

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

Thank you for the opportunity to receive EJA funding this summer! I have had a great experience at Greater Boston Legal Services working in the Immigration Unit for the past 10 weeks.

Most of the work that I did this summer was in the realm of asylum applications. I learned a lot about the asylum application process and what are the common trouble areas for clients seeking asylum. In order for a client to apply for asylum, they must apply within one year of coming to the United States unless there are extraordinary or changed circumstances. As most of my clients are from Guatemala, a very common example of changed circumstances that I have used to argue for my clients is the remilitarization of the Guatemalan government after the election of President Otto Perez Molina in 2012. Following this election, the family members of several of my clients started experiencing worse targeting and persecution than before, and the Guatemalan soldiers simply stood by and watched the violence increase.

The majority of the clients that I worked with this summer were indigenous Mayans who fled from Guatemala after suffering years of targeting and persecution. Because of this, I learned a lot about the history of indigenous people in Guatemala. This includes all of the suffering that they have faced, especially during the Guatemalan Civil War. During this Civil War, there was a large divide created between the indigenous population and the Ladinos, the people of Spanish decent. Many clients told me that if anyone in their family had previously stood up to soldiers or persecution from Ladinos, their family has and will continued to be targeted because of the actions of their ancestors. For example, several of the female clients that I assisted with their asylum application were attacked and raped in Guatemala because their grandparents had been community organizers and had tried to stand up for the rights of indigenous people.

Additionally, because the majority of my clients are from Guatemala, they often speak little to no English. This gave me the opportunity to practice my Spanish skills, and by the end of this summer I was able to fully converse with my clients without the assistance of an interpreter. My final client, a young man from Guatemala, stated that he had no problem telling me his story in Spanish and felt completely comfortable with my responses and ability to understand what he was conveying.

During this summer, I had the opportunity to work one-on-one with 16 different clients. My work usually involved doing intake interviews to determine the theory of the client's case; preparing forms to file with the court to support the client's claims' drafting and editing affidavits both of the client and their family members; and preparing and attending asylum interviews with the client. I learned a lot this summer and greatly enjoyed my experience.

Best,
Samantha Bloom
Northeastern University School of Law '19