

August 24, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I cannot thank you and Equal Justice America enough for the Summer Fellowship. Because of the fellowship, I was able to work at the Children's Law Center in Hartford, Connecticut. The attorneys at the Children's Law Center work as Guardians *ad litem* in continuous family court cases throughout Connecticut. Many times, the children that are represented have no one looking out for their best interests. The Children's Law Center fills that gap.

During my internship, I worked directly with attorneys in investigating the cases, coming up with custody and visitation recommendations that are in the best interests of the children, and presenting those recommendations to family court judges. As the summer went on, I was given more and more responsibility and conducted home visits, intake interviews, and child interviews on my own. I also helped attorneys go through pages of DCF records, doctor records, and school records in order to determine what is best for the children involved.

In addition to being actively involved in cases, I also took calls for the Legal Helpline that provides free legal advice over the phone. These calls ranged from basic, like how to change a custody agreement, to very complex. The more and more calls I took, I realized that many of the callers were at their wits end. They had usually called many other agencies before getting our number, and had constantly been given the run around about what to do. Yet we took the time to address all their concerns and give them the best legal advice possible. I had so many callers who expressed so much gratitude for the time and effort I put in to answering their legal questions when they had been ignored by so many other agencies. It was very rewarding to be able to help so many people, even just over the phone.

One particular case that I worked on throughout the summer was especially meaningful to me. We were assigned to the case at the beginning of the summer and we would be representing two young boys, aged 4 and 5, in their parent's very contentious custody case. I quickly learned of all the turmoil these boys had experienced in their short lives. Their parents had been in and out of family court for the past three years and these boys had been exposed to things most children never experience. They had seen both parents arrested at different times and drugs in the home. They had already met with multiple therapists and professionals; they had even spent time in foster homes. The saddest part was that they had two parents who loved them and were capable of caring for them, with a little help. But because the two parents had so much animosity

towards each other, the best interests of the boys were not being put first. When we entered the picture, the boys were living with a family member in a very unstable home.

Once we learned the gravity of the situation, we were able to work with both parents and the judge on the case to come up with a parenting plan. Because the father had kept the boys away from the mother for a long period of time, we decided that slowly going through the reunification process would be best for everyone involved. We were able to get the judge to order the father to attend parenting classes and random drug testing to make sure he was being the best parent possible. The boys and their mother went through the reunification process and started with supervised visits, then unsupervised visits in a public place, then visits in mom's home, and then overnight visits. Once the overnight visits started, the goal was to eventually work towards a shared parenting plan where both parents would have equal time with the children. I first met the boys right before their first supervised visit with their mother. They were very polite and sweet, but seemed a bit sad. There was not a sparkle in their eye and they just seemed a bit defeated. I met with them again after they started doing overnight visits at their mom's home. It was like meeting two different kids. They were so happy and enthusiastic and had that worry-free sparkle in their eye that is so common in young children.

When the case was closed three months after it was opened, the change in the family dynamic was amazing. The father was becoming a much more calm and understanding person and was continuing to test negative on all of his random drug tests. The mother had equal time with the children and had just started a new, stable job. The kids were happy and go-lucky and their day-care instructors told us it was like two different kids. But one of the best things that came out of our work on the case was that the parent's relationship was on the mend. They were finally able to speak through text messaging and email, which is so important when sharing parenting duties for two young children. Neither parent was blocking access to the other parent and there was much more civility between the parents.

Seeing the transformation of these children and the entire dynamic of the family really showed how important the work is that we do. I really hope that this is the end of our relationship with this family, and their days of court dates and screaming matches are over. However, I take comfort in the fact that if sometimes does go wrong, the Children's Law Center will be there to protect these children and look out for their best interests.

I am eternally grateful for the Summer Fellowship from Equal Justice America because it allowed me to do some of the most meaningful work I have ever been a part of.

Sincerely,

Sarah Gleason
Juris Doctor Candidate, 2015
University of Connecticut School of Law



The Children's LAW Center of Connecticut

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August 21, 2013

Dan Ruben,
Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing this letter regarding Sarah Gleason and her fellowship with us this past summer. I am the Supervising Attorney for the internship program at The Children's Law Center (CLC), a non-profit organization that provides legal representation for children of low-income families, involved in high-conflict divorce and custody actions. Sarah was an intern at our office during the summer of 2013.

During her fellowship, Sarah participated in our Representation program. She attended court proceedings, co-conducted home visits with our young clients, and co-interviewed our clients' parents in our office. She summarized relevant family court cases and researched laws in relation to pending cases. Sarah acted with such professionalism and skill that once she became comfortable with our cases she began conducting home visits, interacting with clients in court, and editing court recommendations on behalf of our attorneys. In addition, because of Sarah's ability and eagerness to learn she quickly became the "go-to" intern for some of our more complex cases.

Sarah also participated in our Lawline program, a legal hotline on which we give self-represented parties advice about family court. She conducted intakes with callers and, over the course of her fellowship, began informing callers about their legal options. In each of these areas, Sarah showed great insight during her interactions with people, making them comfortable while also eliciting pertinent information in a professional manner. In all of her communications on our behalf, whether with clients, parents, opposing counsel or service providers, Sarah treated everyone with respect.

Our cases involve tremendous amounts of interaction with clients and their families. Our cases can also be sad and stressful. Due to this, our office atmosphere is somewhat informal and familial. While Sarah was professional in her responsibilities, her personality and affability quickly made her an integrated member of our staff.

During her tenure here, Sarah proved herself to be an intelligent, compassionate, and dedicated fellow. She impressed me with her level of self-motivation and commitment, producing quality work that exceeded my expectations.





The Children's LAW Center of Connecticut

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Based on my experience working with Sarah, I believe that she did an excellent job during her fellowship with us.

Regards,

David Coughlin
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