

August 31, 2014

Dear Dan Ruben,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be an Equal Justice America fellow. This summer I interned at AHRC New York City, where I helped families file their 17-A guardianship petitions for their intellectually disabled children. From the first to the very last day, I had the privilege of interacting with families; and during each intake, I listened attentively as they recounted their family history and the daily struggles they face raising their child.

The father of a twenty-nine year old developmentally disabled son came into the office for an intake. Throughout the intake, the father angrily told us that the biological mother abandoned and disowned their child when he was two years old. At the age of five, his son saw his mother for the first and last time, when she came to the United States to visit her friend. She stopped by their home for five minutes. During her visit, his son asked the mother “Mom, can I go with you?” His mother responded, “I don’t know you...it’s best if you stay here, with your father...”

At a workshop, a twenty-three year old intellectually disabled female came up and told me that she does not like her legal guardian because “...she tells me that I am ‘slow.’ My dream has always been to go to college and she doesn’t let me go to college because she says that I’m slow and can’t do it. It’s not fair; is there anything I can do to change my legal guardian?” As I sat there listening to their personal stories, it became very apparent that there is a lack of representation and a need for advocacy within this community.

Throughout the summer, I was able to assist families, like the ones above, with filing guardianship petitions, and translating during hearings and intake meetings. The most rewarding and worthwhile moment this summer was when the mother of one of our clients came up to me

after a successful hearing, gave me a hug and said “Gracias por todo, nunca te olvidare.”
(Translation: “Thank you for everything, I will never forget you.”) Thanks to the Equal Justice
America fellowship, I was given the opportunity this summer to experience moments like these,
which ignited my passion to continue my commitment to public interest work.

Sincerely,
Diane Lopez
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