

August 27, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to thank you and everyone at Equal Justice America for your efforts in helping me fund my summer work experience. While working at the Domestic Violence Legal Clinic, I was able to work directly with clients who were in dire need of legal assistance. Over the course of the summer, I conducted 100 intake interviews and worked directly on 20 cases.

An average day at the Domestic Violence Legal Clinic (DVLC) began at 8:30, when the Domestic Relations courthouse in Chicago opens. The clinic is located within the courthouse, so many individuals who come to the courthouse seeking civil Emergency Order of Protections will come to the DVLC office. After a potential client filled out an intake form, I would run a computer check, searching both civil actions and criminal charges for both the Petitioner and the Respondent. I would then conduct a brief intake interview with the potential client, as a means of assessing the nature of the alleged abuse and the credibility of the potential client. I would then screen the case with a supervising attorney, who would make the decision whether to accept a case or refer the case elsewhere.

Once a case was accepted, I would work with the screening attorney to complete the paperwork, in order to take the case to court that afternoon. I would have the client sign a client retainer agreement, and then ask them to fill out a longer intake form. Based on the information that I gleaned from the intake interview, I would write an affidavit, which presented the history of the abuse. Also, after I discussed the possible legal remedies with the client, I would fill in the petition for the Order of Protection. I also created a cover sheet, a summons, and an informational sheet for the sheriff. All this work was checked by the supervising attorney and then signed by the client. The attorney would then take the client to court, and I would observe.

I worked with many people during my time with the DVLC, but one client's story stands out in my mind. A woman came into the office seeking an Order against her 20 year-old son. A few days before this woman came into our office, her son had beaten his 17 year-old half sister so badly, that she still remained hospitalized. The injured girl had intervened on her younger sister's behalf, after the son had punched the younger girl in the head and slapped her across the face. The son then punched the older sister in the eye, hit her in the head with a shoehorn, and threw a tricycle at her. This was not the first instance where the son had been physically abusive towards his half sisters. The woman did not want to have to file an Order of Protection against her son, but she knew it would be necessary to keep her daughters safe. She was granted an Emergency Order of Protection that day, and three weeks later she came back and was granted a two-year Plenary Order of Protection. Although this woman was grieving the self-imposed loss of her son, she knew that what she was doing was in the best interest of her family. She was very grateful for the work that the attorney and I did in preparing and presenting her case.

I found that the most fulfilling part of my day was handing the Orders of Protection to our clients. Some cried because they were so happy to have taken a stand against an abusive partner. Some were excited because they saw this as a positive turning point in their lives. Others were still apprehensive. Whatever their reaction, each of our clients knew that they had done something to protect themselves that day. And whether they came back to pursue a Plenary Order of Protection or decided to reconcile with their abuser, they knew that they had an advocate.

Again, I greatly appreciate all of your efforts.

Sincerely,

Amy Gjesdahl
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of Law