

October 2, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Working on asylum cases is not for the faint of heart. Before I started my summer at the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), my exposure to immigration law and asylum claims was very limited. By the end of my time at NWIRP, I gained a firm understanding of the difficulties associated with presenting a valid asylum claim and the emotional toll working with asylum applicants can have on the human psyche.

I spent the entirety of my internship working with Central American Immigrants. In particular, I was tasked with performing initial interviews to determine the strength of the potential client's asylum claim or, in the case of children, the possibility of applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). The first few interviews were by far the most challenging. All of the people I worked with had entered the United States after suffering horrible atrocities in their native countries. In order to help them, I needed to learn as many details about their lives and their hardships as possible. I was reluctant to ask the difficult questions because I felt a need to protect these individuals from their past. However, after the first few interviews it became clear that the best way for me to help clients was to have them explain the all of the circumstances surrounding their departures from their home countries. As a result, I slowly became desensitized to the trauma they had suffered. At the same time, I realized that the only way for me to be an effective advocate was to focus on the legal issues and put the emotional aspect of the job behind me. Two cases involving Guatemalan immigrants best exemplify my summer at NWIRP.

Mary and her two siblings came to the United States from Guatemala in 2014 after Mary was raped on two separate occasions by the same group of men. Mary is developmentally challenged. Her vision is limited and she received no education. During the Guatemalan Civil War, her father was forced to serve on the Civil Patrol and then again on a Security Committee after the war. Her father was repeatedly tortured for missing his security shifts and fled to the United States in the early 2000s. Mary's mother was raped about 7 years ago and fled to the United States as well. When Mary and her siblings were attacked, her attackers demanded money and to know the whereabouts of her father. During my discussions with Mary and her family, I was able to determine that they were likely targeted by members of the Security Committee for her father's failure to perform his security shifts. Guatemalan patrols have a history of attacking family members of patrollers that do not fulfill their duties. I spent countless hours listening to the events of Mary's attacks and helping her and her siblings draft declarations for their asylum

applications. Our discussions were difficult but necessary. Although the case is still in proceedings, I feel confident that Mary and her siblings will be granted asylum.

In addition to working on asylum applications, NWIRP also allowed me to work with a client to prepare her for a Credible Fear Interview (CFI). Generally, CFIs are conducted upon entry at the border. However, in Julia's case, her CFI was scheduled to happen in late July. According to the USCIS, "a person will be found to have a credible fear of persecution if he or she establishes that there is a "significant possibility" that he or she could establish in a full hearing before an Immigration Judge that he or she has been persecuted or has a well-founded fear of persecution or harm on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group if returned to his or her home country." In order to even be considered for asylum, an applicant must first pass the CFI. Julia and I went over her story on five occasions leading up to the interview. I wanted her to be comfortable sharing the unpleasant details with the asylum officer. At first, our mock interviews were brief and omitted details of her suffering in Guatemala. By the time of her interview, she was confident enough to answer all of the officer's questions and passed her interview in late July.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with asylum applicants at NWIRP. I gained a better understanding for the motives behind Central American immigration to the United States. My supervisors trusted me with writing SIJS motions, SIJS orders, and various research projects related to asylum (e.g., cover letters, declarations). I learned how to interview children and gain their confidence. I also learned how to ask the unpleasant questions necessary to establish a strong asylum claim. I plan on continuing to volunteer at NWIRP throughout the school year. I am still very interested in international issues, especially immigration. This year I hope to continue advocating for the underrepresented by working at the Public Defender's office in Seattle. NWIRP reinforced my desire to continue working on behalf of those in need.

Sincerely,

James Carr
University of Washington School of Law
JD Candidate 2017