

August 8, 2006

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Dan Ruben
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Dear Dan:

I want to thank you, Equal Justice America, and all of your donors for enabling the incredible summer experience I have just completed. Without a grant from Equal Justice America, it would have been far harder, if not impossible, for me to have completed an unpaid job working with a civil legal aid services organization. The skills that I learned and the experiences that I had this summer will serve as an excellent foundation for my career.

I spent this summer working with the Virginia Justice Center for Farm and Immigrant Workers (VJC), a program of the statewide Legal Aid Justice Center, based in Charlottesville, VA. The general thrust of the program is to provide free legal services to the migrant farmworker and low wage immigrant worker communities in Virginia. The Charlottesville office where I was working spent the majority of its time working with the migrant community although I did have some exposure to other workers as well. I worked under the supervision of Tim Freilich, the senior managing attorney at the VJC, who provided me with excellent direction, exposed me to a variety of types of work, and served as an amazing mentor.

As a whole, the summer provided me with an extraordinary view into the multi-faceted role that a civil legal attorney must play. Throughout the summer, I worked on a variety of projects, including: legal research and memoranda writing for a class action lawsuit, data analysis for a class action lawsuit, legal research and memoranda writing exploring novel new defenses to use on behalf of our clients, client contact in the form of outreach to farms throughout Virginia, client contact in the form of legal intake for first time clients (both on the phone and in person), community meetings, and legislative lobbying preparation.

Through these projects, I gained a far deeper understanding of the law and how a legal services attorney functions within both a legal framework and a community framework. My legal research and writing skills also improved not only in the technical sense, but also in the practical sense by working with tight deadlines, real clients, and real problems (as opposed to the tailor made problems presented in class).

I had a large amount of client contact this summer, which was excellent in a few senses. First, the client contact made me far more comfortable in the role of "lawyer," listening to the stories of clients,

eliciting relevant information, and managing each client over the course of the weeks or months that it took to advance their case. Second, through all of the outreach trips I took as well as interaction with ongoing cases, I was able to more fully understand the problems that the migrant farmworker population is facing. In this age of great animosity towards the Hispanic immigrant population in the United States, it is more important than ever to provide quality legal services to these communities. The first step in providing quality legal services is a deep understanding of the problems that people face; this summer I started down the road towards that deep understanding. Finally, an ancillary but very useful benefit of my client experiences this summer is that I now feel more comfortable working in a legal setting in Spanish. Very few days went by when I failed to speak or write in Spanish and I now have a very good working legal vocabulary in a second tongue.

I'm not sure that I can impress upon you any specific story that would sum up my summer – I was touched by the humanity of my job at more than one moment and grew angry at the people who wronged our clients at more than one moment. Perhaps the best story to relate from this summer is a soccer game that I played in while on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Early in the summer, my boss and I took a trip to the Eastern Shore to meet with the tomato pickers who fill the area every summer. Unfortunately, we arrived about a week too early and found less workers than we had anticipated. Returning to our hotel one evening, we spotted a soccer game amongst a number of migrant workers and decided to stop to speak with the workers and hand out our outreach materials. Of course, it can be hard to separate a Guatemalan from his soccer, and the next thing I knew Tim and I were playing as well. We gained the trust of the workers through that game (and their respect by scoring a few goals) and afterwards spoke with them at length about their rights and any problems they might have had. That game and the conversation afterwards was a microcosm of the whole summer – we connected with the workers, helped them, worked with them, and provided them with more than just strict legal services. I learned that the role of a lawyer, especially a legal aid lawyer goes well beyond writing briefs and taking people to court– it involves making connections with your clients and your community.

I want to close by thanking both you and the EJA again. If you have any questions or would like to speak more about my summer experiences and future plans, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415.244.3169 or mikeh@virginia.edu.

Sincerely,



Mike Hollander

UVA Law '08