

August 27, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Below is a summary of my experiences during my excellent and enlightening Summer 2013 Fellowship through Equal Justice America. Honestly, I wish I had more time and space to share my experiences – being limited to just a couple of particular instances does not do the Fellowship justice. This Fellowship allowed me to gain a wide range of knowledge and skill in various civil practice areas, and also gave me the extremely valuable opportunity to spend time working with many different clients on a personal level. This personal interaction is especially beneficial in the setting of a legal clinic that focuses on helping those that need it most. Being able to provide these people real help and improve their lives in tangible ways was a special experience that I will carry forward with me into my career.

The first case I'd like to discuss as an example of my experience involved a woman seeking a divorce from her husband, but had many other issues: her income was extremely limited; she was struggling in her search for gainful employment; she had various health problems which further constricted her time and resources; and her two adult sons lived with her, both of whom required extensive medical care. Her situation was essentially untenable, and she was absolutely despondent when she first came to us. To help her stabilize her income while waiting on her divorce, we sought temporary orders that would prevent her husband from withholding funds from her, improving her emotional state and quality of life. Thus, in addition to my usual divorce-related duties, I also participated in preparation for the temporary orders hearing, which was a totally novel experience for me. I interviewed the client multiple times, each time going over new stacks of personal, medical, and financial documents. I took all of that documentation and compiled it into a comprehensive index. I researched the rules of evidence and rules of civil procedure to ensure that all of the documentation I had amassed was credible, and undertook steps to certify the authenticity of various records for the hearing. I strategized with my supervisors on lines of direct- and cross-examination questioning, on the strengths and weaknesses of our evidence, and on different strategies we could undertake at the hearing to get the results we were looking for. The hearing has yet to occur, but I am confident all of that preparation will pay off, and the results will be highly beneficial. The main thing I took away from working on that case is the dual nature of client interaction; how personal and professional responsibilities to the client work in tandem to achieve the best results. The client arrived upset, confused, and unsure of what to do. She felt trapped in a bad situation, one that was beyond her ability to control. So from a personal standpoint, it was my responsibility to help put her at ease, to help her understand that she wasn't powerless, that she had choices and control over the situation; but from a professional standpoint, it was my responsibility to help her understand her legal choices, the potential positive and negative consequences of those choices, and formulation of strategies for best achieving her legal objectives. Learning to strike the proper balance

between personal support and professional assistance is absolutely crucial to success in this area of law, and it's far more nuanced than I initially thought.

Another case I would like to discuss is not actually an individual case, but more of a long-term project that I was involved in which contained multiple cases within it. This project was about ensuring that Child Protective Services was operating in accordance with current statutory and constitutional due process requirements for children in foster care, specifically in making sure that children who were prescribed psychotropic medications were being cared for appropriately by CPS, their prescribing physicians, and their foster families. This project was instituted because there had been some legal compliance problems. Some of the children who were placed on these medications were not having their doses monitored, were not receiving follow-up care to see if dosage should be adjusted, nor being examined for signs of negative side-effects. Some children who had reached the age at which they have the right to make their own medical consent decisions involving prescription medication were not being informed of their rights. Some of the screening and prescribing facilities had dubious reputations. These compliance problems are the byproduct of a crowded juvenile system lacking in necessary resources and the failure to implement adequate oversight. This project was about volunteering to help provide that needed oversight when it was appropriate. My responsibilities involved going to the juvenile court and going through the week's docket for permanent managing conservatorship hearings and placement review hearings. I checked the docket files to determine whether the children in those cases had been placed on psychotropic medications, whether their dosages were within appropriate guidelines, whether the child had been informed about their rights to consent (if of age), and whether the child had been receiving proper follow-up care. If I encountered a case where the child's care was not in accordance with statute, I'd make note of it so that the clinic could inform the judge at the hearing – the judge would then work with CPS to take whatever steps were necessary to remediate the situation. The result of this oversight was improvement of the child's quality of life, and to provide much-needed oversight. I had no idea such a program even existed when I started working at the legal clinic under this Fellowship, but looking back at it, I do not understand how such an oversight mechanism was not place already.

The above-mentioned case and project are just two of the many things I was involved with throughout the summer as part of my Fellowship – I would estimate I worked on 14-16 cases and 5-7 research projects. Again, I wish I had more space discuss everything else I was involved with. I found the experience to be extremely beneficial for my future career, to give back to my community, and to provide legal help the less-fortunate. It feels special to be able to make tangible improvements to the lives of people who place their trust in your abilities. I would absolutely recommend my experience to anybody with even the slightest chance of working in civil practice law or assisting low-income individuals with their legal problems.

Thank you so much for selecting me for this wonderful Fellowship opportunity, I loved every second of it.

Sincerely,

Jason M. Brooks
Student at South Texas College of Law
Graduating December 2013