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July 28, 2015



Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II Suite 204
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to tell you about the incredible experience I had working at the Alliance for Children's Rights this summer as a legal intern. During the course of the summer, I worked as a legal assistant on fifteen open cases. I assisted in case management for transition-age foster care and former-foster care involved youth in their Next Step Program and their CSEC Program under the supervision of two attorneys: Sasha Stern and Allison Newcombe.

The Next Step Program helps youth on a variety of issues including legal-focused issues such as re-entering foster care, sealing juvenile records, amending birth certificates, legal name changes, and helping advocate for students who want to graduate under AB 167/216. AB 167/216 is a California initiative that allows youth graduate with fewer credits than the standard California graduation requirements if these youth have had difficult lives and might not otherwise graduate (had to have transferred high schools and be behind on credits to graduate). However, the Next Step Project also helps in case management for non-legal issues such as helping youth connect to employment and housing opportunities, parenting youth resources, and referrals to organizations that provide benefits to foster care and former foster care youth.

During the course of the summer I had the privilege of assisting many foster care and former foster care involved youth on a variety of these issues. One youth, I will call her Jessica (not her real name) came for help in getting her birth certificate amended. I was able to help her begin the process of amending her birth certificate to match her name listed on her social security card, which had been a barrier her whole life as many service providers would not accept her into programs/employment because her identity on these documents did not match. Additionally, I helped Jessica check her credit report and we discovered that she had fraudulent charges on her report. We were able to place a fraud alert on this charge and put her in touch with the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs to investigate these charges. This experience highlighted firsthand what my supervisor had told me previously that many youth involved in the foster care system are victims of identity theft as their information is often circulated widely from their foster care system involvement.

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Another youth I had the privilege to work with, Samantha (not her real name), was a youth that was a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation. From her time being exploited, she incurred a record of juvenile charges that were interfering with her ability to find employment as she could not pass a background check. I was able to obtain her RAP sheet and file a petition to seal her juvenile record. Additionally, Samantha had attended several high schools during the course of her time being exploited and never graduated from high school. I was able to track down her school transcripts from all the high schools she attended and calculate that she was only a semester away from a full high school diploma under AB 167/216. I gave Samantha referrals to attend an alternative high school program at a community college where she will be able to finish her high school diploma and begin to take community college courses at the same time.

Additionally, the Alliance gave me the great opportunity to attend juvenile court regularly this summer. I attended the STAR Court on a bi-weekly basis with my supervisor, Allison Newcombe; the STAR court specifically serves Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) based out of the Compton Courthouse. Commissioner Pratt presides and holds STAR Court every Tuesday and the program seeks to treat CSEC youth as victims and not as delinquents. I was able to sit in on this alternative court and witness the collaboration done between Commissioner Pratt, the public defenders representing the youth, the district attorneys, the parole officers, and the youth themselves in finding creative solutions for helping get their life back on track following their sexual exploitation. Seeing court first hand really demonstrated to me how the legal issues I had been learning about played out in practice rather than just in theory and was incredibly valuable.

My summer at the Alliance has been one of the most pivotal working experiences of my adult life. It was an incredible privilege to get the opportunity to learn about the juvenile justice system with such compassionate attorneys as supervisors who are both committed to helping their clients and committed to helping their summer interns learn the law in practice. I could not have asked for a better experience to affirm my commitment to a career in public interest law and I would definitely recommend working at the Alliance to anyone from the amazing work they do and I sincerely hope this is not my last contact with their work.

Sincerely,

Morgan Hecht

UCLA Law J.D. Candidate Class of 2017

NextStep Program Summer Legal Volunteer

The Alliance for Children's Rights