

September 18, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I wanted to take a moment to write you to let you know about my experience over this past summer. As you may remember, I was working with Public Counsel Law Center in their Homelessness Prevention Law Project. The major focus of my work was providing on-site direct legal service for homeless individuals. This involved going with my team out to local Department of Social Services (DPSS; welfare) offices for an afternoon. Once we arrived, we would ask people if they needed help and would then proceed to advocate on their behalf in order to help them get benefits to which they were legally entitled but were being prevented from getting because of administrative barriers.

Throughout the summer, I had a myriad of amazing client interactions worth noting. I will recount two of them for you here. The first was a gentleman named "Jack." When I met Jack he was already in a better position than most of our clients because he was receiving his county benefits. However, he had been having trouble getting his food stamps transferred from another county. Unlike most of our clients, he had kept thorough records and had a folder of documents. Working with him, we discovered that he had done what was needed to get his food stamps transferred over four months before, however the county denied that they had received his documents. With my assistance we were able to work with a county supervisor. After hearing the case, the supervisor determined that Jack was owed for benefits for four and a half months. He received over \$800 in back benefits because of my advocacy that day.

Part of my work during the summer also involved helping homeless youth through an alliance with a local drop-in center. One youth I helped, named "Michael," had been going without food because his food stamps had been terminated without his knowledge. We set up a time to meet and went to the local DPSS office together. Once there, we discovered that he had failed to complete his annual recertification. I appealed to the deputy director of the office to excuse his failure to do so and reinstate his benefits. Alas, my advocacy was not successful. However, I knew that a county rule made food stamps available on the same day for applicants who were homeless. Undaunted, I requested a new application packet and immediately set Michael to working on it. In Los Angeles County, the process for an applicant is a day-long affair. Despite the timing, we decided to stay with Michael until he could get benefits. Throughout several hours that day I worked with Michael, completing the application, going to see an eligibility worker with him, and eventually walking him out (he was one of the last people to leave that day)

with \$200 in food stamps so he could go buy food. The best part of the day, outside of a successful advocacy, was the huge hug I got from Michael when he was leaving.

One of the most important lessons I learned from this summer is that the work we do matters beyond some quantifiable number of money received or people helped. When you help a person who is in one of the worst situations imaginable you realize that you, one single law student, made a huge difference in someone's life. For me, this was the reason I came to law school: to help those who need help, regardless of their ability to compensate me for my work. For me, the happiness and thanks of hundreds of clients, whose lives were a little bit better for my work, was worth so much more than any money they could have given me.

That said, I could not have had this summer experience with the funding I received from EJA. It allowed me to remain housed for the summer without incurring additional student loan debt, and I am extremely grateful for that. The work you do enables people like me to do the work I do, and without it my work would be impossible.

Best,

Stefanie Renaud
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Class of 2015