to the ground and be proximate to the communities you are trying to serve. I am grateful that I can stay connected and keep working closely with communities.

What does an average work day and year look like for you?

I was constantly studying at Temple Law School. I did not want to be disconnected from service and community, so I took advantage of every opportunity that I could find to be involved in the community work that happens on the ground. There has not been an average day yet, since I have just graduated. In law school, however, it was constant studying and learning and I would fit in community work anywhere I could.



What is best and worst thing about working in your current role or sector?

One of the hardest things is dealing with the politics of law. There can be a law that comes down from a place you cannot control and it starts to impact everyone you work with. Politics can be abstract when you are not involved in them. When you are working on the ground, the harsh reality of political policy can be demoralizing.

One of the best things is getting to be so close to people I am working with. Being able to meet the people I am advocating for and seeing the changes that can be made in their lives is inspiring and rewarding.

If you had to name one decision, positive or negative, that has shaped your path. What is it?

There are many experiences that seem like predecessors for the others, so it is hard to separate a single origin. I will say that I am grateful for the opportunities I did not get. I am a faith-based person and feel like my steps have been ordered. There were times when I could have gotten another opportunity and become a teacher, or missed out on deeply connecting with Bonner because I would have had other things on my plate. I am not sure there is one decision, but the times I missed opportunities are just as impactful as the times I have landed them. Looking back at all the times my future could have changed, I feel that my life has been divinely guided.

What has been the biggest impact Bonner has had on your life or work?

Bonner was intentional about finding what is in your heart, what you are passionate about, what you are good at, and combining all of that. Bonner is a way to find your calling. They helped me to reflect and take ownership over my life.

What do you wish you knew as a recent Bonner graduate preparing for this field?

That you should be prepared to commit to a grind. Bonner put a battery in my back and helped me believe that I could accomplish whatever I put my mind to. That is important in the workforce. You will not always have people telling you that you can do it. Not everyone believes that change is even possible. It was a wake-up call to me that people could be highly complacent when compared to the average Bonner. If you commit to your goals and are ready to work as hard as necessary for them, the adjustment will be more manageable.