

Thomas Lodwick

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

August 28, 2011

Dear Mr. Ruben:

With the help of an EJA Fellowship, this summer I served as a legal intern at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS). CLS is the oldest provider of civil legal aid in the Philadelphia area and it has a variety of practice areas to serve the needs of Philadelphia's poor. I worked in the Community Economic Development Unit on the Child Care Law Project (CCLP).

The CCLP provides legal services to low-income persons, primarily single mothers, seeking to start small for-profit or non-profit child care businesses in Philadelphia. The direct benefit of the CCLP is that it helps place our clients on long-term paths out of poverty. Beyond this, it has a two-fold impact on the low-income neighborhoods where most of our clients start their child care businesses: (1) it enables parents to obtain or maintain employment by increasing the availability of affordable child care in their neighborhood, and (2) it leads to all of the peripheral benefits associated with increasing the number of small businesses in struggling neighborhoods.

There are many issues and bodies of law involved in opening a child care in Philadelphia, and to the extent possible the CCLP assists clients with all major legal issues that arise. As a result of this, and in part because my supervisor is the only staff member of the CCLP, I was able to work with several bodies of law and assist clients in almost all matters handled by the CCLP. My tasks included: outreach to prospective clients, reviewing applications, interviewing prospective clients, drafting retainer agreements, creating and managing case files, legal research and writing, advising on business structures and drafting articles of incorporation, property research (property history, zoning, site visits, and drafting letters summarizing legal issues with properties), zoning applications and appeals, assistance with landlord-tenant disputes, develop and update community education materials, as well as a variety of other tasks.

I was grateful to have such extensive client contact. By managing my own cases and assisting my supervisor, I experienced for the first time the rewarding life of a legal aid attorney. One of my most memorable clients was a married couple eager to start a child care business. Both had been laid off or out of work because of the Great Recession. Rather than let this break them, as a team they came up with a creative business idea to fill a particular child care need in Philadelphia. They were always friendly, and they appreciated any help we could offer.

Our main task during my fellowship was to help them find a commercial space which could satisfy both the local zoning laws and state welfare regulations. After much searching they located a space with the help of a realtor and invited us to do a site visit. The site visit was midday during one of the hottest days of the summer, but that was no deterrent from serving such great people.

When we got to the site, the building was completely unfinished and in terrible shape. It was clear that a tremendous amount of work would be needed to build it to suit, and that would cost a lot of time and/or money, neither of which were in great supply for our clients. However, they liked the building and were optimistic that the changes could be made.

The realtor claimed that the building was zoned properly, but my research had shown otherwise. This led to some uncertainty about the property, but the clients were inclined to side with the realtor because that was the answer they wanted. I conducted further research and reached out to a city official directly for a final answer. Unfortunately, my research was correct and the building was not the optimal zoning classification for our clients.

It took several conversations and a lot of explaining, but ultimately I was able to communicate to the clients that the zoning was not good for their child care business. I was afraid they would be upset - they had expressed how hard it had been to even get a call back on prospective properties. It wasn't fun to let them down, and it meant we would have to start over with the search. However, once they got the final word, they were upbeat and ready to move on. They knew that it wasn't worth going forward, and I greatly respected their judgment.

Although this was a simple story, it showed me that sometimes, to act in your client's best interest, you have to deliver bad news. It also showed me how important our role was in the situation. Without us, the clients likely would have relied on the realtor's incorrect assertions, signed a bad and overvalued lease, and then run into a whole host of problems. I didn't like sending our clients back to the drawing board, but it was rewarding to see how my work made a positive difference in their lives. I'm confident that in the end they will be better off and will be top-notch child care professionals.

My summer was full of moments like this; moments where my legal training and position at CLS enabled me to make a real difference in clients' lives. It's no exaggeration to say that my summer internship, which may not have been possible without EJA's support, completely reinvigorated my interest in the practice of law. I hope to further explore a career in legal aid, and perhaps one day serve as a staff attorney at an organization like CLS.

In closing, I would like to thank you and everyone who makes Equal Justice America fellowships possible. Such fellowships make the practice of public interest law possible for all law students, and I am extremely grateful for that.

