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### **Final Report - 2021 Asper Faculty-Funded fellowship**

This summer I worked at Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY) as an Asper Centre Summer Fellow. JFCY is a legal aid clinic in Ontario that provides legal services to young people under 18 and homeless youth under the age of 25. The clinic provides summary legal advice with specializations in conflicts within the legal, education, social and mental health systems in the province. On a systemic level, JFCY advocates for law reform from a child-centered perspective. This takes the form of strategic interventions in cases where child rights are at stake as well as public legal education projects. Over the course of the summer, I worked on a constitutional challenge to the minimum voting age in Canada and a public legal education project aimed at enhancing access to special education.

My primary project at JFCY was assisting in launching a constitutional challenge to the minimum voting age in Canada. JFCY and the Asper Centre worked together on this case over the course of the summer, allowing me to work closely with students at the Asper Center and my supervising lawyers Emily Chan and Mary Birdsell. From interviewing potential co-litigants to strategizing about social media campaigns, the level of participation and autonomy that I was given was beyond anything I had ever imagined. I was able to learn about test cases and the preparatory processes leading up to filing a notice of application. Additionally, I drafted numerous affidavits for potential co-litigants which allowed me to develop my legal writing skills in a non-academic setting. The bulk of my practitioner related experiences were on the voting age challenge case but working at JFCY also allowed me to learn extensively about public legal education.

Shortly before I joined the clinic, JFCY was provided funding by the Ministry of Education to create resources for parents, caregivers, and students to enhance access to special education in Ontario. When I expressed my interest in education related legal issues to my supervising lawyer Emily Chan, she added me to the team when the project was in its earliest stages. What came to be called Enhancing Access to Special Education (EASE), allowed me to work on a three-person team to address a legal issue that I was passionate about prior to my time at JFCY.

The EASE project was the highlight of my time at JFCY as I was completely unaware of the legal work available in the realm of public legal education. I was able to assist in stakeholder consultations as well as design and execute materials to be disseminated across the province. Most importantly, this project and JFCY as an organization, has allowed me to cultivate and apply a multi-disciplinary and intersectional approach to the law, something that has been missing thus far in my legal education. I have had the pleasure of working alongside lawyers,

social workers, and community organizations. JFCY's holistic approach to solving legal problems has been my biggest takeaway, one I hope to employ throughout my legal career.

My time with JFCY has taught me so much about Legal Aid Ontario and I am endlessly grateful for the opportunities it has presented. Coming into law school with exposure to the non-profit sector in Calgary, I knew that JFCY's mandate would align with my professional and personal values. However, I was blown away with the passion that the entire team has for advancing the rights of young people and fostering a more inclusive legal landscape. These opportunities would not have been possible without the generosity of the Asper Centre for which I am extremely grateful.

Thank you,

Meaza Damte

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