

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben:

The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights is one of the clinics at the University of Chicago Law School. The Center works with unaccompanied minors from foreign countries who come to the United States for various reasons. We as a child advocate (guardian ad litem) do not legally represent the children, but we decide what is in the best interest of these children and make best interest recommendation to immigration judge and attorneys representing these children.

I have served four young clients during my summer internship. They are minors from Guatemala, China, and Mexico who came to the United States unaccompanied. Particularly memorable experience was my relationship with two of these children.

About a month ago, I was assigned to a girl from China who came to the States this May. She was caught at the border and was transferred to a detention facility in Chicago. I have been visiting her once a week to talk to her, find out what her motivations were for coming to the States, situations back in China, etc. She initially was not willing to talk to me, because she perceived me as another government agent trying to investigate her. She speaks very little English and I do not speak Chinese, and we used telephonic interpreter to talk to one another. This was additional barrier to our conversation. I told her how I came to the States on my own, and that I do not have family members living in the States. Finding some common grounds between us helped me establish a bonding relationship with her, and she was more comfortable talking to me in our second meeting. As I became close to her, she told me her journey to the States, her family back in China, and what her wishes are.

After each meeting, I write down a detailed summary of our conversation. These notes later serve as a useful information when I write a best interest recommendation letter for the child. She is still in the detention facility because her sponsor is subject to a home study, which is conducted to determine whether the sponsor's household is a safe environment for the girl to live in. I encourage her to stay patient and positive while she waits for her release from the detention facility, and at the same time try to find out what is in her best interest. For example, I ask her specific questions that can reveal possible trafficking concerns involved in her journey to the States.

Another child that I worked with was an infant from Guatemala who came to the States with his adoptive mother. While the adoptive mother alleged that she had made a pre-arrangement with the birth mother to adopt the child, there was a concern that the child was trafficked. I contacted experts in Guatemalan adoption law and asked them cultural practice of adoption and legal regulations in Guatemala. In doing so, I translated home study conducted in Guatemala—which interviewed mother-in-law of infant's birth mother, biological mother of birth mother, neighbors of birth mother—from Spanish to English. Expert opinions are useful in making the best interest recommendation for the infant—whether he should be sent to his birth mother's family in Guatemala or should be released to the adoptive mother in the States.

My experience taught me several invaluable lessons. First, I learned to interact with clients. Initiating conversation with a detained child from different cultural background was challenging. I coped with the situation by bringing up some common grounds between the client and me. This helped the client to feel more comfortable, and eventually the client opened herself up to me. Second, the experience taught me to be a critical and analytical thinker. In order to make the best interest recommendation, each case has to be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, such as a child's safety, family reunification, wishes, and development. I thought about my client's case from different angles and tried to come up with persuasive arguments in support of the client's best interest. Lastly, I learned responsibility and commitment. I have been regularly talking to my client even after my internship had ended. When I could not visit her in person, I called her. I find it rewarding that I have established a lasting relationship with my client, and that my client finds comfort in talking to me.

I am grateful for the generous support that Equal Justice America has given me. My summer experience helped me to become a mature and professional person.

Sincerely,
Janice Han
/s/ Janice Han
The University of Chicago Law School
Class of 2018



August 25, 2016

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

Re: Janice Han

Dear Mr. Ruben:

It is my pleasure to write this letter and commend the work of Janice Han during the summer of 2016 with the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights at the University of Chicago Law School. Janice is a rising second-year student at the Law School. Throughout the summer, Janice brought integrity, compassion, and thoughtfulness to our work. Time and again, our staff remarked to one another about how fortunate we were to have Janice on board.

By way of background, the Young Center trains law students, social work students, and community volunteers to serve as Child Advocates (best interests guardians *ad litem*) for unaccompanied immigrant children. These are children who arrive in the United States without any parent or legal guardian. They come from all corners of the world. The Office of Refugee Resettlement appoints Young Center volunteers to serve as Child Advocates to unaccompanied children who have been identified as particularly vulnerable. Child Advocates make weekly trips to visit the children in federal facilities, build trust and rapport with the children, and identify and advocate for the children's best interests with federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Justice.

This summer, Janice served as the Child Advocate to a teenage girl from China. Janice met with the girl on a weekly basis at a federal facility in Chicago. In a short period of time, Janice built a bond with the girl that is marked by warmth and ease. That she did so across a language barrier deserves particular acclaim. After her initial meeting with the girl, Janice noticed that using a telephonic language interpreter had stilted her ability to connect with the girl. At the next meeting, Janice used gestures and pictures to create a more natural, uninterrupted flow in their conversation. Thereafter, Janice relied upon a mix of non-verbal communication and telephonic

The University of Chicago
6020 South University Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637
773.702.9560
773.702.2063 fax

THEYOUNGCENTER.ORG



interpretation to create a space for the girl to share information about her life in home country, her experience in federal custody, and her hopes for the future.

Janice also researched a wide array of legal issues that arose during the Young Center's work on behalf of other unaccompanied children detained across the country. In one case, a very young boy was separated from his adoptive mother (both from Guatemala) when they entered the United States. Questions arose regarding the legitimacy of the adoption. The Young Center was tasked with recommending whether the boy should be reunited with his adoptive mother. Janice researched the issues that often arise in Guatemalan adoptions, identified experts in the area, and procured opinions from those experts to guide our recommendation. Throughout the process, Janice showed initiative, discretion, and persistence. Janice also provided thorough, detailed research on other issues, ranging from the effects of detention on teenage girls who give birth in detention, patterns of human trafficking from Ghana to the United States, and the availability of mental health services for teenagers detained in adult facilities.

Finally, Janice showed solid written communication skills. Janice drafted Best Interests Recommendations (BIRs) directed to various government decision makers. In preparing those BIRs, Janice conducted extensive reviews of case notes, posed considered questions to the supervising attorneys, accepted revisions and suggestions with grace, and ultimately crafted persuasive recommendations regarding each child's future.

We thank you for supporting students like Janice and their commitment to public service. The Young Center, and the children we serve, benefitted tremendously from Janice's work with us this summer. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 773-702-8795.

Sincerely,

Maria Woltjen
Executive Director

Marcy Phillips
Senior Staff Attorney