

October 6, 2009

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23122

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank you for the Equal Justice America fellowship that allowed me to work at the Brooklyn Family Defense Project (BFDP) in Brooklyn, New York this past summer. There I assisted attorneys in representing parents in New York's Article 10 proceedings in order to keep families intact and children out of foster care.

My experience this summer at BFDP was truly amazing. I knew before I started my internship BFDP that I felt strongly about representing parents and families in neglect cases, but I did not know how emotionally connected I would feel to each family. First, before working with any families, we had an extensive training on the New York Family Court Act, New York Social Services Law, other relevant statutes, and general client advocacy skills. It was very helpful throughout the summer to be able to refer back to training materials. In addition to the training at the beginning we had an office meeting where all of the attorneys, social workers, and parents advocates told us interns about how strongly they feel about the importance of the work being done at BFDP, and how much they enjoy working in the office with so many committed people. It was uplifting to hear how happy everyone who works there is.

Because of the nature of a family court case, I was not able to see one case from beginning to end. Neglect proceedings can go on for years. Luckily I was assigned to attorneys who gave me varied work. At different points in the summer I was working on research and writing for memos, writing motions to dismiss and orders to show cause, conducting outreach to clients and services providers to get updates, interviewing clients on the phone and in person to gather information for motions. I spent a lot of time with one client in particular, gathering information for her family offense petition, which was a request to the court for an order of protection against her first husband, and the father of one of her children. Gathering the information was a learning experience, because there were many questions I did not even know to ask at first. My supervising attorney gave me great feedback on my drafts and helped guide me in getting all the pertinent information by the end. Ultimately her family offense petition was granted, which means that she now has additional protections from her abusive ex-husband. She is still involved in a neglect proceeding, but it was really amazing to see her being proactive about protecting herself and her family from someone who was jeopardizing their safety, even though it was someone that she once thought she loved. She will still likely spend about another year fighting in court to keep her children with her, but having had one victory was able to lift her spirits to keep fighting.

Thank you again for the fellowship that allowed me to spend the summer at BFDP. It was my summer internship that made me certain about the direction I want my career to go in upon graduating from law school.

Sincerely,

Abby Biberman
J.D. Candidate, 2010
Temple University Beasley School of Law