

Liza Davis

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August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thanks to Equal Justice America, I had the opportunity to work at Public Counsel this summer. From my supervisors, to my peers, to my clients, I enjoyed every minute of it. During my time at Public Counsel, I was lucky enough to get a lot of one-on-one client interaction. Because of this, my clients taught me the most during my time at Public Counsel. My clients taught me a lot about real life struggles, about who I want to be as an attorney and what I need to do to be the best advocate possible.

While at Public Counsel, I was in charge of research, drafting complaints, intake interviews and client phone calls. I interacted a lot with clients by phone and in person. My initial contacts with most clients consisted of an intake interview. After that, my job was to follow up with each client regarding their situation and keep in contact with them if their case was kept in-house. Every client interaction was different so I handle each meeting depending on the situation. Most of my clients were children with disabilities, learning disorders or victims of discrimination; through them, I learned about the importance of being patient, compassionate and understanding.

Out of all the work that I did at Public Counsel, client intake interviews made up the most memorable experiences of my summer. Interviews commanded a lot of sensitivity and understanding on my part. Many of the intakes that I conducted were with parents of children who are in grave trouble at school and in life. One of the most memorable interviews that I conducted was with a mother seeking help for her 18-year-old son. Her son had a long history of disciplinary issues and, at the time of the interview, was in a juvenile facility. He had spent most of his childhood in and out juvenile facilities because of his district's failure to identify him as needing special education. Once identified as a special education student, her son was prescribed medication, received counseling and hours of various services. With the appropriate help, her son succeeded in school and stayed out of the system. Unfortunately, he began to receive help too late into his education and, as a teenager who had already been labeled a "bad students," he rebelled against all help. Mom came into our meeting with bags and boxes full of school documents. She had waited months to be seen by us and was ready to give us all the information that we needed so that we could help her son. We conducted the interview. I sat and watched mom's desperation and saw her tear up every time she had to recall difficult times in her child's past. Then, at the end of the interview, I watched mom cry as we had to tell her that we could not help her son because he was over the age of 18 and that if he needed our help, he would have to

show interest himself. A few weeks later, we received a call from mom informing us that her son wanted our help. I contacted son, conducted an interview with him and am now helping him receive help transitioning from high school to college. Currently, he is the first member in his family to graduate high school and will soon become the first to go to college.

Another client intake that I will never forget is that of a little girl who suffers from cerebral palsy. Her mother passed away a few years ago and her father was left as the sole breadwinner and caretaker. She has attended a special education school all of her life and dad came in seeking help with her current placement. The school had been neglecting her services for years now and dad was in desperate need of help. Dad brought binders of exceptionally organized school documents. Despite only knowing Spanish, he had records of dozens of letter that he has written to school administration and district seeking help for his daughter. He kept records of everything that he did and, most importantly, records of everything the school failed to do. During the interview, I connected with both father and daughter and knew that I would fight to keep their case in-house. During our project meeting that week, I explained the little girl's story and the struggles that her father has had to endure. I was allowed to bring the case in-house and am now working with dad and the school to get her the services and education that she needs to live her life as normal as possible.

The above clients are only two of almost a 50 clients that I met with or helped this summer. Each story is different but all are touching and impressive stories of parents' endless fight to educate their children. Many, if not most, parents come in with extensive knowledge of the educational system and an impressive collection of documents recording their battles with the educational system. This all from low income, sometimes immigrant and many times low educated parents who, against all odds, do everything they can for their children.

Working for Public Counsel this summer was one of the best experiences of my law school career and I am delighted to continue working for them this fall. I want to continue learning from new clients and from the people that I work with. Helping children with their educational rights has become a passion of mine. Hearing client stories and fighting for their right to an education makes the struggles of law school well worth it. I want to learn as many skills as possible while in school so to one day become an effective and successful public interest attorney.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for making my summer at Public Counsel possible and for all of the great work that you provide to our community. Your help is priceless and makes a difference in the lives of many.

Warm regards,



Liza Davis

Juris Doctor Candidate, May 2012
Southwestern Law School

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Re: Equal Justice America Summer Clerk Liza Davis

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to inform you that Public Counsel had and continues to have a genuinely wonderful experience working with Equal Justice America clerk Liza Davis!

Public Counsel is the largest pro bono law office in the nation. The Children's Rights Project ("CRP") alone assisted over 32,000 low-income children and youth last year. CRP staff attorneys, social workers, and social work interns work with pro bono attorneys and law students in assisting children in civil legal matters such as guardianship, special education and school discipline, foster youth services, government benefits, emancipation, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status ("SIJS") cases, and teen parents' issues.

Liza began working with the Children's Rights Project—specifically within our Education Rights and our Transition Age Foster Youth Projects, but also volunteering to take on a SIJS case—in May 2011, and will continue to volunteer her time until the conclusion of her Fall 2011 semester at Southwestern Law School. Throughout her clerkship with us, Liza has proven to be a thorough and tireless researcher, a compassionate and sensitive client advocate, and an inquisitive and focused learner.

Liza assisted our team in a range of tasks and large-scale projects, including client intake, case management, brief services support, due process complaint drafting, state and federal policy research, and creating client "know your rights" materials. With each endeavor, she truly gave her best effort and then some—Liza was a bright and breezy presence in our halls, but she always directed her energy toward client needs and substantive solutions. Without prompting, Liza sent me near-daily updates of her progress, consistently asked questions when appropriate, and sought out research and writing assignments. I was continually impressed with her work product. Liza even spent a weekend or two making client home visits—this is a level of dedication we do not often see from a volunteer!

We feel so very fortunate that Liza has chosen to continue to work with us as she concludes her law school tenure, and are so very thankful to Equal Justice America for enabling students like Liza to contribute to our mission and to the public interest in general.

Warm regards,

Katie Brown
Staff Attorney and Equal Justice Works Fellow
Children's Rights Project
Public Counsel Law Center