

August 28, 2005

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I consider myself fortunate to have interned at The Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Division (JRD) in New York this summer. While I entered the internship knowing that I would begin my legal career as a children's advocate, my two and a half months at JRD further cemented my desire to specifically provide direct legal services to children involved in child protection and/or delinquency cases.

On the first day of my internship, I was assigned to an inter-disciplinary team of four attorneys, one attorney supervisor, a social worker and paralegal. While I worked closely with every member of the team at various points throughout the summer, one of the attorneys in particular took me under her wing. Through her guidance I was exposed to, and participated in, the many facets of the JRD practice, including client interviews, home visits, monitoring of various city agencies to ensure compliance with our clients' needs, arraignments, etc.

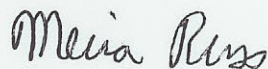
My motto over the summer was "the busier the better," and as I conveyed that to my team, I was given more and more responsibilities. While I found almost every assignment unique and challenging in its own way, and while the several court appearances I made by the end of the summer were all quite exciting, the aspect of my internship that I most cherished was direct client contact, usually accomplished through client interviews. By the end of the summer, I must have conducted or participated in interviews of clients ranging in age from seven to nineteen. The interviews were almost always challenging. It can be incredibly difficult to extract the information one needs from a child or teenager who has been in "the system" for a number of years, has perhaps been represented by multiple attorneys and, one must never forget, who also has a story filled with personal challenges that most adults will never face. Difficulties aside, it was through the interviews that I was regularly struck by the amazing resiliency of so many of these children. I clearly remember one interview where I met a client who was just about to start college. The client had been in and out of foster homes for years, finally ending up in a residential home. The adult world worked against him his entire life and there he was at age nineteen, easygoing and highly articulate, ready to begin life as a productive adult himself. This is not to minimize the awesome daily challenges that he continued to face. I only mean to

highlight that starting at a very young age, this client somehow found it within himself to find the means to succeed, a resiliency of which many adults are not capable.

Before I conclude this letter, I would like to share an anecdote that provided so much meaning to my experience this summer and, more importantly, to the career in child advocacy that I look forward to. At the end of my second week at JRD, one of the attorneys I worked with arraigned a case involving excessive corporal punishment of a ten year old boy who appeared to be the "target child." His two sisters were never punished in quite the manner that he was. It was an unusual case involving relatively affluent parents and other unique circumstances. As part of the unusual nature of the case, the children were actually produced by the parents on that first day of the case. The attorney, a supervisor, social worker and myself quickly split into groups of three to interview the children to learn about what exactly was taking place in the home. I joined the social worker and we jointly interviewed the young boy, an adorable articulate child who stated to us through his tears that his mother and father must love his sisters more, for they were never punished quite the way he was. The parents and various attorneys involved in the case shortly after went into the courtroom for an initial appearance that lasted a while. I unfortunately had to leave the courtroom early, but before returning to my office, I stopped by the room where the boy was waiting. After saying my goodbye, just before I left he looked up at me and asked, "Are you my lawyer?" I quickly explained that I was not, but that his attorney was just inside the courtroom telling the judge what he had asked us to say and that she would be out shortly to speak with him. Either way, I walked away from that experience absolutely struck by the notion that indeed this ten year old child had a lawyer, and that in just one year's time I would be that lawyer for children just like him.

This story reflects one of many epiphany moments that I experienced over the summer, and while there are understandably several stories of disappointment as well, I was overall thrilled by my internship. It was a challenging and meaningful experience filled with many opportunities to learn. To that end, I would like to thank you and Equal Justice America for your assistance in this wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely,



Meira Russ
Boston University School of Law
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