

October 9, 2023

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America fellow during the 2023 summer. I worked as a legal intern at Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) in Washington, DC. I worked within the family law unit working on issues related to child custody, child support and domestic violence.

My summer began with a series of trainings related to all the areas NLSP practices in such as family, economic security, and housing law. It was helpful to learn from experts within these fields and see the intersection of all the issues. NLSP continued the trainings through weekly lunch and learned to dive deeper into niche issues and work on practical legal skills such as client communication.

My first few assignments were drafting client closing letters and sitting in on client calls with my supervisors. Drafting client closing letters helped establish my foundational understanding of family law in DC because I often had to explain how child support and custody worked in DC and how the court process would continue if we were unable to offer the client in court assistance. I learned the importance of communicating in an effective and understanding matter, as well as the importance of formally closing cases and giving clients as much information as possible in a manageable way. After writing a few closing letters, I found it much easier to understand the legal process. Sitting in on client calls was helpful to meet the clients, understand the issues, and learn how to communicate with clients and manage expectations.

Throughout the summer I had the opportunity to lead a few client calls, both to receive updates and conduct initial interviews. The call that stuck with me the most was an interview about our client's experience with domestic violence. Our client was a survivor but had trouble recalling each instance. It was important for us to understand each instance to best assist the client during a child custody battle. I lead the call by asking open ended questions about instances. My plan was to start with the most recent incident and go backwards, but the client found it easier to start with the first and move forward – so that is what we did. I was able to practice my active listening skills and sympathizing while staying on track. It was difficult to hear their story, but I am grateful I was able to create a safe where they felt comfortable sharing.

Throughout the summer I also had the opportunity to visit court multiple times to sit in on hearing and settlement conferences. I am so grateful for my experience this summer because it showed my desire to pursue a career in family law. I also enjoyed engaging with my LinkedIn network through regular posts about my experiences.

Thank you,
Kali Fields
Catholic University