

August 28, 2017

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I had the privilege of interning for Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc. I was assigned to the General Law Unit in downtown Atlanta. When my internship began, I was uncertain of what type of law I wanted to practice, but after working with my supervisor and other attorneys in the office, I gained a stronger interest in labor and employment law. I likely would not have realized my interest in employment law without my experience through Atlanta Legal Aid.

My duties in the office included weekly screening of clients who were eligible for Legal Aid's services. I would be assigned anywhere from 2-5 clients to call in order to better understand their legal issues. Often these phone calls required follow up with the clients who came to our office. This allowed me to have one-on-one time with the clients and sometimes to decipher that their legal issues were more extensive than they originally presented.

During these screening calls, I was often struck by awe and respect for clients who tried to handle these legal issues on their own. Many of them had made lengthy trips on public transit to visit public benefits offices, researched their legal issues at the library, and maintained a personal file and record for their case. While I respected their initiative, they simply were unable to efficiently protect their own interests alone. After struggling for weeks, months, or even years with legal issues, their gratitude for the assistance I provided was humbling.

In addition to screening clients, I was also able to represent two clients in two very different matters. The first case was assigned [to me] early on, and while it did not involve a law suit or a large recovery, the impact on the client made this one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career thus far.

The client was an elderly resident of a public housing facility which had, for years, promised a reward for any resident who reported a crime which resulted in an arrest. One year before calling us, the client had witnessed three men burglarizing an apartment. She reported it to the police, and one of the three men was arrested. For one year the client repeatedly requested her reward from management, but she was dismissed each time. After speaking with me and providing me with the pamphlets which promised the reward, I drafted a letter to the apartment management requesting the reward be dispersed to my client. Within two weeks, the client called me with great excitement to inform me that they had given her the \$300 reward. Although this \$300 may seem small to many, you could hear the joy in the client that the matter was settled, and she was given what she was rightfully owed.

The second client that was assigned to me was a client who was disabled and only capable of working a part time job. She was living in a hotel and had recently been fired from her employment due to her disability restrictions, and she was seeking unemployment compensation. She filed for unemployment by making lengthy transit trips to the Department of Labor. She

went to three to five interviews a week to seek new employment. She also made lengthy trips to her post office only to be met with rejection letters from the Department of Labor. The client filed an appeal and represented herself at her first administrative hearing; again, she was denied.

By the time the client spoke with me, she was exhausted by this process, and she was feeling helpless regarding her worsening financial state. I was able to meet with her personally in our office, and after accepting her case for representation, I spoke with her almost every day to discuss updates on the case. After reviewing her record, it became apparent that the Hearing Officer who reviewed her appeal had made a grave legal mistake. Not only had the Officer misstated the law, she had misapplied it. It appeared obvious that the client was entitled to benefits. I researched the case law and drafted a brief on behalf of the client which was submitted in support of her appeal to the Department of Labor Board of Review.

While waiting for the decision from the Board of Review, I continued to speak with the client almost every day. She eventually obtained a new job, and she frequently called me to tell me about her duties or her schedule. She also told me about her discussions with her doctor who believed part of her disability was due to her falling at her previous employment. During these discussions, we came to realize that she may also have a claim for worker's compensation and even discrimination by her previous employer based on her age and disability. Although Legal Aid could not represent her in these claims, I was able to refer her to attorneys in the area so that she could pursue these legal actions. These daily communications with the client seemed to ease her stress, and I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about her during this journey.

My last week at Atlanta Legal Aid Society we obtained the Board of Review decision. The supervising attorney watched as I opened the decision and read that the Board agreed with my argument; my client was entitled to benefits. The first thing I wanted to do was call the client to tell her the good news. She repeatedly thanked me for my help, and she seemed overwhelmed that the problem was over. I informed her then that I would be leaving Legal Aid to return to school, and she congratulated me on my achievements and wished me luck.

It was satisfying to be able to give my supervising attorney her file knowing that I had made her life easier and less stressful just by using my privilege and education to fight for what she was rightfully entitled to.

I am grateful to Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity and the financial security to take this internship with Atlanta Legal Aid Society. This experience humbled me. I was able to take on real, legal responsibilities rather than merely research issues that other attorneys would handle. I was inspired, not only by my clients but by the people of Legal Aid who make it their mission to improve client's lives. I am now committed to taking pro bono work and volunteering my time to Atlanta Legal Aid or similar organizations during my legal career.

Thank you again for this opportunity,

Kelsey Handley  
Emory University School of Law  
Class of 2019

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Anne E. Carder

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August 31, 2017

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Mr. Dan Rosen, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Re: Kelsey Handley

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I had the pleasure of supervising Ms. Kelsey Handley this summer while she worked in the Downtown General Law Unit of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc. Kelsey did excellent work and was an enthusiastic presence in our office. I would highly recommend her to any future employer.

Kelsey did a variety of work for us throughout the summer. She did some research and memo writing, but she also helped organize data and exhibits for trials. She attended mediations and court hearings with the attorneys. She also accompanied us as we visited client's homes and obtained documents, such as court records and police reports, on behalf of our clients.

Every week, Kelsey spoke with new clients who called in for our services. She was unfailingly polite and kind to everyone she spoke with on these days, whether they were here in person or on the telephone. She met with me before speaking with each client to review the information we had about the case and confirm the information we still needed about the case. She also conferred with me after speaking with each client to discuss each case and review the advice to provide each client. She then presented the cases each week at our staff meetings.

Kelsey represented two clients during the course of the summer. In one case she helped a woman collect money that her landlord owed to her, but had refused to pay her for nearly a year. Kelsey wrote a letter to the landlord and within a week our client had the money she was owed. In the other case, Kelsey represented a woman who was improperly denied unemployment insurance benefits. The client was pro se during the administrative hearing, but Kelsey represented her at the administrative review level by writing a brief arguing the reasons for her eligibility for benefits. The decision was reversed and our client received her benefits.

Throughout the course of her representation of our clients, Kelsey was professional and treated her clients with the upmost respect and compassion. One of her clients called almost daily and Kelsey always took her calls and listened to her concerns or noted the information the client wished to convey to us. In addition, her writing needed almost no editing before being sent to the intended recipients.

Kelsey had a fantastic work ethic. She was always on time and she completed her work promptly and took on any assignment that we gave to her with enthusiasm. She was very capable of handling her work, but also very willing to come to us with any questions or if she needed guidance with a particular assignment. Her work product was also always excellent.

I enjoyed working with Kelsey; she exceeded my expectations in every way. Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

Margaret L. Kinnear  
Staff Attorney