

Dear Dan Ruben and Equal Justice America,

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank EJA for the funding I received this summer. This summer I worked at the New York Legal Assistance Group, in their Special Education Unit. During the summer I worked with parents and students in their struggle to ensure that they are in the proper educational settings. Special Education starts with having a student classified as requiring special education. Once a student has been classified the board of education, along with the parents create, an Individual Education Plan for the student. During the summer I represented parents in Impartial Hearings arguing that students IEP's were not adequate and therefore failed to provide the student with a "free and appropriate public education."

While all the clients I assisted have compelling stories that deserve to be told and highlighted, I will discuss the one that affected me the most. The first client that I met this summer was a young man who was classified as having an emotional disturbance. This young man had been bullied in school, had attempted suicide, had been institutionalized and had finished his school year being home schooled. His mother came to NYLAG seeking to find a school that would be able to provide for her son's emotional needs while also challenging him educationally. Her son was reading and doing math above grade level and was described as "gifted." The board of education wanted to place her son back in a public school and had limited the amount of therapy that he would be receiving. Meeting with this young man and his mother you saw the stress that she was under and the frustration that her and her son had since he was extremely intelligent was not being challenged and was in fact showing regression.

To assist this family we first had to show that his emotional needs were affecting his ability to learn and therefore needed to be addressed as part of his individual education plan. After attempting to work with the Board of Education the mother felt that they had not found an appropriate setting for her son and we assisted her in placing his in a state-approved private school that had the therapeutic educational setting and the level of instruction that is appropriate for this student. Helping this family was rewarding because I was able to see this student through the process of creating his IEP through his

placement and seeing the relief and excitement that comes with having a student in the proper setting.

Having this summer funding made it possible for me to spend more time assisting students like the one described above. Had I not received this funding I would have needed to work only part-time and would not have been able to devote my summer to this meaningful legal field that requires a lot of time and attention to detail that I would have not been able to devote to my summer work if I couldn't work full time. Again, thank you to Equal Justice America for assisting me so that I could better assist the students and parents who needed assistance through the maze that is Special Education law.

Sincerely,

Michelle M. Herzog

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