

August 22, 2017

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Mr. Ruben,

Over the summer, I had the wonderful experience of being a legal clerk in the domestic violence unit at Bay Area Legal Aid in Oakland, California. This was made possible in part by my Equal Justice America fellowship, as I was working at Bay Legal on a volunteer basis.

The family law unit at Bay Legal (which encompasses domestic violence, my chosen field) is very busy; just a few lawyers serve a huge population. As a clerk, this meant I jumped right in and it was a nonstop summer, in the very best way. On day one as a clerk, I took notes in a deposition of the opposing party in a custody case stemming from a domestic violence incident. I continued to work on that case, communicating with the client and doing research, until it ended in a settlement that worked out for both parents and was in the best interest of the child.

I worked on another case that had a weeklong trial that required many hours of preparation. Our client was a mother who was trying to keep custody of her child; the opposing party was her abusive ex-husband. I took notes during the deposition of the opposing party, researched legal questions for the case, and wrote the cross-examination questions for witnesses. I attended each day of the trial, taking notes and providing other support to the attorneys. The case did not finish in that week, but I learned so much about family law litigation from that experience and I felt like my supervising attorneys had an extremely strong case.

One client who I developed a particularly strong bond with was a mother who had been married to an extremely abusive man for a long time. My supervising attorney had been representing her for over three years. While I was at Bay Legal, we worked on her divorce – pouring over taxes, bills, loans, etc. I was impressed and motivated by her strength in the face of such hardship and at her relationship with her children. I have no doubt, with the help of Bay Legal, she is going to move on in life and be happy again.

One thing that really amazed me this summer was the strength and effectiveness of the attorneys I worked for. It was refreshing and reassuring to see legal aid attorneys working in my chosen field and doing such a great job helping the community. Not only did I gain invaluable experience and knowledge this summer, but I gained a few role models. I cannot thank Equal Justice America enough for your involvement in making this happen.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Studley
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