

August 16, 2011

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

Re: Equal Justice America Fellowship Experience of Lauren Cooperman

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to you to share my experiences as a summer intern at The Door Legal Services Center in New York City and thank you for the generous support from Equal Justice America.

The Door is a youth empowerment organization that provides services, including legal support, to young people aged twelve to twenty-one years old. The legal services department at The Door is presently situated as the only place in the city that has an expertise around the unique legal issues and forms of relief in civil matters specifically pertaining to this age group.

I worked under the supervision of a fantastic attorney who specializes in issues related mainly to housing, public benefits, and emancipation. From the first day of my internship, I was included in client meetings and new client intakes. This gave me first-hand knowledge of the typical type of interaction my supervisor has with the clients, which strikes a fine balance between that of a legal advocate and a social worker. Almost immediately, it became apparent that the young people who come to meet with an attorney at The Door are up against many other challenges in their lives beyond the legal issue for which they are seeking help. Often times, as a young person spoke of their legal issue, I was struck by the sense that they were likely seeking help or sharing their story for the very first time. This realization helped me understand the importance of providing clients with a safe, comfortable space where they could express their problems, concerns, and life stories without being judged.

Within a few weeks, in addition to working with existing clients, I began to see clients on my own. This was a great opportunity for me to put into practice all of the interpersonal lessons I had observed during my first couple of weeks on the job. With this new task came the responsibility to know the law better, particularly in the areas of emancipation and public benefit entitlements.

Some of the highlights of my summer included opportunities to represent clients in different proceedings. My first go at this was in a client's fair hearing for public assistance. The client, A, is nineteen, homeless, and has learning impairments. A's welfare case was closed and sanctioned because he had missed an appointment for which he had received no notice other than

a message left on his voicemail-only phone number a day prior to the scheduled appointment. I came prepared to the meeting ready to argue my client's situation, point out flaws in the record keeping of the state welfare agency, and submit the voicemail as evidence. However, none of that was needed because the New York City representative, upon looking over the details of A's case, dropped the sanctions and agreed to reopen A's welfare case retroactively.

This situation exemplified a common lesson for me this summer. In addition to witnessing the needless barriers young people often face when seeking help, I saw, time and again, the substantial influence an advocate can have on a young person's situation, simply by their presence. Herein lies the exact place where I was able to come to the aid of many Door members this summer. Upon reflecting back on my work at The Door, I realized that I served over 400 hours and met with over fifty clients. This experience meant so much to me that I will be returning as an intern at The Door this fall. Thank you again for this wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely,

Lauren Cooperman  
Fordham University School of Law  
Class of 2013