

August 8, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to thank you for the opportunity to spend these last ten weeks working with Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A. My time here has been inspiring and empowering (and perhaps most importantly, productive), and I deeply appreciate Equal Justice America's support for making it possible.

As a member of Brooklyn A's Community Economic Development Program, I primarily represented not-for-profit community groups working in Brooklyn's poorest neighborhoods. Our clients include larger groups that build and operate health clinics, affordable housing, community gardens, food pantries; as well as start-up non-profits. These diverse clients allowed me the opportunity to work on a wide range of issues.

One client was a start-up non-profit corporation that provides low-income women with technology training and job counseling. The organization is the brainchild of a single mother and teacher from Brooklyn who was struck by the traditional educational system's failure to provide marketable skills to poorer women. The tech sector in particular has been out of reach for many of these women due to a combination of bad or inaccessible schools and decades of institutional marginalization. Her nascent organization will help to close this gap by helping its participants gain the know-how and the professional connections to enter the modern *career* – not just *job* – market.

My role was to give the organization a legal structure; filing incorporation paperwork, drafting bylaws and other self-governing documents, and preparing the organization to begin raising money and providing services. Creating a new corporation is, at least in a legal sense, akin to giving birth. Crafting the required papers involved intense collaboration with the client, frequent assistance from my fellow Brooklyn A attorneys, and more IRS case law than I care to remember. At the conclusion of the project I had helped my client to hit the ground running – the organization will begin trainings this fall.

On two occasions I also participated on closing loan deals on behalf of long-term Brooklyn A clients to construct low-income housing. These projects differ significantly from working with start-ups; each closing represented its own unique blend of contract law, network of interpersonal and interagency relationships, and of course much larger sums of money. Yet both types of projects were positive-sum endeavors in which all parties were ultimately invested in the same outcome, and in both my role was to turn the law from an obstacle to an accelerator of progress. This work was less independent, and the results less immediately tangible, but I

enjoyed contributing to an attorney-client relationship whose legacy has created thousands of units of affordable housing for poor New Yorkers.

On a personal level, I found working with Brooklyn A so important because of its proactive nature. In many of the communities where our clients live and work, the law more often serves to incarcerate or intimidate than to enable or empower. Those people with the passion, skills, and energy to do meaningful work within their neighborhoods very frequently find their ideas stymied by impenetrable and incomprehensible legal barriers. Lawyers tend to inflict expense and heartache and for most people are best avoided altogether. The dual results are a lack of meaningful community development and a pervading (and not at all unwarranted) sense of disempowerment.

Brooklyn A turns this dynamic on its head. In contrast to a traditional top-down charity, which would offer services according to the dictates of governmental bureaucrats or well-off nonprofit Directors, Brooklyn A facilitates its clients' own ideas for revitalizing their communities. This was particularly powerful to me – I have neither the time nor the skills to run a nonprofit in a poor Brooklyn neighborhood, but by providing a few necessary services to those people who do, we were able to magnify the effects of each other's efforts several times over. I was able to represent my clients zealously (which is, of course, the lawyer's ethical duty) without losing sight of our shared goals of socioeconomic justice, which I found immensely fulfilling.

Since grade school I have had the goal of maximizing my own effectiveness as an agent of progress. Law school gave me the tools, and Brooklyn A the venue – and Equal Justice America provided the means. I have benefitted immensely from this summer, and I like to think that Brooklyn A and our clients have as well. Thank you for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

Michael Zimmerman
Fordham Law '12



Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

building communities, ensuring opportunities, and achieving justice

August 6, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II – Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112
Via email: Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

Re: Michael Zimmerman – Evaluation Letter 2013 Equal
Justice America Fellowship

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Michael Zimmerman served as an Equal Justice America fellow this past summer (June 3rd through August 9th) with the Community and Economic Development (CED) Program of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A (“Brooklyn A”).

During his fellowship, Mike worked on a variety of transactional and non-profit corporate matters for the CED Program’s clients. He worked on the incorporation and corporate organization of a newly formed non-profit organization and assisted another non-profit organization with the amendment of its certificate of incorporation to more accurately reflect its charitable purposes. He assisted with contract analysis and drafting required to deal with difficulties with a client’s general contractor arising in the post-construction operation of an affordable housing project. He also assisted with a closing associated with the replacement of a limited partner and capital repair loan for a not-for-profit client’s affordable housing project. Additionally, he assisted with the drafting of a commercial lease for an arts organization and researched several issues for clients including brownfield tax credit financing parameters for a non-profit health care center and restrictions upon earned income for a federally tax exempt organization.

Mike worked well both on his own and as part of a team. He established a good relationship with the staff at Brooklyn A and our clients. He was very responsible in completing the tasks given to him in a diligent and conscientious manner.

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I give Mike a favorable evaluation and our office is very appreciative to Equal Justice America for sponsoring the fellowship program which enabled him to work in our office. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions (direct phone/fax 718-487-0874, jrose@bka.org).

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Rose". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jessica" and last name "Rose" clearly distinguishable.

Jessica Rose, Esq.
Director, Community and Economic Development Program