

August 26, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I chose to attend law school to pursue my passion for public interest work. My experience at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) allowed me to expand my interest in the field and further develop my legal experience. Over the summer, LAFLA provided me the opportunity to design and execute my own community lawyering project, based on community outreach and direct services strategies. In addition to my community lawyering project, I was also involved in assisting many trafficking victims adjust their status.

For my community lawyering project, I honed in on the needs of the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community in Long Beach. I met with community leaders and organization representatives where I presented my project. These informal meetings allowed me to learn about the organizations, build rapport, and aided in identifying specific community needs.

After many informal meetings, I organized a presentation at the local senior center. Although the presentation was targeted towards Cambodian senior citizens, all members of the community were welcome to attend. My supervising attorney spoke about the services LAFLA provides and we concluded with a question & answer segment.

Based off of the data we received, we decided to start a clinic at the senior center due to the variety of legal issues the senior citizens faced. One specific issue was the lack of mental health services at the senior center. This was a priority since two members had recently committed suicide. In order to address the issue, I organized a second presentation through the Long Beach Asian Pacific Islander Family Mental Health Center. The presentation aimed to extend the availability of mental health services to all members of the senior center.

In addition to my community lawyering project, I assisted more than 15 trafficking victims adjust their status. My clients were targeted from rural areas in Asia, where they were given false promises of lucrative jobs in the United States. Upon their arrival, their passports were confiscated to prevent departure before paying off their debt. As a result, they were compelled to work in farms in order to pay off thousands of dollars of recruitment and travel fees owed to the traffickers. My clients managed to escape and receive a T-1 visa. I was able to help them apply for an adjustment of status so they could receive a green card.

My experience has exposed me to the inequality that many people face in our society, and has reaffirmed my commitment to using law as a means to promote social justice. I am grateful for receiving a fellowship from Equal Justice America and for being able to spend my summer at LAFLA.

Best,

Mai Ly
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
Expected Graduation Date: May 2014