

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Re: Summer 2016 Fellowship Experience

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My name is Lotaya Wright and I am a 3L at Boston University School of Law. This past summer I had the privilege of working in the Child Protection Unit at New Haven Legal Assistance Association (“NHLAA”).

During my time at NHLAA I was under the supervision of a court appointed attorney who was responsible for advocating on behalf of children who were found in Juvenile Court to be abused, uncared for, or neglected by a parent or caregiver. This role is different from that of the Department of Children and Families (“DCF”) who is responsible for advocating for what is in “the best interest of the child.”

Many of the children represented by NHLAA were often exposed to severe trauma ranging from a variety of factors including most commonly, domestic violence in the home and substance abuse by parent(s). In addition, a majority of these children were committed to the care of DCF and placed in foster care with either a relative or a stranger. Nonetheless, with the exception of those committed, a handful were placed under protective supervision and remained in the home.

So, I was tasked with contacting the respective homes for the children whom we represented and setting up appointments for home visits. During these home visits my job was to ensure that the children were content, comfortable, safe, and had access to all the resources at their disposal. In addition, I got the opportunity to attend Administrative Case Reviews (“ACR”) to assess the progress of individual clients over a six month period to ensure that everything was up to par.

Our clients ranged from seven days old to eighteen years of age and in addition to the trauma they faced, some battled with depression and low self esteem. I was physically and emotionally drawn to these children, but not because I pitied them. I understood their stories and their pains and most importantly I understood that every child needs an adult who believes in them and encourages them to be a better version of themselves every day.

Hence, for me, having the opportunity to interact with most of the children on home visits meant that I was able to give them a platform to be heard and a feeling of self worth. This was important to me because in return I could coherently relay their needs to my supervisor who is tasked with advocating for exactly what they wanted. Furthermore, it gave them presence, it made them aware – despite how they felt – that I cared and that they mattered to the team at NHLAA advocating on their behalves.

I was also assigned a few legal research assignments, one of which piqued my interest because it was very different from all the cases I have been exposed to throughout the summer. This particular case originated in Probate Court and made its way to the Juvenile Court after years of

delay and confusion. Moreover, in this case the client was a parent as opposed to being a child. Hence, I was tasked with researching and educating my supervisor about the laws that applied, the standard of proof required, the best and worst case scenarios for the client, and both arguments for and against the client.

With this assignment I worked diligently to ensure that my supervisor was equipped with sound legal arguments to have an order of immediate temporary custody against our client vacated and the child returned in her care. I took this task seriously because I wholeheartedly believe that a parent who is capable of maintaining a reasonable degree of responsibility for a child should not be deprived of doing so.

Nevertheless, my internship lasted for ten weeks and though I was not able to work on a case from start to finish I was exposed to a considerable degree of knowledge about the intricacies of child protection and the role the legal system plays in the family unit. I also got the opportunity to strengthen my communication skills while interacting with clients and enhance my legal research and writing skills.

Overall, my experience at NHLAA was very telling and would not have been possible without the generosity of your organization. Thank you for facilitating my opportunity to work with one of the most vulnerable groups in society today. I am truly grateful to be a recipient of your Summer 2016 Fellowship.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Lotaya Wright

Lotaya Wright

Boston University School of Law

Class of 2017

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August 26, 2016

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

Lotaya Wright completed a ten week fellowship at New Haven Legal Assistance Association this summer. She worked in our Juvenile Matters Unit ("JMU") under my supervision. JMU attorneys represent children and parents in child abuse and neglect proceedings. We also have a masters level social worker on staff who ensures that we provide holistic, multi-disciplinary representation to our clients, advocating for their legal, therapeutic, educational, and administrative needs.

As part of her fellowship, Lotaya observed proceedings in court, undertook extensive legal research and briefing on individual cases, attended case meetings and reviews on behalf of clients at the Department of Children and Families ("DCF"), and did client visits in homes and foster homes. Lotaya's research was utilized by our staff to prepare several cases for trial. She had significant client contact to coordinate and conduct numerous home visits. The purpose was to interview our clients and their support resources, as well as to the assess clients' needs and positions. The information obtained from said assessments was utilized to develop advocacy positions moving forward. Additionally, Lotaya attended several administrative meetings on behalf of clients, in order to advocate for clients' service needs, ascertain the positions of other parties, and obtain information on case management.

Lotaya was conscientious and thorough in her projects and research. I found her to be reliable and invested in our work. We were grateful to have her assistance in our unit this summer and wish her well as she finishes her legal education. If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at iswanson@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Ingrid Swanson

Ingrid Swanson
Staff Attorney
New Haven Legal Assistance Assoc.