

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to you to reflect on my extremely positive summer internship experience at Atlas: DIY. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to your organization for providing additional funding for my summer internship.

Atlas: DIY is a non-profit organization that provides free immigration legal services to undocumented youth aged between 14 and 24. Its client base is so diverse that it functions almost like a mini United Nations. The clients fall mostly on the younger side of the 14-24 age spectrum, and because of this, the vast majority of the immigration visas that we work on is called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Besides SIJS, Atlas: DIY also provides free legal services in many other forms of immigration relief, including T-Visa, U-visa, VAWA, DACA, etc. What is truly amazing and unique about Atlas: DIY is that, beyond its primary role as a legal services provider, it also aims to empower, educate, and build a community for undocumented youth through various vibrant educational, leadership and community outreach programs.

I had an incredible learning experience at Atlas: DIY. During the course of my summer internship, I received intensive training and supervision from devoted attorneys, hands-on experiences in providing direct legal services to young clients, and developed a deepened understanding of the practice of immigration law and public interest law in general. Overall, I worked on 10-15 cases that were of various stages, and the vast majority of them are Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases. On a typical day, I met on average two to three clients independently to work on their cases, and my responsibilities ranged from conducting intake interviews to screen for potential visa eligibilities, drafting guardianship petitions with clients and their proposed guardians, interviewing clients to collect relevant facts for their affidavits accompanying their special findings motions, and helping clients fill out their visa and green card applications, etc. When I was not meeting with clients, I performed legal research for clients whose cases did not have clear-cut legal solutions, drafted special findings motions and affidavits, and filed motions and petitions in family courts in different boroughs. I also helped make a YouTube video in mandarin explaining the implications of the Supreme Court's most recent ruling on DAPA+ and DACA to help educate the Chinese-speaking community as part of the educational and outreach effort of our organization.

The most memorable part of my summer was when I represented two clients in two SIJS special findings motion hearings in front of judges in the Bronx Family Court. This particular hearing is crucial to their SIJS applications, because without the Family Court's approval of their special findings motions and guardianship petitions, my clients cannot advance to the next stage to apply for permanent residency. I conducted testimonies of both my clients and their respective guardians in front of a judge independently. In both instances, my clients' special findings motions and guardianship petitions were granted. It was a hugely rewarding experience because I got to experience the sheer joy of having made some positive impact in somebody else's life, and

this experience strengthened my belief that I eventually want to commit to the practice of public interest law.

Last but not least, my summer internship was not just a learning experience in terms of legal practice, but more importantly, a humbling realization of my own privileges and hence my responsibilities in fighting against injustices in the system. Most of my clients overcame so many challenges at such a young age, and their perseverance in striving to turn everything around is very illuminating and inspiring to me. I am also continuously inspired by my supervisor, Becky McBride, Supervising Staff Attorney of Atlas: DIY. I have learned tremendously both from her unwavering commitment and courage in the cause, and her kindness and sensitivity to each client's emotional and legal needs. This summer to me was not only an enriching learning experience in the practice of immigration law, but also a lesson in how to become a better human being.

Sincerely,

Dielai Yang
Columbia Law School
Class of 2018