

October 9, 2009

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

*Re: Summer 2009 Internship Experience*

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for Equal Justice America's sponsorship of my work at Ayuda, Inc. in Washington, DC this summer. I would like to share some details of my internship with you below.

As a legal intern in the Domestic Violence unit at Ayuda, I was responsible, along with my co-intern, for interviewing domestic violence survivors who met Ayuda's funding requirements for receiving free legal assistance. These survivors had to be indigent immigrants, and as such, their access to the legal system was severely diminished. Ayuda sees its role as filling this gap in legal services and increasing access to the local justice system for these people.

I interviewed many individuals throughout my 12 weeks at Ayuda, and most of them were Latina survivors who were seeking protection orders from their abusers. Most of these women had young children that they were responsible for, so part of my job also consisted of setting them up with a social worker to find a suitable housing and employment situation, so that they would not be financially pressured to return to their abusers. I was inspired by these women because after so many years of abuse, they were willing and able to stand up and say, "no more."

One particular case that touched me was a Mexican woman who will have to go unnamed here. She came into our office for an intake with four trash bags filled with everything that she and her children owned. She also had her two sons, one in a stroller, with her. She had just left her apartment after her husband had gone to work – the night before, he had caused a particularly violent incident in their home. She was not young, and she had been married for many years. Nonetheless, something clicked and she could not take the abuse anymore. While she was afraid of the consequences of what she was doing, she was resolute that her husband could no longer treat her this way. She was ready to stand up and say, "no more," and it was really amazing for me to be there to witness this transformation. Throughout the next couple of weeks, I accompanied her to DC Superior Court to conduct an official intake and ask the court for a temporary protective order, for assistance from the police in evicting her husband from their home so that she could return there safely, and then for a year-long civil protection order. The relief on her face when the CPO was finally obtained was beyond any emotion I had ever really witnessed. Having never worked with survivors of any kind of violence or serious family trauma, I learned so much from this client's strength and resolution. Her poverty did not stop her

from seeking justice, and I know that she is grateful to the attorneys at Ayuda for strengthening the Latino community in DC and making results like these possible.

While this client will struggle to find work, the court was on her side, and so is Ayuda. She will continue to receive public assistance until she can get on her feet. I was proud to be a part of making her life better, and this experience reminded me of why I came to law school in the first place.

My summer at Ayuda was filled with clients and stories like these, and I encourage anyone looking for real litigation experience, particularly in family or immigration law, to consider interning at Ayuda. The paralegals and attorneys trained the interns very well throughout the first week, and we had constant support from the staff whenever we had a question. The exit interview process was also very helpful to me, and I appreciated the constructive criticism (and the praise) that I received from my supervisor, Alice Lugo. I hope to stay in touch with the staff at Ayuda and to encourage other Georgetown Law students to intern there.

Thanks to Equal Justice America for helping to make this summer possible! It was truly a unique education in public interest law.

My best,

Lucy Panza  
Georgetown Law 2011