



ANNIE EBY

KING CHILD HEALTH FELLOW

UNDERGRAD: VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

KING CHILD HEALTH FELLOW: AUGUST 2025 - JULY 2026

How did you learn about TJC and its King Child Nutrition Fellowship?

After graduating from Villanova University in May 2024, I joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps for a year of service. I was lucky to match with the Tennessee Justice Center, where I served full-time as the Jesuit Volunteer (JV) Healthcare Client Advocate. When my year of service came to an end, I accepted an offer to stay on the team as the King Child Health Fellow for another year.

Why did you want to do the King Fellowship?

During my year of service, I realized I loved working with families of children with complex medical needs. These children live with conditions such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, congenital heart defects, rare genetic conditions, and other serious illnesses. I witnessed families navigate confusing paperwork, appeals, and hearings just to access the healthcare and services their child needed to survive.

I found a sense of purpose learning the complexities of the system and, more importantly, walking alongside parents as they navigated them. The King Child Health Fellowship offered me the opportunity to continue to serve children and families directly while also collaborating with the Health Policy and Advocacy team to improve child and maternal health outcomes across state. It felt like a natural next step - it combined the client advocacy I had come to love with the opportunity to help make the system better for everyone.

Did you have a typical routine during your fellowship, or did it vary from day-to-day?

50% of my time was spent on direct casework. I screened young clients for coverage and submitted applications, prepared and filed eligibility appeals, collaborated with staff attorneys, and corrected TennCare administrative errors to secure coverage for medically complex kids.

The other 50% was dedicated to advocacy. I authored the Children's Champion Newsletter, keeping advocates, providers, and faith leaders informed about state and federal updates on child and maternal health policy. I supported our organization's press and media engagement efforts that resulted in coverage by local, state, and national outlets. And as Lead Storyteller for the health team, I strengthened organization-wide storytelling infrastructure and captured the lived experiences of our clients through narrative-writing, helping influence policy and shape people's understanding of the public safety net.

Can you share more about one of the client cases you helped with during your Fellowship?

One client who comes to mind is a little boy named Zacchaeus. He was born with an extremely rare form of double-dominant dwarfism and has complex medical needs that require constant, specialized care. His mother came to the Tennessee Justice Center after learning he was at risk of losing his TennCare coverage. I worked with the family to enroll Zacchaeus in the Katie Beckett Waiver, which provides Medicaid coverage and additional support for Tennessee's most medically fragile children. Through the program, he now has access to the therapies, growth hormones, medical supplies, and treatments he needs to thrive.

I had the privilege of visiting this family's home to collect their story in person. As soon as I walked through the door, I could hear the pitter-patter of four children running through the house - one of whom the family had adopted - and the sound of constant laughter. I learned that Zacchaeus's father is a motivational speaker in his spare time and that his mother homeschools the children. Meeting clients in person reminds me that every case file represents a real family with hopes, routines, and challenges that extend far beyond the paperwork. Visiting Zacchaeus's family made that clear, and it reinforced why this work matters so much to me.

What were some of your favorite memories at TJC during your Fellowship?

My favorite memories mostly revolve around my clients. The parents I worked with were kind, forgiving, compassionate, hard-working, and deeply attuned to what matters most in life. As cheesy as it sounds, they changed me for good. Other favorite memories were in TJC traditions, namely "Farm Day" out on Gordon's sweet potato farm. A word of advice: beware of Gordon's tractor ride.

Would you say you had a robust knowledge of (health care coverage/nutrition safety net, etc.) before your fellowship? If not, what did you learn?

I had very limited knowledge of Medicaid before my fellowship; most of what I know now, I learned on the job. What I found most interesting was seeing firsthand the intersection of healthcare, law, and public policy - and how healthcare systems, legal frameworks, and public policies can shape and sometimes perpetuate cycles of poverty.

What were some skills you took away/learned from the fellowship?

Practically speaking, the King Child Health Fellowship strengthened my problem-solving, critical thinking, project management, advocacy, and communication skills. But most important of all, I learned the value of humility. I learned to be comfortable asking questions when I didn't know the answer. I'm indebted to those who showed me the way - I wouldn't have accomplished nearly as much without the guidance and support of my coworkers, TJC staff attorneys, and mentors.

What's something you wish more people knew about healthcare coverage/nutrition safety net?

Medicaid supports some of the most vulnerable members of our communities: children, the elderly, pregnant women, people with disabilities, foster youth, and more. In Tennessee, TennCare covers about half of all births and nearly half of all children. Beyond the moral imperative of ensuring access to healthcare for our neighbors, TennCare also strengthens our economy. It helps keep rural hospitals open, keeps folks healthy, reduces medical debt, and brings federal dollars into the state.

How did your time as a fellow shape you into who you are today and the work that you do?

My time as King Child Health Fellow was instrumental in my decision to pursue a career in optometry. Early on in my fellowship, I worked with a walk-in client experiencing homelessness who had severely impaired vision due to untreated cataracts. Although his vision could have been restored through routine cataract surgery, he was unable to access care because he did not qualify for Medicaid nor coverage through the Marketplace. The interaction brought into sharp focus the role vision plays in how we engage and interact with the world. It became a defining moment in my decision to go to optometry school.

So, I guess my takeaway is this: whether you ultimately choose to pursue law, medicine, nonprofit management, public policy, global health, or another field entirely, TJC may help you discover what sets your heart on fire.

Do you have any advice for current and future TJC fellows?

Ask questions, put your ego aside, admit when you make a mistake, and ask for help. I learned very quickly that no one expected me to know everything. What mattered was being honest, staying curious, and always focusing on what was best for my client.