

SUEANNE CO

West ###th Street #XX, New York, NY 00000 • Phone: (000) 000-0000 • Email: xxxxx@xxxxxx.xxx

September 7, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to thank you and the rest of the board of Equal Justice America for granting me the fellowship that made it possible for me to spend my summer working on behalf of the indigent at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) in New York City. I would like to share with you some of the highlights from my internship.

The Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) is a non-profit community-based public defender office whose mission is to provide high quality comprehensive legal representation to residents of Upper Manhattan: the Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood neighborhoods. NDS is also committed to reducing crime in these communities by assisting its clients in addressing the wide range of problems that bring them into court in the first place. A criminal accusation often brings trouble beyond the criminal charge itself. Even if never convicted, a person can be fired, lose public benefits, forfeit property, or even lose custody of a child as a result of being arrested. The NDS civil team represents clients in three principal areas related to their criminal cases: police brutality and misconduct; housing and eviction matters; and family court child protective proceedings. The beauty of working at NDS was the opportunity to witness how this holistic approach effectively and positively impacted the lives of so many.

One of the most gratifying aspects of being an intern at NDS was the opportunity to interact directly with clients and witnesses through client intake and witness interviewing. This direct service component gave a human dimension to the legal writing and research that I was doing. Instead of simply working with facts that were on paper, I was always reminded that each case involved a real person and that therefore, I had a grave responsibility to preserve this person's rights and help him to exercise them effectively. In attending to this duty, I had to learn how to balance empathy with rationality. For instance, in one case, a client relayed to me his humiliating experience of being falsely accused and arrested by the police on drug charges. The interview required that I give him the proper room to express his outrage and yet direct his answers so that I could understand whether he had a meritorious claim against the police for false imprisonment and police misconduct.

Beside doing direct service work, I also often researched the law and wrote memorandums and motions. One assignment on which I worked was particularly intellectually challenging and fulfilling—I was asked to research about the newly established integrated domestic violence courts which combined criminal court proceedings with civil family court proceedings and to marshal the most persuasive arguments as to why the judge should recuse herself from the family court proceedings. Essentially, I had to understand both criminal court and family court procedures in order to effectively complete the assignment. The task seemed daunting, but I was confident and excited to work on the project.

As one can see, I learned so much about the law while working at NDS. This is true even while I worked on things that seemed to be unrelated. In one case, I had to help a client who was to be released from prison after his acquittal from his criminal charges to find employment and housing. I was surprised that such a task also had a legal dimension to it. It was important to be familiar with the employment laws as it pertained to our client's right to privacy and to not be discriminated against because of his arrest record. It was also important to understand administrative procedures and proceedings in order to prevent our client from being disqualified from government housing simply because of the criminal charges that were brought against him that were ultimately found to be baseless.

In sum, I had a phenomenal summer working at NDS, and my experience has affirmed my desire to work on behalf of the indigent. This was all only possible because of Equal Justice America, and I am a true believer in your organization's mission.

Thank you once again.

Sincerely,

Sueanne Szuen Co
Columbia Law School, '08