

September 1, 2010

Equal Justice America
Building 11, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Rd.
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben:

I did not enjoy my first year of law school. To be honest, that is a gross understatement. I had just moved to DC from Chicago where I had been a Teach for America corps member. As a teacher, I had spent my days interacting with students and families – students and families whose struggles had compelled me to go to law school. But as a law student, I spent my days squirreled away in a library carrel, far removed from the struggles I hoped to address.

I felt lost and considered dropping out. I even looked for teaching positions at local schools. Then, I spoke with a fellow teacher turned lawyer, and he suggested I try to find an internship in direct legal services where I would get the opportunity daily to interact with clients – or, as he put it, with my students' families. Specifically he suggested that I apply to intern at Bread for the City. Thank goodness he did.

My first day at Bread for the City, I shadowed an attorney during client intake. In the span of just three hours, he helped one family avoid eviction, provided legal information to a confused resident, and directed a mother to resources that could help her with her Landlord and Tenant case. People came in with problems, and he solved them. I was hooked.

Over the course of the summer, I interacted with hundreds of clients. I investigated one family's housing code violations, testified at a hearing regarding those violations, and helped get the family's rent cut in half because of those violations. They were able to make the decreased payments and stay in their home. I represented another client – a woman who had been denied Social Security benefits, but who suffered from severe bipolar disorder – at her hearing at the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. The decision in that case was fully favorable – three years of disability back payments and full benefits going forward. I, like the attorney I shadowed on my first day, helped solve problems.

Bread for the City is committed to providing holistic services, and thus if there was a problem that I could not solve – and there were many – there was always someone – someone with expertise in social services, or medicine, or food – who was there with help. When one of my clients told me she had no money to buy her children fresh fruit and vegetables, a food bank volunteer packed her a bag of fresh groceries. When someone was evicted, a social services representative was there with a list of homeless shelters. We solved our clients' problems together, relying on one another for support.

At Bread for the City, I learned to love the practice of law in the context of direct legal services. And I also became part of a community – a community of social workers, food bank volunteers, clients, and public interest lawyers who work to ensure that our corner of Washington, DC is more just than it was the day before. I want to become a public interest lawyer because of Bread for the City, and it is there that I want to begin my public interest career.

Sincerely,

Melissa Medoway
Georgetown University Law Center 2011