

EJA SUMMER FELLOWSHIP REFLECTION MEMORANDUM

My summer at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia was an extraordinary experience. As an intern in the Family Law unit I was exposed to child custody, child support and domestic violence cases. My primary duties consisted of researching and drafting motions on questions of family law and procedure. I also assisted in the preparation of direct and cross-examination of clients and witnesses. In addition, I conducted follow-up client interviews and provided recommendations as to whether or not our unit should take on the cases.

I am extremely proud of the work I did this summer. I had the opportunity to make a tangible difference in my clients' lives. The area of family law can be very stressful and to know that my work aided in the alleviation of at least some of that stress makes me very proud. To know that my diligence on a particular case effected whether a parent could obtain custody of her child was a far greater motivator than a grade. The real world consequences of my final work product also helped me to realize that the degree I hold is never as important as the people I help. One interesting memo I worked on dealt with the joinder of TANF-recipient parents in child support cases. Under the law if the custodial parent receives TANF, the Attorney General is responsible for bringing a suit against the parent who has not satisfied his or her child support order. For our clients this was a problem because they were not consulted during the process therefore leaving their interests and their children's interests unprotected. Another issue pertaining to TANF-recipients was the fact that back child support was not paid to them but paid to the government. This not only takes money away from the parent but it also creates friction between the custodial and non-custodial parent because while the non-custodial parent is

indeed paying child support the custodial parent is not receiving it. All in all, my experience at Legal Aid showed me the invaluable advantage of having an attorney on your side even in the “simplest” matters.

My experience has also solidified my determination to work in the public interest sector. Such a decision is not an easy one especially considering the pressure to work for a big firm and the difference in pay. However, I truly believe working for an organization such as Legal Aid will be more rewarding to me than working for a corporate firm. Difficult clients and a lack of resources are common pitfalls in public interest work however if more individuals gained an interest, whether financial or otherwise, in this field lack of resources would no longer be an issue. It is also important to note that difficult clients are not unique to public interest work. The attorneys I met during the summer were inspirational not only on a professional level but also on a personal level. They possessed a compassion that I strive to maintain throughout my legal career and my life. Without these organizations large sectors of our communities would be at a great disadvantage and as Martin Luther King Jr. is so commonly quoted “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Angel Harris

Georgetown University Law Center

Juris Doctor expected May 2009