

Maddy Starbranch
October 8, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I worked at the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) of Charlottesville, VA in the Immigrant Advocacy Project. The Equal Justice America Fellowship was absolutely crucial; without it, I would not have been able to afford to take this internship.

A Legal Aid in Georgia asked for help from our program this summer. A group of Mexican migrant workers with H2A visas was working somewhere in Virginia, and they had not been paid properly for their previous work in Georgia. The Legal Aid there had been gathering the workers' information so they could help, when the workers suddenly found a new opportunity and quickly left by bus to pick peaches in Virginia. Unsure where the workers had gone, but fighting to make sure they were paid, the Legal Aid in Georgia asked that the Immigrant Advocacy Project search for these workers in nearby camps.

After the work day was done, we would make trips to migrant worker camps to hand out pamphlets with information about worker's rights, make sure the workers were being paid and that their living quarters were adequate. At each camp we made sure to ask if any workers had just come from Georgia. When finally we found a camp that had Georgia workers, they were up a hill and through the trees. We had to trek to find them, but not before we accidentally alerted the foreman to our presence. While some of us tried very hard to talk to workers about signing up and check if they were facing any issues now, another volunteer would need to distract the foreman so the workers felt comfortable speaking with us. We didn't get home until about 9pm that night, but we signed up nearly all the workers for help from the Georgia Legal Aid office.

Today I learned that a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals application was approved for a really great high school student that I worked with. She had emigrated from Mexico when she was about four years old, and she was just granted two years of living without fear of deportation, the ability to get a social security number, a license and to work in the United States.

While she was an outstanding student with many accomplishments, there were serious difficulties in figuring out all the addresses from where she had lived since arriving in the United States. After many long conversations with her immediate and extended family, we finally were able to pin down where she lived and when. Because she had such a bright future, it was very important that all the details were right – it would have been awful if a college bound, intelligent and kind student were rejected for a silly mistake in addresses.

While I began my summer focusing only on work and immigration issues, I began to help with health law when there was suddenly and overwhelming number of clients. We had just started the “Medical Legal Partnership” with the UVA Medical Center, where doctors and social workers would screen patients for legal issues that the LAJC could help with, and then refer them to us. I called dozens and dozens of patients, many of whom had not received any legal help because they didn’t know where to go.

I am now studying to be a Certified Application Counselor so I can help people get health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. It’s a really exciting and evolving area, and I would not have made the connections to get into the field without this internship.

In short, this summer I was able to reach migrant workers at isolated camps, to help workers who had not been paid, and to reach out to potential Legal Aid clients who did not know where to turn. I am looking forward to expanding on all that I’ve learned during this summer, including continuing to help Spanish people understand their rights, and get healthcare for as many people as I can.

Thank you for the grant and the opportunity to expand my horizons in ways that I couldn’t have imagined at the beginning of the summer.

Sincerely,
Madeline Starbranch