

August 3, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Today is my last day at the Bread for the City legal clinic and I wanted to tell you a little bit about my experiences this summer. Bread for the City's legal clinic handles landlord-tenant, family, and Social Security cases. I worked with clients in all three areas (with the largest percentage of my time spent on housing cases). From my very first day, I was meeting clients, doing research (I visited the recorder of deeds, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory affairs, the DC Housing Authority, and more), and feeling like a part of the organization.

In one of my more unusual assignments, I searched for the biological father of a child whose grandparents were seeking custody of her – this involved calling hospitals, prisons, DMVs, social service agencies, homeless shelters, and voter registration bureaus throughout the DC metro area, and writing to various branches of the military service. When we could not locate him, I wrote a motion for leave to post in lieu of service, and helped the grandparents prepare affidavits about the fact that they hadn't seen the father in years. Although I began this summer determined to have a career in housing law, and I have not changed my mind about this, it has been wonderful to learn about other types of law as well.

I also referred people to other legal and social service organizations when they had issues outside of these practice areas. When a client would call or walk in, I was often the first person they'd talk with. This meant I got to interact with clients with every kind of issue: outstanding warrants, immigration troubles, being injured by a city bus, needing a will drafted, traffic tickets, lost birth certificates, criminal records expungement, employment disputes, difficulty with school enrollment, and more. Researching and advising clients about the resources available to them gave me a view of much more than Bread's usual practice areas.

Since Bread for the City has a food pantry, medical clinic, social workers, a clothing room, and a representative payee program (that helps people budget their benefits checks), I was able to work with other Bread staffers to provide a continuum of care to our clients. A social worker referred an elderly gentleman to us because he was living in a bug-infested apartment and getting threatening letters from the local housing authority about overdue rent. I was able to request and decipher his rent ledger, determine what he owed and why he was getting the notices, talk to the building manager about requesting extermination, and work with the social worker to help our client apply for emergency rental assistance. He's now living in a bug-free apartment and did not have to face an attempt at eviction for nonpayment of rent.

In another situation, a woman contacted us for assistance getting legal custody of her infant grandson. When she mentioned off-hand that the child didn't have a lot of baby supplies and was sharing a bed with his grandmother, I was able to work with Bread's social workers to find an organization that would supply a crib, and with the medical clinic to give our client advice about enrolling the child in subsidized medical insurance programs. From these and other experiences, I've realized the necessity of providing comprehensive services to clients, who are often facing legal and non-legal challenges.

My memories of my summer at Bread for the City are too numerous to list, but here are a few: Attending a tenants' meeting in a building courtyard, children playing tag and shouting in many languages while their parents listened intently to an update on the case against their landlord, who attempted to convert their building into condos without following the established rules for doing so. Watching the community garden next to our office blossom and bear fruit throughout the summer. Climbing a broken staircase in a client's apartment building and looking at photos of their collapsing ceilings and rodent infestations. Eating lunch with the other staff members on the roof of our office. The first client who cried in front of me. The first client who made me cry. The first client to offer to pray for me, the one who let me read stories to her grandson, the one who grilled me about recent Supreme Court cases and told me how mental illness kept her from college and law school herself, the one who recognized me outside of the office (we lived around the corner from each other) and introduced me to her friend as the lawyer who'd helped her so much. I made sure to correct that last woman – to tell her I'm just a law student, and that I hadn't done much at all. But she said I'd treated her kindly and that sometimes that's enough. Bread for the City's motto is "Dignity, Respect, Service, and Justice." I've learned a lot about all four of those this summer, and I think those are lessons that will be of great assistance in whatever sort of legal career I choose. Thank you for helping make this experience possible.

Sincerely,



Stacy Braverman

University of Michigan

JD/Master of Urban Planning expected December 2009