

Dan Ruben

Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I worked at the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC), Neighborhood Justice Clinic. The Neighborhood Justice Clinic is a general legal clinic, which helps low-income individuals who cannot afford or find legal help. This experience has allowed me to grow as an advocate, future lawyer, and as a person.

Throughout the summer, I have been able to work with a wide variety of clients. Every one of their stories has been inspiring, sad, and heart warming. For example, I worked with an elderly man who needed help getting his commercial driver's license renewed because he had received a traffic ticket a few years ago. While helping him, he shared his story with me. He told me that his wife, son and daughter had all died within the past few years and that he had just lost his job in February and is now homeless. Nonetheless, things started to look up because he had found a Catholic charity that was committed to paying the security deposit and first month's rent, if he had a regular income. However, this ticket was stopping him from finding employment. The client had just received a job offer but needed his commercial driver's license for the job. His story epitomizes the strength, courage, and drive all of the clients have, even though they have faced numerous hardships over the course of their lives. The clients have never given up and have continued to strive to better their lives and themselves.

I learned that sometimes the solution to a client's problem is not always rooted mainly in the legal system, but in practical solutions as well. This summer I was encouraged to take a holistic view of clients' problems. Sometimes this meant helping them answer a lawsuit was only of minor help, if I could not also direct them to assistance with keeping their food stamps benefits. Additionally, my role in the office included being a support system, listener, and reference guide at times leading the clients' in the right direction to obtain different benefits.

Each client brought new issues to the clinic and a variety of legal challenges, which has expanded my knowledge and skills as an advocate. Every individual client has helped me grow as a future attorney and as a person. In addition, having the opportunity to work directly with clients on a day-to-day basis has aided in strengthening my client interactions, writing, and organizational skills.

Furthermore, watching policy issues unfold and seeing policy change has also been a once in a lifetime experience. The Neighborhood Justice Clinic has worked hard this summer trying to stop the "Sit Law" from going up for a vote to the city council. This law would make it illegal to sit on the sidewalks and therefore would make life even more difficult for Berkeley's homeless population. We have held meetings at our office, attended city council meetings, and organized protests at city hall. We helped spread the awareness of the potential consequences of this law and stopped it from going to a vote over the summer.

Additionally, the attorneys in the Neighborhood Justice Clinic have been great role models, advocates and policy makers. I have been inspired by the way they embrace challenging cases, and by their dedication to the community, particularly the homeless population.

The job was always demanding, but knowing that I have been able to help change peoples' lives, and ease their daily burdens made my efforts worthwhile. This internship has made me want to share my experience with others, to show them the wonderful work that EBCLC does and what public interest law can do for the community.

Thank you,

Angel Eggleston
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2013
University of Wisconsin Law School



September 6, 2011

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

Re: Internship of Angel Eggleston

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for making it possible for Angel Eggleston to intern at the East Bay Community Law Center this summer. Angel is a force to be reckoned with, and she did outstanding work this summer.

There's one story that says almost everything you need to know about Angel's experience here. "Reginald," a long-time client, is an elderly man in Oakland whose family has been in his very modest home for three generations. He worked his whole life, and his pension should be enough to pay his property taxes. But he has a "girlfriend," a 40-year-old with a crack habit who lives in his house and takes most of his money. She has financially ruined him, and without Reginald's consent to report it, there was little we could do about it, except make many failed efforts to convince him to allow us to call Adult Protective Services.

Where others failed, Angel succeeded. She won over Reginald. She convinced him he deserved better. She called Adult Protective Services. She convinced a bank representative to put Reginald in a reverse mortgage program that could save his home. She spent hours on the phone with tax bureaucrats. She researched laws on payment of property taxes. She went to Reginald's home. She convinced me to come to Reginald's home with the mortgage broker. Then, after seeing the cracked foundation, the debris and broken windows, the lack of heat and electricity, and the physical strain and stress on Reginald's face from working round the clock to get his home ready for an appraisal that would probably reveal defects too big to qualify for the mortgage, Angel told Reginald what no one else would: it's time to part with your home.

Angel spent hours and days on this case. She brought the only hope Reginald had of saving his house, and then was the only person to cut through to the truth: even though it was what he wanted, keeping the house wasn't best for Reginald. She told him in a way that was heartbreaking and truthful, and clear as day. Even as his eyes were filled with tears, the ordinarily stoic Reginald was thanking her for telling him the truth. Angel took the moment to be with Reginald. Then, as soon as she got back to the office, she started her quest to find him a senior housing apartment.



Angel is a person with a strong sense of justice, and she is willing to work tenaciously to bring the world closer to a just reality. At the beginning of the summer, I worried that she would not be flexible enough to work at the Neighborhood Justice Clinic, which is in a general clinic with a wide spectrum of low-income clients and services. There is necessarily ambiguity about who we can help and how best to find the expertise to do so successfully. But Angel worked well with a range of clients: homeless clients given criminal citations for sleeping, someone who had been sold a faulty car, formerly well-off clients who were being sued by debt collectors and even a family made sick by white chunks in a bottle of Minute Maid. Angel excelled at managing the many tasks and cases on her to do list, while not losing sight of the people those tasks affected. While she enjoyed the broad range of work here, I know that Angel's interest and passion is for working for justice within the criminal justice system, as a prosecutor.

Angel was persuasive, and relentless. She was often the first person waiting to meet me in the morning, because she had been working since 8:00 a.m. and had many questions to ask and tasks to assign me. Over the course of the summer, Angel got better about recognizing that not everything could move as fast as she does. Angel's writing also improved over the course of her internship, and she is committed to continue that arc.

The East Bay Community Law Center's Neighborhood Justice Clinic is a fast-paced, supportive environment providing limited scope legal services to clients with very difficult life circumstances. Angel was a good fit here. I never doubted her commitment or her passion. Her life experiences have created in her an understanding for others as well as a steel core that make her, as I said, a force to be reckoned with.

It would be my pleasure to talk more about Angel by phone, if that would be helpful, because I miss her already. Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to work with Angel, and for the impact her work had on our clients.

Sincerely,

Elisa Della-Piana