

December 18, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America

Dear Dan Ruben:

My fall internship was a full time legal position at Greater Boston Legal Services, with the Immigration Unit (which houses the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic). While there were several other legal students working with the clinic, I was the only full time student and this provided a particularly valuable experience because I was relied on by my supervisor and the other attorneys for all kinds of tasks and projects.

I worked with clients who were applying for many different immigration benefits: asylum, withholding of removal, u visas, work authorization, adjustment of status, naturalization, etc. I was able to utilize my Spanish skills by working with many clients from Central America. On top of the legal experience, this was also a very valuable experience because I have always hoped to be able to use my language skills in my career.

One client I learned a lot from was a human rights advocate from Guatemala who had fled four years after the civil war ended. He has experienced so much pain and suffering in his life but his enthusiasm for human rights and his hope and passion for a better future were truly inspiring. We met several times and discussed his life story. We sent in an initial asylum application and worked on the additional pieces of documentation that would be submitted in advance of his asylum interview.

Another client experience that was truly eye opening came from working for someone I never even met. One afternoon about three weeks before my internship ended, a current client called the lawyer who was working with her and informed us that her daughter had been picked up crossing into the country on the Mexico-US border. For three weeks I worked with the attorneys a little bit every day to help locate what detention center this young girl was located at, send her a form to authorize our office to work on her behalf, and convinced Texas USCIS and ICE officials that the young woman had credible fear of returning to her native country and should thus be granted an asylum interview. It really showed me the difficulties the immigration detention system poses and was a lesson in insistence and determination. Ultimately at the time I left, we heard from the girl's mother that she had been granted an interview.

Thanks to you and EJA, I was able to receive some funding for this internship and I am very appreciative of this support. The public interest sector is one that needs workers but doesn't have the resources to draw as many talented new lawyers into its field, but thanks to EJA, more of us can dedicate our lives to the important work we see that needs to be done.

Sincerely,

Sarah Leidel
Northeastern Law School, 2015