

August 27,2010

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I recently finished a wonderful summer internship with Manhattan Legal Services. I interned with the Employment Unit and the Single Stop Project, where I worked with low-income clients from throughout Manhattan.

Last summer I worked for a federal district court where I rarely saw any of the litigants, so one of my main goals for this summer was to gain experience in client interviewing and interaction. I wanted to feel that I knew and understood my clients and their needs on a personal level. This goal was more than met through my work with the Employment Unit, which gave me the opportunity to follow up on intakes. This involved interviewing clients over the phone to get their full history; speaking with my supervising attorney, Julia Rosner, about the viability and validity of the clients' legal issues; and then following up with the client. I was also given the opportunity to interview clients in person in our offices. Interviewing clients was very satisfying because it often seemed that I was helping the client just by listening. Some of my clients seemed to feel that no one had listened to them before, and they were just grateful that I wanted to hear their story.

I was given great autonomy in my work with the Employment Unit, but still received strong supervision from Julia, who was always available to answer any of my questions. Because of this autonomy, I learned more about providing direct services to low-income clients than I would have previously believed possible in one summer internship. I learned how to interview clients effectively (usually) without offending the client or making the client so uncomfortable that the client could not communicate any useful information. Julia also gave me the opportunity to represent a client at an administrative hearing, which was an invaluable learning experience.

I was also very grateful to be included in Julia's work with the Single Stop Project. Nearly every week, I accompanied Julia to the Henry Street Settlement, where she interviews and counsels clients with a variety of legal issues, not just employment issues. My work with the Single Stop Project exposed me to diverse legal issues as well as a client population that was very different than the one I worked with through the Employment Unit. Many of the Single Stop clients were immigrants (with green cards) living in public housing and on (or trying to receive) SSI or SSD. The Single Stop clients needed a lawyer in order to deal with problems in their day-to-day living-- housing problems, consumer problems, and problems trying to receive SSI. I will always remember one particular client, who believed she had been fired from her job. All it took was one call from Julia and a good translator, and Julia got the client her job back. It was amazing to see how one well-placed and well-articulated call from an attorney can change someone's life.

The Employment Unit's client population is extremely varied and I had the chance to work with clients from diverse backgrounds who have held a huge assortment of jobs, from nanny to restaurant owner to

adjunct professor. Although the Unemployment Insurance system in New York is meant to be simple, the reality is that the system can easily become so complicated that clients needed a lawyer in order to help them fix what might seem like a simple error that precluded them from receiving any UI benefits. Working with clients in the Employment Unit was extremely rewarding because, if the work is successful, I could actually assist someone in getting the means they need to live their everyday life while they look for work.

This letter can only cover a tiny fraction of the experiences I had through my internship this summer because they were so varied. More than anything else, this summer taught me the great importance of providing civil legal services to low-income clients, and strengthened my previously held view that the right to counsel needs to be more greatly expanded into civil situations.

I am truly grateful for my experience at Manhattan Legal Services this summer, and to Equal Justice America for funding my summer experience. I plan to continue to provide civil legal services to low-income clients after I graduate from law school, and I look forward to commencing my public interest career.

Sincerely,

Sarah Alba
University of Pennsylvania Law School
Juris Doctor expected 2011