

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, Virginia, 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My summer fellowship at the Nationalities Service Center (NSC) in Philadelphia could not have been any more rewarding. The skills that I learned as a legal intern not only helped me improve my analytical and research skills, but also provided me with an understanding of how Immigration Law works in the United States. My interactions with clients from all over the world provided me with an understanding of other cultures. More than anything however, I truly have become passionate and committed to pursuing Immigration Law and plan on becoming an Immigration Lawyer.

I worked for ten weeks at NSC as a legal intern and was exposed to a myriad of clients from different countries. I mostly worked on asylum and domestic violence cases. I met with clients, did their intake consultations, and presented these cases to the attorneys. During these consults, I listened to the immigrants' stories from all over the world. Most of the time, these clients were confused and uninformed about Immigration Law in the United States and felt that they had no options. I then conducted their country condition research, gathered the corroborating evidence, wrote research and case memos for the attorneys, and wrote briefs for the corresponding cases. Additionally, as a legal intern I inherited cases from previous interns and followed through on client files. I drafted travel documents, work permits, naturalization applications, asylum applications, and petitions for relatives. I took detailed notes and met with clients to write their affidavits. These sessions were very intense and emotional because often the basis for an asylum claim focuses on the most traumatic experience of this person's life.

When I first started, I remember that it was incredibly difficult to hear some of the stories from fellow human beings who had suffered so much. A majority of the clients that I talked to were incredibly traumatized by domestic violence, had suffered severe human rights infractions in their country of origin, and had families that depended on them. It was upsetting and traumatic at first to hear about firsthand accounts of women who had suffered female genital mutilation (FGM), rape, trafficking, severe domestic violence, or had witnessed a genocide. I talked to men who would suffer the death penalty if they returned to their country of origin for being gay. I listened to stories where men and women had suffered severe persecution for their identity: whether it be race, religion, ethnicity, gender, political opinion, religion, or membership in a particular social group. I can genuinely say that at NSC I gained awareness as to humanitarian issues that are occurring around the world and how they affect and displace ordinary citizens of those countries.

As the summer went on, I realized that this is the path that I want to pursue in law. I want to help immigrants of different backgrounds who have suffered human rights violations to gain asylum in the United States. I feel fortunate that I have had the honor of meeting some of my clients who have been so strong even when they have lost everything. The attorneys at NSC are passionate, brilliant, were extremely helpful to the interns, and have a genuine interest in helping others. I could not have asked for a more rewarding experience.

To finish off the summer, I had the privilege of attending the last asylum hearing for a client who had suffered a forced marriage in her home country. This particular client had suffered extensive abuse at the hands of her polygamist husband and suffered FGM multiple times. At this hearing, she was granted asylum by the immigration judge. I had helped the attorney communicate with the client (from English to French, and vice versa) and I cannot tell you the feeling of joy upon hearing that that the client was granted asylum. The look of gratitude on her face and the tears of happiness that followed made me realize that although the work that goes into asylum cases can take a long time and many hearings, the final result can be the most rewarding experience of any person's life.

My experience at NSC has led me to volunteer during the year on domestic violence cases. The funding for domestic violence cases has been drastically cut and it would be practically impossible to follow through on these types of cases without help. For this reason and because I had such a rewarding experience this summer, I will be continuing as a volunteer at NSC throughout they year.

I thank EJA for granting me the opportunity to work at NSC. Working at NSC has provided me with the most rewarding summer of my life. I feel more than fortunate that I was able to work at NSC with EJA's generous fellowship program.

Sincerely,

Cristina Maria Juarbe Santaliz