

LEGAL SERVICES OF SOUTH CENTRAL MICHIGAN

8/9/2016

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

RE: EJA Fellowship Exit Letter

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I have had the privilege of working for the Family Law Project (FLP) of the Michigan Advocacy Program. FLP serves survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in seeking justice through legal recourse. The FLP offers support and counsel for divorce from economically, physically, and emotionally abusive marriages, protection orders against violent partners and strangers, or just an opportunity to see their child that, in many instances, is isolated and conditioned to distrust them. The women that I have been able to serve define the true meaning of strength. The evil they endure from their opposition disgusts and disheartens me. Observing and assisting our clients face and prevail over systemic, pointed abuse, during such a trying time of their journey, has been an invaluable and galvanizing experience.

By my last week, I filed eight divorces, three custody cases, and two petitions for a Personal Protection Order. Not one of the survivors had the same story nor the same background. The diversity of persons seeking help from abusive relationships knows no race, class, or age, but affects everyone. Beyond just initial pleadings, I was able to help survivors tackle post-judgment issues as well. Whether it was receiving support payments, arranging supervised parenting time, or just being a listening ear, it was clear to me that domestic violence pervades a victim's entire life.

I was consistently amazed by how much our clients could withstand on their day to day. While being a witness and a victim to a criminal case, dealing with Child Protective Services investigations, finding new housing, getting their children to school on time, and working a minimum wage (or low-paying) job as much as they could without neglecting their children, they still were able to manage a custody or divorce case on top of it all. I feel that oftentimes victims of domestic violence are told to "just leave" or "they shouldn't have put up with it." These statements, in my opinion, greatly simplify the complexity of these types of situations and relationships. It takes a lot of work and concerted effort for a survivor to distance themselves from the aggressor; oftentimes, it is the aggressor who creates much of the difficulty.

Throughout the development of the cases I would develop trusting and communicative relationships with the clients. This allowed me to have a better understanding of all that truly was going on for them. I was able to be helpful in ways outside of just drafting a motion or answering a procedural question, but by calling employers and explaining the clients' tardiness, helping with finding a new apartment, or advising upcoming financial decisions.

I would not have been able to serve the Family Law Project if not for Equal Justice America (EJA). I am so grateful for the opportunity to provide services for those who would otherwise go unserved. This experience has certainly made me a better law student and has helped me further my career goals. More valuably, it has made me a better person with a more complete understanding of the human condition and a deeper empathy for people who are ignored and doubted. Everyone deserves support on their journey. The Family Law Project clientele is no different. Rising up from abusive relationships, protecting children from the abuse, and transitioning into a new space to call home, is a process that especially deserves a committed support group. I am truly honored that I was afforded the opportunity to be a part of that support. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Sherwood", with a stylized, flowing script.

Daniel A. Sherwood
Michigan State University Coll. of Law, '17



August 19, 2016

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to evaluate Daniel Sherwood's fellowship this summer with the Family Law Project (FLP), for which he received a grant from Equal Justice America.

The Family Law Project provides legal assistance to low income survivors of domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault in family law matters including divorce, child custody and protective order proceedings. Daniel, along with our other two summer clerks, provided invaluable assistance to our office and allowed us to provide advice and representation to more clients than we could have without our summer clerks. We could not have done the work with financial support that Equal Justice America offers to law students who choose to work for low income legal services programs.

During his summer, Daniel touched on all aspects of the work we do at FLP. He worked with several clients through the course of their legal action. He conducted initial interviews with clients and used the information to draft complaints, motions and judgments. He was responsible for monitoring cases, which included responding to client questions, informing clients of case progress and communicating with opposing counsel and the court. Daniel participated in our weekly intake meetings where we discussed new cases and various legal issues in existing cases. Daniel also helped the office with some essential, but often tedious tasks required in a legal aid office. He filed pleadings at court, he organized case files, and he reorganized and stored closed files.

Daniel was committed to the work at FLP, was organized and always willing to pitch in. He was a pleasure to work with. Again, thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

s/
Rebecca Shiemke
Managing Attorney