

August 27, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Without any doubt, this Fellowship has been one of the best work experiences I have ever had. As an intern at Greater Boston Legal Services, I worked on one specific project: the Latinas Know Your Rights project. The projects' clients are all survivors of domestic violence with any multitude of legal concerns, ranging from divorce to public benefits. Primarily, I dealt with clients' immigration issues, although I did assist in some public benefits and restraining order matters.

As survivors of domestic violence, the clients are normally eligible for U-1 Nonimmigrant Status or relief under the Violence Against Women Act. These immigration options provide a pathway to permanent residence given the client can meet certain, strict requirements. In preparing an application, it was my job to obtain the client's story and then convey it in a manner that was both compelling and legally satisfactory.

Throughout my internship, it was challenging to portray clients' stories without focusing too much on the emotional aspects. Every client's story was fraught with violence and trauma, but also with perseverance and victory. There was the client who was severely abused in her home country and in the United States. Yet she still found the strength to support her great-niece, who suffered from third-degree burns to her face, and be the only mother the child knows. Then there was another client whose family has been painfully indifferent to her throughout her whole life, suffered terrible abuse at the hands of her ex-boyfriend, and yet still felt only joy when she looked at her son. Another of my clients told me the story of her abuse, all while smiling so that her son, who would wave to her through the glass door, would not see his mother cry. All of my other clients had equally tragic stories but every single one was a survivor in the truest sense of the word. They continue to face life, fighting with all of their strength to provide a better life for their children and themselves. Looking back on their past was extraordinarily painful for them, but they did it in the hope that their story would convince an immigration official to grant their application.

Through my work, my clients now have the possibility of obtaining legal status in the United States. Legal status would change their lives in many ways. The threat of deportation would no longer hang over their heads. They would have access to educational and employment opportunities that are closed to them right now. They would be able to provide a better life for themselves and their children. Most importantly, they would have the security that they will not be separated from their children. That is more important than any letter can convey. A person

would have to be in my clients' position to truly understand how important remaining with their children is. Their children are the source of all of their joy.

Every single client touched my heart in some way, and humbled me with their strength. My clients agonize every day over, among other things, how to make sure that their children are not affected by the absence of their fathers in their lives. That is a challenge I hope to never face, and if I do have to face it, I can only hope that I will do so with half the integrity that they do. Working at the Latinas Know Your Rights project has been an incredible experience, and as a Latina myself, I am beyond grateful that I have been able to assist members of my community in such a meaningful way.

Thank you very much for making this opportunity possible!

Sincerely,

Pamela Fuentes

Temple