

Dear Dan Ruben,

My name is Betzy Bras-Gonzalez and I am currently a 2L at UC Hastings, College of the Law. I want to start off by thanking you and all of Equal Justice America for your generosity this past summer. Thanks to your financial assistance, I was able to do meaningful work that helped a lot of low-income families, while working at the Immigration Center for Women and Children (ICWC) in San Francisco. I had the privilege of working with the most vulnerable of communities, immigrants. I primarily worked with people seeking asylum and minors with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases. During my time with ICWC, I was allowed to have plenty of direct client communication by taking declarations and running through direct examinations with the clients for their merits hearings.

My experience with ICWC was both rewarding and humbling. I listened to the heartbreaking stories of people who had to flee their country for their own safety and I heard the fear in their voice from the possibility of having to return. From my very first interaction with a client, I knew that I would have to learn to be okay with hearing about very delicate matters. I now realize that immigration is more than just coming to America seeking “the American dream”. For some it is a matter of life and death. There were many times when I would have a declaration appointment and the client would break into tears as they recalled and retold everything they had experienced. For some clients, telling their story seemed relieving but for others it was very difficult. But in the end they understood that the re-telling of their story was what could possibly allow them to stay in this country.

I also had the opportunity to give the “Know Your Rights” presentation at our local courthouse for people in removal proceedings. This is an especially critical duty because most of the people who were at the courthouse did not speak English. Although there’s an interpreter in the courthouse, the people are unsure of what is going to happen during the proceeding so they are afraid. Being there to alleviate at least a little bit of their anxiety made it worthwhile. The most difficult part about giving the “Know Your Rights” presentation, was seeing the ages of the people in removal proceedings. There were many who were only a couple of years old and who thought it was fun to talk to the judge. Their innocence in the process demonstrated their vulnerability in our justice system.

What I loved most about my fellowship was being able to follow through with my client every step of the way and, of course, hearing about a positive outcome in cases that I worked on. I am excited to continue working with the most vulnerable communities like I did this summer and hope that the work that I did with the Immigration Center for Women and Children made even a small impact for the organization. Again, thank you very much for your support!

Best wishes,

Betzy Bras-Gonzalez
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