

August 28, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for selecting me as a recipient for the 2013 Summer Equal Justice Fellowship. I have had the most rewarding experience of my life! This summer, I had the pleasure of learning more about the law and the legal profession, but most importantly, I was able to help those in need. Often times during the rigorous course year, I lost focus of why I wanted to become a lawyer. However, by participating in the fellowship, I was able to reconnect with my passion of becoming a lawyer and helping the less fortunate.

I interned with Lone Star Legal Aid – Houston location in their housing unit this summer. The housing unit assists indigent persons with public and subsidized housing issues, foreclosure and eviction defenses, code enforcement, discrimination, and other housing issues. My work at Lone Star included as follows: client interviews, research and writing, community outreach, and representing clients in eviction hearings. Working in the housing unit was a very humbling experience. Shelter is a basic need that is often taken for granted, and every day I assisted people who were in danger of losing this necessity. Our clients were amongst the most amazing, caring, and courageous people that I have ever met.

The Caring Grandmother: One of the clients that I assisted throughout the summer was an older woman trying to care for her grandchildren. Our client participates in the city's housing voucher program and lives in an apartment complex that accepts the voucher. Our client's daughter was recently incarcerated and serving a ten-month sentence and left her two young children to stay with her mother. In strict compliance with the voucher program's and apartment complex's rules, the grandmother petitioned the apartment management for the addition of the grandchildren to the apartment lease. The management refused the addition without consent from the city's housing authority. The housing authority refused to give consent, stating that our client had to obtain legal guardianship over the children. Obtaining legal guardianship of the children would be practically impossible due to the incarceration of the daughter and time. The grandmother came to our office for assistance in obtaining legal guardianship or some type of legal authority over the grandchildren. My supervising attorney and I researched the issue and found case law supporting that our client does not have to obtain legal guardianship over the children, but just written permission for the children to stay with her. I drafted a power of

attorney agreement for the daughter to sign and notarize in jail that provided the grandmother written permission to care for the grandchildren in her home. The daughter signed and returned the document, but the housing authority still refused to give their consent. After drafting letters and speaking with the general counsel of the housing authority, the children were eventually added to the lease. The amazement of this story is how much compassion the grandmother had for her children and the appreciation she had for our services. When we told her that we were able to resolve her issue she replied, "Thank You, Jesus!" After her reply, I felt great about my performance on her case.

The Caring and Courageous Mother. I also had the pleasure of working with Lone Star Legal Aid's Family Unit. I was able to conduct client interviews and under the supervision of an attorney, I provided clients with advice. Our client was seeking a divorce from her husband. During the course of their marriage, the husband physically and mentally abused her. Their last encounter took place in 2010 and the husband held a gun to her head and the couple's child had to stop the husband from shooting our client, the couple separated after the incident. The couple had two children of the marriage and the husband had not contributed financially for the children since the separation. The woman was seeking a divorce and temporary child support. However, due to some changes taking place in the Family Unit, we were only able to give her advice. I walked her through the process of obtaining a divorce and temporary child support. This story touched me because this mother had been physically and mentally scarred, but was fighting for her children. Often times low income people are viewed as ignorant and uneducated, but our client was very smart and just needed some reassurance and guidance.

Over the course of the summer, I was able to meet some incredible people that touched my heart. Thank you for the opportunity and the funding. I am excited about continuing my career in public interest law.

Thank you,

/s/ Kirstyn Arnwine
Thurgood Marshall School of Law
Second Year Law Student