

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

For my fellowship, I worked for the Law Project of Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH). This organization offers direct legal services to residents of the Chicago area who experience housing instability. The majority of its clients are youth.

I participated in two areas of the Law Project. The first was helping clients qualify for medical debt relief. A significant number of the homeless have medical bills they are unable to pay. State law requires nonprofit hospitals to have a charity care program that will forgive some or all of the debt of qualifying patients. I participated in visits to shelters, helping residents fill out forms and assemble the necessary documents. Through my efforts, I was able to get more than \$1,500 of debt forgiven.

The second area was education rights. Some of this was in the form of public outreach. This summer CCH partnered with Chase Bank to conduct an outreach program to let parents and students in Chicago's Austin neighborhood know about the educational rights of homeless children. I organized several outings to hand out flyers at transit stations. I also researched and updated three sections of CCH's new homeless education manual.

The remainder of my activity in the education rights area was in the form of direct services, such as helping clients request the school records of their children. After a school closing in the Chicago area, I assembled statistics on neighboring schools to help CCH advise clients of their options. Finally, I did extensive research for pending litigation on behalf of a disabled homeless student that was denied enrollment at a public school.

The most important concept that this internship demonstrated to me is that legal rights without the ability to enforce them are meaningless. Both federal and Illinois law are quite progressive in guaranteeing homeless people access education and medical services. Yet the reality is that both are frequently denied to homeless people. A real value of legal aid organizations such as CCH, in addition to providing direct aid to individuals, is also in serving as a watchdog. By letting homeless people know about their rights, and by litigating on their behalf, CCH lets government agencies and other service providers know that failing to provide legally required services will not be tolerated.

This was an extremely valuable experience for my legal career, and I would like to thank Equal Justice America for helping to make it possible.

Sincerely,

Ben Kidder
Chicago-Kent College of Law, 2012