

August 31, 2015

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

Mr. Ruben:

I am forever grateful for the assistance that the Equal Justice America Fellowship provided me during my time in the Rio Grande Valley; with ProBAR Children's Project. My experience at ProBAR Children's Project solidified my passion for working with the most underserved and vulnerable of populations. Every day I worked there I was surrounded by amazing attorneys and paralegals who were dedicated to their work, as well as passionate advocates for immigration policy and reform. The staff's optimism was infectious. They truly believe in what they do and live to serve the children.

Working with children again put a smile on my face, but, at times, their stories were hard to swallow. I was very fortunate to be a small part of these children's lives and in charge of their future here in the United States, while I assisted them in obtaining legal relief. U.S. Immigration Law can be very challenging, but ProBAR and its staff are quite adept at relaying information and making it palatable even for my clients, all of whom were children. It was amazing to observe the minors taking an active, integral role in their legal representation by asking questions about the legal process.

Two of the cases that I spent the most time on were those of JRQ, a fourteen year old boy from Honduras, and IAL, a seventeen year old girl from Mexico: Upon beginning at ProBAR in June, I was immediately met with a case that was rife with urgency. JRQ was at risk of being sent back to his home country. JRQ had a fear of returning home. JRQ was a smart, articulate fourteen-year-old boy from Honduras who recently identified as gay. When he disclosed this information to his mother, telephonically from his shelter in the United States, she threatened to "fix" him by sending him to live with a brother she knew was abusive and who had threatened to kill him in the past. The shelter in which he was staying reached out to a child advocate — and to ProBAR— to handle this emergency matter, as JRQ was scheduled for a departure flight the next day.

As his counsel, we sought a declaratory judgment from Texas state court to show abuse, abandonment and neglect on the part of his mother, and it was granted. We sought an emergency stay from the Board of Immigration Appeals, and submitted an appellate brief, after the Immigration Judge refused to reopen his case on account of "changed circumstances". I visited JRQ a couple of times at his shelter to keep him abreast of his case. He was always very engaged and had poignant questions to ask. Seeing him struggle with his identity while his immigration status was in limbo was very difficult for me. At such a young age, JRQ was facing a situation that was essentially tantamount to life or death. To this day, JRQ is in limbo as we wait to hear

from the Board of Immigration Appeals on his appeal. If it is denied, JRQ will be returned to his home country where he faces great danger.

IAL fled Mexico after being threatened by a prominent figure of a Mexican drug cartel in the border town of Reynosa, Mexico. The morning after IAL was assaulted by the cartel, she fled to the U.S., was stopped by Border Patrol and placed in a children's shelter. Her shelter referred her to ProBAR and I was able to meet IAL for several interviews. These interviews enabled me to prepare her declaration and asylum application for submission to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. It also gave me a glimpse into the way that cartel violence continues to hold a grip over so many people living on the border. IAL was able to flee, but there are many, including classmates of hers, who are not so fortunate.

Through the humanitarian efforts of ProBAR, I was able to gain perspective on the importance of non-profit work. It was a privilege to work with both of these clients, but I was able to also work with several more. The trust that each child placed in me to solve their problems was immediate and the burden was strong, however, I felt prepared by my supervising attorney to take on these cases. Being a part of ProBAR gave me the ability to witness the inner workings of Texas state court, immigration court, the Office of Refugee and Resettlement, Customs and Border Patrol as well as other local non-profit organizations. It reaffirmed my passion to continue as a public servant, which began in my previous career as a first grade teacher, and continue to serve the needs of the voiceless and underprivileged.

Sincerely,

Aissa I. Olivarez  
University of Wisconsin Law School  
May 2016

August 26, 2015

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I had the pleasure of supervising Aissa Olivarez during her time at the ProBAR Children's Project this summer. Aissa worked as a legal intern in our office from June 8, 2015 to August 14, 2015. Ms. Olivarez's passion for justice and thirst for legal knowledge was evident from the moment I met her.

Ms. Olivarez came to ProBAR with prior experience in representing detained and non-detained immigrants. To our benefit, Ms. Olivarez had experience in asylum law and relief for victims of violent crimes. We were able to utilize her knowledge in representing our clients, especially applicants for asylum and U nonimmigrant status. Ms. Olivarez assisted me in several cases including cases involving asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status ("SIJS"), and U nonimmigrant status. She also assisted our office in an appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals ("BIA"). Ms. Olivarez effortlessly helped me manage my, at times, heavy caseload including multiple emergency motions to reopen and motions to stay removal. Ms. Olivarez was consistently reliable as she worked efficiently to address each emergency promptly and appropriately.

Among the many things that impressed me about Ms. Olivarez was her handling of her first case as an intern with ProBAR. Almost immediately after starting with us she took on a child client's asylum case. Right away Ms. Olivarez took the initiative in preparing all case documents, scheduling appointments to meet with the client, and meeting with the client to develop her claim. As Ms. Olivarez worked to develop the client's claim, I noticed that she was asking the appropriate follow up questions without prompt on my part. I quickly learned Ms. Olivarez had a firm grasp of asylum law and was more than capable of preparing the case for filing with little instruction. Ms. Olivarez easily developed a professional relationship with the client based on mutual trust and respect. In addition to skillfully representing applicants for asylum, Ms. Olivarez assisted in multiple SIJS cases and prepared her first appellate brief that was later filed with the BIA. Ms. Olivarez was always eager to learn and quickly developed an understanding for areas of the law she had no prior experience in. Among many of Ms. Olivarez's accomplishments this summer, Ms. Olivarez assisted our office in preventing the removal of a child and the subsequent reopening of his removal proceedings. The child was ordered removed in absentia without receiving notice of his first master calendar hearing. Thanks to Ms. Olivarez, the child is now able to continue fighting his SIJS case.

Ms. Olivarez has proven herself to be a professional, intelligent, competent, and zealous advocate for our client population. It was truly a pleasure to work alongside Ms. Olivarez and witness both her connection to the clients and her sharp legal mind at work. I hope to see Ms. Olivarez return to work with us on a permanent basis after she graduates from law school. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or for further comment at sarah.vidal@abaprobar.org or 956-365-3775.

Regards,



Sarah Vidal  
Staff attorney