Sincerely,

Thomas Lodwick
George Washington University



August 26, 2011

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

RE: Summer 2011 EJA Fellow Thomas Lodwick, Hosted by Community Legal Services

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Rasheedah Phillips and I am an attorney in the Consumer Housing and Community Economic Development (CED) units at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS). Within the CED unit, I direct a project called the Child Care Law Project (CCLP). I had the pleasure of supervising Thomas Lodwick during his 2011 summer internship here at CLS, where he interned in the CED unit, assisting me with running the CCLP.

The CCLP was established to assist low-income for-profit and non-profit child care providers in starting or expanding childcare and early childhood education programs. One of the central aims of the CCLP is to increase the availability of quality, affordable child care for low-income families in Philadelphia. The CCLP also encourages and assists low-income entrepreneurs in starting and growing successful businesses. A peripheral benefit of the Project is that it stimulates the local economy of struggling neighborhoods by encouraging the development of viable businesses within the neighborhoods. The CCLP does this through direct representation of childcare providers on a wide variety of legal issues, by providing community education, and by engaging in policy advocacy.

During the internship, after an initial week-long training (and periodic trainings throughout the summer), Thomas jumped right into work on a multitude of tasks. He was given a small caseload of pre-existing clients that he had to maintain throughout the summer, all of which presented different legal issues that he had to tackle. Thomas also assisted in interviewing new clients, assessing their income eligibility for assistance, and, after acceptance of new clients, creating retainer agreements and authorizations for them. For each new client, Thomas did comprehensive background research on their daycare and the property it was housed in.

Several of our clients struggled with landlord-tenant issues and needed lease agreements for their daycares. Thomas had to analyze the lease agreements for possible solutions, and, in one case, gave extensive recommendations for a lease addendum, then went on to draft the addendum. He also did extensive research and wrote a memorandum on landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities in commercial lease agreements.

Thomas accompanied me on site visits to the various daycare properties of new and pre-existing clients. During these site visits, we had to walk-through and assess whether the properties would be suitable for a daycare, based on regulatory requirements of the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. After each visit, Thomas would complete a detailed summary for each client on our recommendations for the property. He always gave a very clear and thorough analysis, and did an excellent job of breaking down the legal and regulatory jargon into terms that could be easily understood by our clients.

Thomas also did extensive work in the area of zoning. Zoning is the regulatory process that determines how property can be used in the City of Philadelphia. Several of our clients were at the point of needing to apply for zoning permits to open their daycare. Some of these clients required administrative appeal hearings to the Zoning Board of Adjustment in order to receive a variance to open a daycare in a particular property. Thomas assisted in drafting zoning applications and did extensive preparation for appeal hearings.

Aside from direct client work, Thomas was also heavily involved in CCLP policy advocacy, most of which involves changes to the Philadelphia Zoning Code, and the effects that the new Code will have on childcare providers. Thomas attended all meetings that were held throughout the summer with coalitions and partner organizations that also work on early childhood education issues. At one point in the summer, he analyzed proposed changes to a Department of Public Welfare energy assistance plan that could have a negative impact on low-income business owners. After his analysis, Thomas sent out letters to providers notifying them of the proposed change and instructing them on how to testify against it. In addition, Thomas made significant edits and revisions to community education materials that the CCLP provides to clients and potential clients.

It would take me much more space than I have in these two pages to list all of the work that Thomas accomplished over the course of the summer. I have only highlighted a percentage of his contribution. With every task that he completed, Thomas was very thorough and exacting. With every client that he interacted with, he was courteous and caring. With every new area of law that he had to encounter and learn, Thomas was curious and attentive. One could not ask for more from an intern. Thomas was truly a benefit to the CCLP this summer, and I suspect that he will be a huge asset to the public interest community in the near future.

If you have any additional questions, or would like additional details regarding Thomas' work on the CCLP in the CED unit at CLS, please feel free to contact me at (215) 981-3774, or via email at rphillips@clsphila.org.

Sincerely,



Rasheedah Phillips
Staff Attorney