

August 27, 2017
Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I cannot thank Equal Justice America enough for helping empower me to spend my summer doing what I came to law school to do--connecting those less connected to the legal systems to tools for sustainable self-empowerment. Because of this fellowship, I was able to live in New York City for 10 weeks and intern at the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project, working with the Worker's Rights team and seeing what a community-driven legal services model looks like while being a part of it.

As an individual who comes from a refugee family background and speaks other languages, I'm conscious of the importance of being able to personally connect with clients. As a law student, I'm conscious of the privileges that come with my education and my position and my growing knowledge of what they entail. I sought out the Community Development Project because I knew that I would have an opportunity, through their model of supporting community organizers and having a defined role within a larger movement, to better understand how my identities meld together.

At CDP, my hopes were met and far exceeded, I had opportunities for constant growth and self-reflection. I saw the work that our partner organizations did largely independently, by attending rallies they organized or hearings they spoke at. I accompanied attorneys on my team to clinics held at partner organizations, and assisted with client intake, and was able to work with clients who were Spanish-speakers. Then, I worked with my supervisor to report back to those who visited our clinic. I helped an individual report her place of work to a city agency. I was able to explore my immigration interests as well, and assist with research for an asylum case. I researched and wrote memos to help my team with questions they needed to answer for their clients. After accompanying attorneys to court and learning the difficulty in enforcing workers rights judgments, and getting our clients full justice, the research I did to help on a legislative proposal memo felt even more significant.

I grew this summer not only by learning more substance, but by learning what it means to be accountable to a client, to work with communities that are marginalized and also sometimes deterred from engaging the legal system, and to be a part of a larger system that can address the issues clients face in different ways, and by learning better ways to learn.

Thank you sincerely,
Laila Ayub

American University Washington College of Law, 2019