

8/31/2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My name is Gena Miller and I am going into my second year at Columbia Law School. This summer I worked at the Peter Cicchino Youth Project (PCYP) at the Urban Justice Center (UJC). PCYP offers direct civil legal services to homeless and street involved youth, with a particular emphasis on providing identity affirming services to LGBTQ identified individuals within that population. By setting up intakes three to four days a week at youth drop in centers throughout the city for over twenty years, PCYP is a well established and visible supportive presence for youth who are homeless in New York City.

My supervisors at PCYP were conscientious about assigning me substantive work that contributed to the efficacy of the organization. From my very first day at PCYP, I was given my own caseload. After being trained in the values of the organization, I was allowed to communicate directly with these clients immediately. Within two weeks, I managed intake clinics on my own during which I met new clients and worked with them to determine their legal issues and goals and checked in with current clients. Over the course of the summer, I had the opportunity to work on a number of different issues as a result of serving these clients. I researched the federal regulations of school records, I assisted several clients in adjusting their immigration status, I helped clients ascertain their criminal records and referred clients to other lawyers when their issues fell outside of our range of expertise. Throughout this work, my supervisor Nadia gave me the autonomy to communicate with my clients independently and learn by doing while at the same time gave me enough feedback so that my learning was supported. She gave me detailed comments on my writing and met with me weekly to support me in helping my clients. In addition to this direct supervision, the lawyers at PCYP also designed informational seminars on areas of law that intersect with the work of PCYP, such as how to work effectively with translators and social workers; immigration law; criminal law; navigating public benefits. The conscientious mentorship I received at PCYP helped me grow as a lawyer and facilitated my development as a social justice practitioner.

The most rewarding aspect of my job was the opportunity to serve people directly. In the beginning of the summer, I met “Tina” (I have changed her name to respect her privacy) at a drop in center for homeless youth. Tina had recently moved from another state and wanted assistance changing her name so that it matched her identity as a transgender woman. Tina told me the reasons why she wanted the name Tina, and I used this reasoning to draft a name change petition on her behalf. Like many other transgender people, Tina’s birth name was a reminder of painful memories from the past, and left her vulnerable to harassment because of the discrepancy between her current presentation and her legal name. I will never forget the look of relief on her face when she received her legal name change orders; she said she felt that it would allow her to

really begin her life confidently as Tina. It was an honor to help her and several other clients this summer adjust their legal identity to affirm who they are.

I also helped clients reach their desired immigration status. A significant hurdle to many individuals in the immigration process is lack of original documents; many of our clients have severed kin ties and have experienced homelessness so they either do not have access to their original identity documents or lost their identity documents during periods of homelessness. I worked with a client named Nanette who faced this challenge (I have also changed her name to respect her privacy). She was an orphan, and her Aunt, already a U.S. citizen, had adopted her and helped her emigrate to the United States. She eventually decided to leave her Aunt's house, and experienced homelessness. She never had a copy of her birth certificate, and during this period of homelessness, also lost her passport. Without any documentation of her legal status, Nanette could not find work or apply for public benefits. Nanette contacted our office for help applying for U.S. citizenship, and this summer, I assisted her in this process by evaluating her claims to citizenship, helping her apply for replacement copies of her vital documents to start the application process, and helping her continue the process of attaining U.S. citizenship. This internship has given me a much deeper understanding of how much immigration law wrongly presumes that most applicants have housing and come from stable nuclear families and how much more arduous the immigration process is for individuals whose lived realities differ from these presumptions.

In addition to hands on experience in several different substantive areas of law, my work with PCYP gave me the opportunity to collaborate with clients and help them achieve their goals. I am grateful that this summer I could use my legal training in ways that made a positive impact on my clients' lives. I hope that I can continue this service throughout my legal career.

Sincerely,

Gena Miller
Columbia Law School – Class of 2016

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August 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Gena Miller worked as a summer legal intern at the Peter Cicchino Youth Project (PCYP) of the Urban Justice Center from May through August 2014. Her work at PCYP furthered our organizational mission of providing free civil legal services to homeless and street involved youth under 25, particularly those who identify as LGBTQQ.

Gena worked on several different projects for us this summer. She conducted intake for clients at drop-in centers for homeless youth, accompanied clients to family, criminal and immigration court proceedings, drafted name change petitions, prepared immigration applications, researched legal issues, and attended weekly trainings and supervision sessions.

In addition to deepening her understanding of different areas of law, Gena grew as an advocate this summer. Over the course of the summer, her ability to communicate effectively with young LGBTQQ clients improved. Gena gained a nuanced understanding of the ways in which a poverty law practice intersects with criminal, family and immigration law.

Gena's work this summer helped our organization provide quality legal services to our clients this summer. We thank Equal Justice for generously supporting her in her work. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at nqurashi@urbanjustice.org.

Sincerely,

Nadia Qurashi
Senior Staff Attorney