

LYDIA J. NESS

August 11, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I had the privilege of being an Equal Justice America fellow at Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA). I worked in the family law division with my 711 license, representing people who cannot afford attorneys in parentage and domestic relations matters. I stepped up in front of the judge a number of times to advocate for our clients.

Not only did I advocate for clients in court, but I was given the opportunity to draft pleadings and various court documents to file in our cases. I also negotiated with opposing counsels and child representatives, drafting orders after stepping up to the bench.

I particularly enjoyed conducting intakes with potential clients, and running meetings with our clients each week. I often drafted documents and walked our clients through the documents, explaining the legal process to them. I felt like I really took ownership this summer and have more confidence pursuing a legal career.

A lot of the clients I worked with have extremely difficult situations, and what I appreciated most about CGLA is the wholistic approach to the law. The criminal records, criminal defense, housing, and family departments work together to maximize relief for the clients. There are also social workers on staff who provide additional assistance to the clients. For example, my supervisor and I were helping a client seek custody of his son while the criminal records department was helping him expunge his record, and while a social worker was helping him get into a job-training program. All of these components working together drastically changed this young man's life.

Another client stands out to me. The first meeting I had with him, he was talking about how the mother of his child refuses to let him see his daughter and how he is at the end of his rope and ready to give up. My supervisor talked to him about the importance of having a relationship with his daughter, and that there are legal mechanisms to pursue a relationship with his daughter if he does desire one. Suddenly, this seemingly "tough-guy" father burst into tears and asked us to help him establish a parenting schedule with his daughter. I will never forget this.

I cannot thank you enough for financially supporting such a great summer internship. The experience I gained was more than I could have asked for, and I look forward to a long career in public interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lydia Ness". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Lydia Ness
Chicago-Kent College of Law ('16)