

Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Building II, Suite 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 15, 2008

Dear Dan Ruben,

This summer I worked as an intern at The Hawkins Center in Richmond, California. The Hawkins Center was established over twenty years ago to provide legal services for people with disabilities. It was one of the first agencies in the Bay Area to represent disabled people during the Social Security appeal process. Today, Social Security representation continues to be The Hawkins Center's dominant practice area. My summer internship advanced my knowledge of Social Security law, disability law, and public benefits. It also affirmed my commitment to working with disabled clients on issues related to health care access and financial stability.

During my internship, I was involved in every aspect of the work-up for Social Security cases. I observed five hearings before an Administrative Law Judge and will represent a client at hearing on August 26, 2008. I also observed many client meetings, including intake and contract meetings, and hearing preparation. I learned how to request and follow-up on medical records, assess the strength of medical evidence, evaluate cases that may be appropriate for On the Record Requests, build relationships with care providers, organize medical records and prepare for the brief, and finally, write Social Security briefs. I wrote two briefs, reviewed and prepared medical records for at least five cases, drafted two On the Record Requests and three Treating Provider Reports. I became familiar with Social Security law and the process for building an appeal, including effective strategies to ensure a favorable outcome for the client. I completed a research project based on Ninth Circuit rulings on the credit as true doctrine in Social Security cases. I also screened and counseled monolingual Spanish speaking clients over the phone.

The Hawkins Center reaches clients who are most in need of legal services and for whom a favorable Social Security outcome will have a profound impact on their health and wellbeing. One client in particular left an impression on me. This client was injured in an accident while working at a warehouse. The accident left him with chronic pain and he was unable to work. His case was difficult because there were few objective medical findings to verify his pain, but his pain was so severe that he could not engage in any of the activities that inspired him before his accident, including artwork. He developed a severe depression and anxiety disorder. His Social Security denial devastated him and he felt that no one would believe his pain.

I wrote the brief for this client's case. As I combed through the medical records, I came to know a man whose life was significantly altered by his pain and who was suffering greatly. The attorney working on his case with me was a wonderful support to the client, patient and thorough in her work-up of the case. Yet, it was hearing that most affected my perspective of the Social Security process. During the hearing our client closed his eyes and drew deep within himself to manage his pain. But when the medical experts testified as to his pain and depression, finding

him disabled, he turned a corner. It was so important to him that the medical experts validate his pain. He was empowered by the finding of disability, as if finally someone believed him and he was not alone. Watching our client before, during, and after the hearing exemplified for me the right to be heard and how a process which seems set up to defeat many can also be used to empower.

I approached The Hawkins Center last year because I wanted to gain exposure to the Social Security appeals process. My goals were met and exceeded through the experience I gained this summer. I worked with each of the Social Security attorneys at The Hawkins Center, who were all generous with their time and open to sharing their expertise. My supervisor, Rosemary Dady was attentive, thoughtful and supportive. Her intelligent and holistic approach to her work was inspirational. The opportunity to observe attorneys in practice and at hearing was incredibly valuable to me. I would recommend The Hawkins Center to any law student who wants to learn about the Social Security appeal process. The attorneys are well respected by the Administrative Law Judges, prepare their cases well, have a wealth of knowledge to share, and are good role models for those who wish to pursue a career in public interest law.

I want to thank Equal Justice America for its support this summer and making my internship at The Hawkins Center possible. My experience this summer has better prepared me for a career in public interest law.

Sincerely,  
Raegan Joern  
UC Hastings 2009