

August 5, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Re: Equal Justice America Fellowship

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I interned with Atlanta Legal Aid. I primarily worked in a general law office. However, through a special partnership, my office was unique in that we took on Temporary Protective Orders for survivors of domestic violence. My main areas of interest are family law and domestic violence, and luckily I was able to be involved in those areas as well as others.

My duties ranged from screening clients which means a relatively quick phone call all the way to representing clients in hearings under the Student Practice Act. No matter what the level of interaction, each client left a lasting impact.

One case which I was not able to finish before I left Legal Aid was a Temporary Protective Order. My supervising attorney and I represented a client in a Protective Order Hearing. The Respondent was charged with pretty severe charges, although he was not in custody. My client was shaky; she suffered severe emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her fiancé. In prepping for the hearing, I was ready for battle; I never dreamed the Respondent would agree to a consent order. In fact, I thought he would like make allegations against my client and we would have to be on the defensive. Much to our surprise he agreed to talk with me and my supervising attorney and ultimately agreed to a consent order.

My client was thrilled with this result. She did not want to see the Respondent again, much less have to go through a hearing and testify as to the abuse. The client suffered from panic attacks as a result of the prior abuse so having this 12-month protection in place was a much needed safe guard.

Unfortunately, the story did not end there. The Respondent filed a Motion to Set Aside based on frivolous claims of duress and fraud. Meanwhile he violated the Protective Order and called our client. This was not ideal for our client's recovery process. After foiling a police report with the sheriff's office, the respondent was arrested for aggravated stalking! Although I will not be able to see how the Motion to Set Aside turns out, I am confident the Order will remain in place. When the client called to update me on the Respondent's arrest the calm in her voice was unmistakable. She finally felt at peace. She was getting into a stable housing situation, something

she lost as a result of the abusive relationship. She is now getting help to deal with the emotional scars and is well on her way to regaining the lost control in her life. To know I was able to be a small part of her road to recovery is something that will inspire me every day throughout my legal career.

Although my focus was on family cases and domestic violence cases, I was able to dip into other areas of law. Demand letters are a task that quite often falls to interns. While many go unanswered, there are those few that return a positive result. I wrote a demand letter in order to preserve housing for a client after the complex threatened to file a dispossessory as a result of not picking up her service's dogs waste. The interesting twist is that there appeared to be an agreement where the complex maintenance would pick up the service's dogs [waste] until recently. This was also a client who was very needy, daily phone calls and new requests were commonplace. I did some research and as it turns out in our local county code there was an exception that allowed owners of service dogs to be exempt from picking up their dog's waste. I wrote the letter explaining the apartment's violation of local code. Although the complex did not get back to me, they started accepting the tenant's rent again. I know the client was in poor health so a move would have been impossible, by preserving her housing and avoiding an eviction we were able to make her life a little easier.

Another highlight of the summer, involved a social security payment to a client that was disabled and only wanted to pay her bills. She was such a sincere and kind woman, an ideal client with a tough case unfortunately. However, part way through my internship, the client called me near tears because she received part of the provisional payment she was owed for months. She listed all the ways it was going to help her and get rid of the debt collect phone calls. The happiness in her voice was contagious. Working with the Social Security Administration in particular can be challenging to the lay person, all she needed was an advocate and we were able to make a huge difference in her life she may not have gotten otherwise.

I am so grateful to Equal Justice America and their fellowship program for giving me the financial means to take an internship with Atlanta Legal Aid this summer. I was able to see first-hand the difference you can make in people's lives. While these are just three brief snapshots of positive outcomes and inspiring cases, every day was filled with at least one client who made an impact on my life. This is an experience I will never forget and will always cherish. I also hope to continue taking pro-bono cases and offering my time in some capacity to organizations like Legal Aid throughout my legal career.

Warmest Regards,

Abby Herrmann

Georgia State University College of Law, May 2017