

September 20, 2011

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America – Executive Director
13540 East Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I chose to work at the Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Practice (“JRP”) because of my interest in Family Law and litigation. JRP represents children in abuse and neglect cases and children in juvenile delinquency cases. This summer I predominantly worked on child protective cases.

The attorney for the child in a child protective case takes a direct advocacy position and tries to advocate for whatever the child wants. JRP gives children an opportunity for children to have a voice when everyone around them is making difficult life decisions on their behalf. Giving kids the opportunity to have a legal team advocate for what they want gives them a feeling that there is someone out there rooting for them and fighting for what they want. JRP is about bringing families together and taking the perspective that families come in all different shapes and sizes and are certainly not one size fits all. This summer I became passionate about this type of work and gained a better understanding as to why it is so important for children to have an attorney.

JRP also provided me with insight into the juvenile justice system. While I spent most of my time working on child protective cases, I did have the opportunity engaged in some delinquency work. It was interesting to see how the clients in child protective cases are viewed as so sympathetic and the same clients in delinquency cases are treated and looked at in such a negative way. While at JRP I had the opportunity to do client intake and observe arraignments and also visit a juvenile detention facility. These experiences taught me more about the juvenile justice system and gave me further insight into this field of law.

At Legal Aid, I gained many practical legal skills. First, I had the opportunity to argue on the record in Manhattan family court. This valuable opportunity gave me the ability to practice litigation in a real courtroom, rather than the simulated courtrooms in law school. Additionally, I had the opportunity to interact with clients through client interviews and home visits. Finally, I had the opportunity to engage in legal research and writing. Overall, Legal Aid gave me the opportunity to gain practical legal skills and experience in a new field of law in addition to everything I learned about the foster care system and the juvenile justice system.

An internship at JRP would be valuable to anyone seeking to do public interest work because in addition to insight into this field of law, it provides a broad skill-set and experience in the legal field, specifically litigation. Additionally, JRP provides insight into how a large legal services organization operates. Finally, JRP provides an excellent office environment and plenty of supervision throughout the entire summer. I never found myself bored the entire time I was there. Overall I had an excellent experience at JRP and look forward to working there part time throughout the school year. Based on this great experience, I hope to work at JRP after graduation.

I would like to thank Equal Justice America for this wonderful opportunity. I was able to work in an area of law that I am passionate and pay my rent! The work EJA does is invaluable, and I believe the program can lead many law students into a career of public service.

Very truly yours,
Hayley M. Koteen