

August 18, 2014
Equal Justice America
Law Student Fellowship 2014

Mr. Ruben –

I spent the summer of 2014 as one of Equal Justice America's Summer Fellowship participants and it was truly one of the most educational and insightful experiences I have had in my law school career. I have always had an interest in offering legal aid to those that may not otherwise have access to it due to financial burdens. Working with Mosaic Family Services in Dallas gave me the opportunity to do just that – to offer immigration and family law advice and services to victims of human trafficking and domestic violence.

I split my time fairly evenly between immigration and family law cases – two of which stand out particularly to me. On the immigration side of my work, I was given the case of Judy Jones* and her family. While fleeing a dangerous situation from their home in Mexico, Judy and her family were held captive by a gang of men that withheld food and water from the family, and repeatedly sexually assaulted Judy. This treatment continued for the Jones family for months until they were finally captured by police officers in the US and brought to Mosaic for assistance. Because of several particularities of the situation and the long process involved, we faced many obstacles in getting the Jones family on the path to citizenship so they can continue to live in the US and work for a better life. I spent a lot of my time not only studying the immigration laws but also thinking outside the box and determining the best method to get the Jones family the status they deserved. As a challenge in itself, the immigration proceedings were only the beginning of the services we were able to offer the Jones family. Because of their limited resources, we also focused on getting counseling services for the family while continuously encouraging them to remain hopeful for the future.

On the other end of my work, I was involved in assisting the family law attorney in researching different aspects of our clients' cases, as well as assisting in trial preparation. Our client, Sue Smith* was desperate to find a life away from her abusive husband and keep her children safe from future harm. Because Sue wasn't a citizen however, and her husband had lied about her citizenship status, we faced additional obstacles in representing her in family law matters. I learned a lot about both how the system works and the multitude of options for those in Sue's position. While I spent my entire summer working on this case, my attorney had spent the last two years working on Sue's case and we were finally approaching trial. In assisting with discovery matters, interviews and trial preparation with Sue and her witnesses, she became so much more than a client and became someone that I felt personally responsible for – someone I wanted and needed to help more than anything. We were able to represent Sue in trial and the Court granted her sole custody of her children, with strict provisions put into place for the children's father to have access to the children in the future.

I could write pages on pages about the work I did and the legal experience I gained this summer – from writing memorandums to research assignments, from assisting in discovery to trial preparations. What I can't quite put into words is what I personally took from this experience. I saw firsthand how some of the things we take for granted, something we think to be so fundamental and assumed as citizenship, is literally everything to someone else. Because we

*Names have been changed for confidential purposes.

(luckily) never have to think what we can and can't do because of our citizenship status, it was heartbreaking to see the struggles that some families faced because of this issue. Many tend to blame families that move to the US illegally for the position that they are in, but the stories of how and why they came to this country were even more heartbreaking. Some to avoid war in their home countries and others to escape domestic violence – whatever the reason, it was rare to see a family that took refuge in the US as a matter of pure choice and not necessity.

Keeping this in mind, I found great personal satisfaction in doing everything that I could to give these families a fair shot at a fair life – something that most of them had never seen before. When we were able to hand them their work permits or update them with good news regarding their family law proceedings, the looks of relief and hope on their faces were indescribable. Knowing that I played a small part in their future was worth more than words can describe. Knowing that I helped them start a new life, a life that they deserved, was worth everything.

I cannot thank Equal Justice America enough for assisting me in the work I did this summer and giving me the opportunity to help others in such a monumental way. I go into the rest of my law school career with the passion and determination to continue to give back in any way that I can, and I strongly encourage others interested in the field to do the same.

Sincerely,

Sara Kamal

The George Washington University Law School

J.D. expected May 2016