

August 31, 2013

Dan Ruben  
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Mr. Ruben,

With the support of Equal Justice America, I was able to work with Mil Mujeres Legal Services this summer in Washington, DC. Mil Mujeres is a non-profit organization that provides direct legal services to immigrants who are victims of violent crimes in the United States and assists them in obtaining immigration relief. My passion for immigration coupled with my summer experience at Mil Mujeres strengthened my desire to continue my commitment to immigration law.

As a summer intern, I worked with indigent clients from all over Latin America living the DC, Maryland and Virginia. My clients were hard working people who traveled to the United States seeking a better way of life. Once in the United States they suffered crimes including domestic violence, felony assaults and rape. The United States provides relief to victims of certain violent crimes who cooperate with law enforcement in the investigation of these crimes in the form of a visa. It is an effort to encourage immigrants to report crimes to police despite their immigration status and keep our communities safe.

At Mil Mujeres, I spoke to law enforcement officials on behalf of clients in an effort to obtain certifications stating my clients had cooperated in the investigation of these crimes. I often had a difficult time because many law enforcement agencies are misinformed or are not aware of U-Visas. I often spent half the day on the phone in an effort to have someone consider looking at a client's police report and certification. Law enforcement agencies have the discretion to deny signing a certification and without it, a U-Visa petition will not be accepted. However, when Mil Mujeres successfully obtained a U-Visa certification for a client, I met with clients and wrote declarations of what they endured. I also drafted U-Visa petition forms and work-permit applications.

Moreover, I drafted declarations for asylum cases. I particularly remember one client left a strong impression on me. She was from Guatemala and had suffered horrific violence at the hands of her husband when she was only 15 years old. She lived in a tiny rural town, and believed that her husband would be able to protect her from the violence she suffered at home. However, her husband abused her in such ways she was forced to flee from Guatemala. Once she came to the U.S. she lived in utter poverty and homelessness, but she never gave up. She eventually found a job, worked tirelessly and earned enough to send for her children who were still living with her husband in Guatemala. Through Mil Mujeres, she was able to seek counseling and break the cycle of violence. Now, she helps other women just like her, who suffered through domestic violence and are rebuilding their lives. I was eager to help this woman with her asylum case. She truly inspired me to continue my work by helping to live without fear and become empowered.

I also added to my immigration experience by working on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) petitions. This is a fairly new initiative for undocumented students under the age of 31 who arrived in the United States on or before June 15, 2007 before the age of 16. This form of relief allows students to complete their education in the United States and allows them to legally work. These cases brought me the most joy throughout the summer. It was wonderful to know that clients would fulfill their academic goals and have the opportunity to start a career.

I additionally continued my work with immigrant victims of domestic violence by independently working on a VAWA petition. Undocumented women and men who are victims of domestic violence and are married to U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, are often times threatened with deportation by their spouses. Victims live in fear of their partners and of law enforcement thinking that if they report the abuse to the police they will be immediately deported. The Violence Against Women Act provides these immigrant victims with the opportunity to seek legal permanent residence. In this way, victims no longer fear their aggressor and are able to seek help, and build new and independent lives. I obtained the proper documentation and supporting evidence from my client, drafted the appropriate forms, and wrote the declaration. Working on the VAWA petition, I could see my client become empowered as I helped her through the process. As she told me of her plans to get back to work I could see she was fearless and gained back her self-confidence.

My internship with Mil Mujeres strengthened my desire not only to continue my work in immigration, but to specifically dedicate myself to the non-profit sector. I made long lasting friendships with the staff at Mil Mujeres and met many more wonderful, inspiring people in DC that have the same passion for immigration as I do. This experience was invaluable in both my professional and personal growth. Thank you for making it possible.

Sincerely,

Helen Rodriguez  
Suffolk University  
J.D. Candidate, 2014