

GRECIA ELISA CEJA

September 18, 2015

Dan Ruben

Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben

Thank you for the opportunity to spend my summer doing what I was born to do, help children. This summer I had the pleasure of interning at Alliance for Children's Rights (The Alliance), a nonprofit organization, which provides free legal services and advocacy to impoverished, abused and neglected children and youth in Los Angeles County. I specifically chose to be in Los Angeles this summer as it the country with the largest population of foster youth in the United States. The Alliance is an organization that takes a holistic approach to helping children. Not only do they offer free legal services to their clients but they also provide training and education for those who work with or care for these neglected and impoverished children. The Alliance has a specific goal to cause system-wide reform

During my time at the Alliance I worked within the Guardianship Program. The Alliance helps eligible caregivers become legal guardians of the children in their care by representing them in probate court. These matters involve children whose parents cannot care for them. These children have not yet entered the foster care system and are living with a relative or non-relative caregiver. One common issue I ran into was a clients struggle to understand the law and the legal process. Many of these prospective guardians would have notarized letters from a parent that they believe give them legal guardianship. Unfortunately, I was often faced with the difficult task of gently explaining that Legal guardianship can only be established by a court, not by a notarized letter from a parent. Many of these cases were complicated, delicate but very fulfilling to work. One case in particular stands out to me.

I had the pleasure of helping a young woman, who sought legal guardianship of her two younger sisters, start the guardianship process. This young woman was an amazing, caring and driven person. Upon meeting her I was inspired and taken back at how selfless she is. This woman was married with two kids of her own and concurrently caring for her two elementary school aged sisters with disabilities and their terminally ill mother. As proposed guardian explained her situation in the initial client meeting, I could sense her frustration and doubt in the legal system, but there she was in front of me fighting for her sisters and trying to

provide. It was almost as if she expected us to give her useless information or a pamphlet to read and send her on her way. When my supervisor asked proposed guardian to sign the retainer agreement and explained that the Alliance would represent her at no cost her attitude completely changed from skeptical to relieved. No, her problems were not fixed then and there but it was so powerful to see the effect in extending that legal assistance.

This particular proposed guardian's case grew very complicated as the girls' father had been murdered 10 years ago and with a mother that was not able to make decisions and a deceased father neither parent could offer their consent to the guardianship. Parental consent is something that a proposed guardian legally needs to acquire before she would be permitted to move forward. Currently this proposed guardian's case has been placed with a pro bono that will assist her in first getting a conservatorship of her terminally ill mother which will help her in providing consent on her mother's behalf. This proposed guardian wanted nothing but to care and provide for her younger sisters and although we did not get very far in the guardianship process it was awesome to experience this clients gratitude and feel like I was able to help relieve her of a great burden by offering legal help.

At this internship, I took on an immense amount of work. The cases were complicated and the details of many of the heart wrenching stories were difficult to handle at times. I found myself struggling between being desensitized by hearing the details of my clients circumstances and getting caught up in my feelings of sympathy. This is not an easy field to work in but it's necessary. I learned that it is alright to feel sympathy because for me that drives passion to help. I hope that as I continue to work in this field I will never grow desensitized and that no story of an abused or neglected child, or the details of a client's difficult circumstances will fail to stir up some kind of emotion. This field needs passionate people and clients can sense when they are seen as just another case verses when they are treated like a person who being helped through their individual legal issue. I want to be the type of lawyer that helps people not one that "handles cases." I've always known this but there was something special about speaking with the proposed guardian mentioned above that really drove that point home for me. Thank you again for the opportunity to help people and the opportunity to have my passion for this client demographic grow.

Sincerely,
Grecia Ceja
UC Hastings

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September 9, 2015

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America – Fellowship Summer 2015

Re: Evaluation of Fellowship for Grecia Ceja

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Juan Guzman, and I work for the Guardianship Program at the Alliance for Children’s Rights, a non-profit legal services organization dedicated to advocating for at risk youth and children in the foster care system in Los Angeles County. I appreciate the opportunity to evaluate Grecia Ceja’s performance as a 2015 summer intern in our Guardianship Program. Ms. Ceja served as a Guardianship Program intern from May 25, 2015 through July 30, 2015. After assessing Ms. Ceja’s overall performance, it is clear that she possess impressive reasoning skills, a social/cultural understanding of our clientele and a desire to make an impact in her community.

Ms. Ceja was responsible for conducting in person guardianship interviews, writing case summaries detailing the pertinent facts of each case and presenting cases for assessment to the Alliance for Children’s Rights’ Managing Attorney, Lara Holtzman. Ms. Ceja played a vital role in contributing to the successful operation of our Guardianship Program this summer as she completed the majority of the in person interviews and followed up with clients as needed. Despite sensitive case issues dealing with child abuse and neglect, and a demanding work environment, Ms. Ceja was thorough with every assignment. Ms. Ceja possessed several traits that carried over into her daily work/office curriculum including good legal knowledge of guardianship law, good oral communication, interviewing and client counseling skills. She maintained client relations, good judgment and paid close attention to detail.

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Specifically, Ms. Ceja showed particular strengths in her dedication and commitment to child advocacy. This commitment proved to be a great asset to our Guardianship Program this summer. At the Alliance, we conduct in depth guardianship interviews which require prospective guardians to disclose sensitive information, including any and all criminal background history. Ms. Ceja's social skills helped form trust with the client and helped create a safe space for conducting interviews. Whenever necessary, Ms. Ceja followed up with questions to ensure she knew how to complete the task at hand. Ms. Ceja was very structured, which helped promote productivity. Ms. Ceja also demonstrated a natural tendency to take initiative, which was very helpful.

While Ms. Ceja's demonstrated various strengths and impressive qualities, her performance can be enhanced by continuing to master her writing skills and being mindful of time management. Despite any shortcomings, Ms. Ceja was professional, personable, a well-respected member of our office and indispensable to our Guardianship Program this summer. I am confident that Ms. Grecia will excel in a career in the public interest sector.

Please contact me if you need further information in support of Ms. Ceja's evaluation. I can be reached at j.guzman@kids-alliance.org or by phone at (213) 368-6010 ext. 111.

Sincerely,

Juan Guzman
Guardianship Program
Alliance for Children's Rights

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