

ERIN P. CROWGEY

August 13, 2008

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112
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RE: Letter Describing Summer Fellowship with JustChildren, a Program of the Legal Aid Justice Center.

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I spent my summer working with JustChildren, a program of the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville, VA. It was an inspiring and fascinating experience, and it has confirmed my commitment to work in the public service field following my graduation.

Throughout the summer, I was able to tackle a broad array of legal issues, including special education law, school discipline, and juvenile justice issues. One notable thing about the legal problems of our clients is that they are ongoing and continuous. Although the clients sign a retainer to address a specific problem, during my three months with JustChildren, I did not see one case close. Some of the cases I worked on had been ongoing for years, with many small steps taken towards resolution, but with many more to go.

I was also able to see a continuum of youth. One of the first cases I worked on was an eighteen year old client committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice with a blended sentence. He had an extensive and complex history of mental health problems from an early age, including bipolar disorder and suicidal ideations, and yet had not received ongoing treatment until he was in the custody of DJJ. He likely never would have entered their custody had he been receiving the treatment and medication he needed before that time. We were working with him to help him stay in the custody of DJJ until the age of 21, because he was more likely to receive better and consistent services through DJJ than if transferred to the Department of Corrections.

A later client, a twelve year old boy, had a great deal in common with the client I mentioned above, yet luckily he was brought to the attention of the school system and our office at a much younger age. He had been expelled from his school for making a threat just a few weeks prior to the end of the school year. He would have been transferring from one school district to another over the summer, because he was finally returning to the custody of

his biological parent after several years in foster care. This transfer of custody was turning the child's world upside down and, as a child with complex mental health diagnoses, he was unable to appropriately express his emotions, leading to his expulsion. We petitioned to have his expulsion revoked, but were unsuccessful. Had this child been without an attorney, his plight to attend school in the upcoming year and to remain in the home with his biological parent would have likely ended here. However, as I concluded my summer internship, we were working with the school district's attorney to find this child an appropriate placement in a school equipped to deal with his mental health problems, so that he could continue receiving schooling in the upcoming year. The intervention at this point, along with continuing mental health services, will hopefully prevent this boy from ending up in the same situation as the young man with whom he shares so many similarities.

I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for helping me to spend my summer in such a worthwhile and important way. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Erin Crowgey
UVA Law School, Class of 2010