

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

August 21, 2011

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to you and Equal Justice America for helping make my outstanding summer experience possible.

During my ten-week internship at Texas Appleseed, a public interest law center in Austin, Texas, I had the privilege of participating in the implementation of an on-going research study on the role of the courts in the foster care system. My duties included legal research, writing, assisting with a pilot project, and conducting a cost analysis of foster care hearings.

As part of the cost analysis project, I gathered information that will be used to demonstrate the fastest and most effective methods of achieving permanent placements for foster care youth. I interviewed judges, conducted in-court research, and gathered cost information in seven different Texas jurisdictions. I also had the opportunity to participate in meetings of foster care stakeholders and the Texas Supreme Court Commission on Children, Youth, and Families.

My experience was invaluable. I especially enjoyed getting a first-hand look at the inner workings of Texas Appleseed. The organization partners with pro-bono attorneys to achieve public policy goals focused on social and economic justice. Currently, Texas Appleseed works in several areas, including foster care, juvenile justice, payday lending, and disaster relief. During my internship, I learned about these projects and assisted various staff members with their work.

Before starting law school, I worked for several years as a social worker with homeless youth. While I deeply enjoyed working directly with clients, my long-term goal has always been to tackle poverty and inequality on a macro scale. By addressing large social problems from the systemic and policy level, Texas Appleseed does exactly that. It was incredibly inspiring for me to be part of this work. I am leaving this summer newly energized about the possibilities for large-scale social change and ways in which I can devote my career to this goal.

Many thanks for your support.

Sincerely,



Rachel "Kate" Meals, MSW
St. Mary's University School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2013

August 22, 2011

Equal Justice America
c/o David Ruben
Building II - Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Texas Appleseed is a non-profit public interest law center, which utilizes pro-bono attorneys from across the state to find solutions to systemic social problems affecting the most vulnerable in our society—children, the indigent, the mentally disabled, and recent immigrants. This summer we were fortunate enough to host Elizabeth “Kate” Meals, a 1L from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio. Kate worked on our Foster Care project.

In December 2010, in conjunction with the Texas Supreme Court Commission on Children, Youth, and Families, we published a report entitled, “Improving the Lives of Children in Long-Term Foster Care: The Role of Texas’ Courts and Legal System.” In this report, we advocate the courts and the legal system taking an active role to ensure that foster children find safe, permanent homes as expeditiously as possible and are supported to lead healthy, productive lives as adults. Additionally, the report includes eighteen recommendations aimed at improving the court process and ultimately life outcomes for foster care children in Texas.

This summer as part of our continued effort to encourage jurisdictions across Texas to adopt some of the recommendations outlined in our report, we began an in-depth cost analysis of the legal and judicial costs in seven jurisdictions with a variety of outcomes for foster kids. Our hypothesis is that while the methods of the jurisdictions with the best outcomes for kids may cost more initially, in the long run they save money for the state and counties because they move kids out of the system faster. Kate assisted with the cost analysis project by submitting open records request for cost data from our seven jurisdictions and she also helped observe several foster care dockets.

Kate also drafted a memo related to how notice of the foster care placement review hearings is provided. One of the recommendations in our report was that the child should be in court, not only is this required by law, but it empowers the youth and allows the judge to gain valuable insight from the child. Even though it is required by law, many jurisdictions do not have the child present in court and in many cases it is because the child’s placement does not receive notice. Kate’s memo will help determine a course of action for ensuring notice is sent to the child’s placement so that the child has the opportunity to attend their placement review hearings.

Kate was a joy to host this summer. She helped keep the project organized and on track. I am very appreciative to Equal Justice America for providing her with a fellowship which made her work with us possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kathryn Freeman
Staff Attorney