

October 19, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer, with Equal Justice for America's help, I had the opportunity to work full-time for Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS). CVLS is a non-profit organization that provides quality legal services to low-income people, some of society's most vulnerable people. I initially interviewed for a position in the Access to Justice program helping people with housing issues such as mortgage foreclosures, but due to the high volume of cases CVLS takes on and my ability to appear in court without supervision because of my Illinois Supreme Court 711 License, I was appointed to general intern. Any staff attorney that needed help, I was there. It was because of this that made my experience at CVLS better than I could have imagined. I got assigned Guardian Ad Litem Adult cases where I conducted the investigations and reported to the court my findings/recommendations, handled a few adoption cases, reviewed divorce settlement agreements, and conducted dozens of client interviews. Each client had an impact on my life, both personally and professionally. Being able to help those that need help the most was absolutely inspiring. The one case that really sticks out the most to me is Ms. Johnson's.¹

Ms. Johnson came to CVLS a few months before I started my summer internship. At that time, she was terminated from the Housing Choice Voucher program by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) for failing to respond to notices in the mail, including the information regarding her re-certification hearing. In June, she was evicted from her apartment and that's when I was assigned to her case. After speaking with Ms. Johnson multiple times over the phone and reviewing the case, it was clear that her failures were not her fault. The record clearly showed CHA had been unable to reach Ms. Johnson by mail for nearly a year and that Ms. Johnson had explained the situation to them multiple times. This miscommunication, one that could have easily been resolved in the months prior, led to this woman being homeless. I drafted a settlement proposal asking to reinstate Ms. Johnson back into the Housing Choice Voucher program. After a couple months of extensions granted to CHA, Ms. Johnson was finally reinstated to the program and had a roof over her head once again. She was incredibly grateful for the work CVLS and I put into her case. As for me, to see my work have that kind of immediate and direct impact has only deepened my passion for public interest work.

I am very thankful for Equal Justice America for allowing me to be a part of their fellowship program. With their support, I was able to make an impact on my community.

Charles De La Cruz

¹ I have changed the name of the client to protect her privacy.