

ANGELICA JUARBE

Dear Mr. Rubin,

I am a rising third-year law student at Columbia Law School and appreciate the opportunity to receive funding from Equal Justice America as an intern with The Legal Aid Society Immigration Unit this summer.

In my work, I worked on the Immigration Unit's Youth Project. The Youth Project works with immigrant youth under the age of 21 and helps them gain legal status. During my summer I worked with over 50 young people, from the ages of 8-20, all of who were undocumented. The Youth Project works with children who are in removal proceedings, as well as those who have been in the United States for a longer period of time. Gaining legal status changes the lives of every single one of these children allowing them to have innumerable more opportunities to advance their lives and those of their families.

As an intern I was able to gain valuable experience working on every stage of applications for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a kind of immigration relief for children whose parents have abused, abandoned or neglected them. These proceedings begin in family court, and many of the children that the Youth Project works with are in the foster care system.

For example, one family that I worked with was a boy who was 18 and his younger sister, 15. They were from the Dominican Republic and have been living in New York for over a decade. Several years ago, both of their parents were arrested, and both have been, or will be deported. The children bounced around from family member to family member, struggling to maintain consistency in their lives. Neither of their parents has contributed to their education, housing, or provided any type of financial or emotional support for the children for several years. A family friend from the Dominican Republic took both children in last year and since then, has provided them with a stable home, food, shelter, and the support that they need to succeed. Under his guidance, the older boy graduated high school and the younger sister received a much-needed surgery for scoliosis that had gone undetected for years. Throughout my summer working with them, we were able to obtain the family court orders that will now allow the older brother to apply for financial aid to apply to college, and that will allow his younger sister to join the army after they receive their status as legal permanent residents. This family was one of many which I was able to personally see such a difference being made in their lives.

Through this work, I have been able to improve many skills, particularly in interviewing clients. It's been particularly rewarding to write affidavits for clients, allowing them to tell their story to the family court judge. I have been able to gain a lot of experience this summer, working directly with children, their guardians, foster care parents, and social workers. My supervising attorney has allowed me to have a wide range of experiences from initial intake interviews, to physically giving the youth their green cards. I have had the opportunity to orally advocate for clients in immigration court and family court, write custody and guardianship petitions and write motions for special findings and to terminate removal proceedings. I have really appreciated the opportunity to work on every stage of SIJS and DACA and truly make an impact on the lives of my clients.

Thank you so much for this opportunity. I now am confident that I want to pursue a career directly serving these same clients in need.

Sincerely,

Angelica Juarbe
Columbia Law School, Class of 2016