

August 29, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Equal Justice America made my summer internship at Atlanta Legal Aid Society possible, and for that, I am incredibly thankful. This summer at Gwinnett Legal Aid, which is one of Atlanta Legal Aid Society's general law units, I was able to serve my community and hone my legal skills by providing legal assistance to clients who had little to no income and who were dealing with legal problems. The experience was immeasurably useful and rewarding. I was involved heavily in family law, and to a lesser extent, benefits law, bankruptcy law, education law, housing law, and consumer law. The majority of my time was spent doing intake interviews to determine what the client's legal needs were and whether Gwinnett Legal Aid could help or not, and if so, what type of help we could provide, but a smaller portion of my time was spent working in depth on various parts of a particular client's case. I saw numerous beneficial results for our clients.

One client in particular made an impact on me. Client A's situation was far from ideal. Client A and Client A's ex-husband, who had abused Client A, had been divorced a few years back. The two had one child together. The divorce order: required that Client A's ex-husband pay child support, gave Client A primary physical custody, and granted the ex-husband visitation, which he never exercised. Client A came to us because Client A's ex-husband had filed for a downward modification of child support. Client A could not afford this downward modification in child support, and in any event, Client A knew that her ex-husband was not representing his income accurately. The ex-husband evaded our requests for information and went to great lengths to hide his money and resources. After numerous depositions of Client A's ex-husband, countless subpoenas, discovery requests, and basically digging up all the information we could find about Client A's ex-husband's actual income, we felt confident that we had uncovered all of Client A's ex-husband's hidden income. We then prepared for a bench trial. At the end of the bench trial, during which I assisted an attorney in our office, Client A actually received an upward modification of child support. While this win may not seem huge to an outsider, the fact that the ex-husband did not succeed in reducing his responsibility to his child was definitely a win. Additionally, the extra money Client A received was critical to the hardworking mother and made a huge difference in the life of Client A and her child.

Another particularly impactful case was one in which I provided brief service to Client B by helping her prepare court documents for an upcoming hearing. Client B had been served by her daughter's father with a Petition for Legitimate and Custody/Visitation. Client B was down on her luck and working irregular hours as a

waitress, and the couple's daughter lived with primarily with the adverse party. Client B had the daughter about half of the time. The petition, which Client B was pretty sure had been prepared by the adverse party's mother, asked for complete custody of the child and asked for Client B to be given limited, supervised visitation. Attached to the petition was an affidavit with several lies about Client B that supported the prayer for limited, supervised visitation by Client B. While a judge probably would not have granted all aspects of the petition, Client B had no idea how to respond or prepare an answer. Client B was scared to death that the adverse party would be granted all that they asked for, and had no idea how to navigate the system. I worked closely with Client B to prepare an answer, a child support worksheet, a domestic relations financial affidavit, and other court documents. Furthermore, I coached her through what to expect at the hearing. In the end, the judge ruled in Client B's favor. This brief service I provided was important to me because without my help, Client B would have been taken advantage of by the adverse party, and her relationship with her daughter would have suffered. Also, the help that I gave Client B empowered her and made her feel more in control of the situation.

I helped Gwinnett Legal Aid achieve results that increased the quality of life for many people. I had a personal hand in helping clients gain/restore access to public benefits, successfully navigate barriers to enrolling children in school, obtain child support orders, enforce child support/visitation/custody orders, and obtain temporary protective orders. The Fellowship made all of this possible. I was able to focus all of my energy on helping clients and becoming a better advocate, and I am beyond thankful for the opportunity I was given. I am now one step closer to becoming an effective, passionate attorney for those who have limited resources.

Sincerely,

Allison Parrish
University of Georgia School of Law
J.D. Candidate, 2015