

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

RE: Summer Fellowship Experience

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, it has been my honor to work as an intern in the Juvenile Rights Practice of The Legal Aid Society in New York City. I got to observe courtroom procedures in juvenile delinquency cases. The bulk of my work for the summer was with Article 10 cases, in which a parent or guardian had charges pending for abuse or neglect. The Legal Aid Society attorneys act as law guardians for the children. In other words, our clients are the children, and by law, we are to represent them as we would any other client, substituting judgment only in the case of a very young child, or a child who is impaired due to cognitive or physical disabilities.

During the summer, I was able to conduct client interviews, prepare files for hearings, participate in hearings, and serve as substitute counsel during agency conferences. I also got to file a motion notifying the parties that the assistance of the court was no longer needed (ACD), and to file a subpoena for medical records.

Long after I have returned to law school and to my pre-intern life, the faces and stories of the children whom I met will linger in my memory.

I will remember Thalia, who was the child I met my first day of my internship. Thalia has been in foster care for over ten years. She is "aging out," meaning she has reached the age of 21 and the system is no longer obligated to provide for her. My supervising attorney inherited her case about a year ago and began to assist her with things to impact her everyday life. With advocacy from Legal Aid, Thalia has gotten tuition and housing costs at her college covered for the first two years. She also was able to get ACS to provide a stipend towards the cost of books and a laptop computer. On the day we were in court, we got ACS to agree to supply her with Metro cards so that she could go to and from her part time job over the summer. This made a big difference in her life, since each trip on the subway or bus is \$2.50. That totals \$5 a day, or \$100 a month, which is a great deal of money for someone who is 21 and only works a part time job. Thalia made quite an impression on me. She is functioning quite well by any standard, which is all the more inspiring considering the challenges she has faced from the time she was born. I had previously had an image of foster children as being dirty, shifty, and downtrodden. Thalia was quite the opposite. She presented herself as poised, mature, and very professional. She articulated her words carefully, and was quite cogent in expressing her needs and her appreciation for the efforts of Legal Aid. Thalia gave me hope that foster kids can come out alright!

Another case that will linger in my memory is Kimberly. Kimberly is hearing impaired. She has cochlear implants which need monitoring and a new surgery, but her mother has not followed through. Curiously the case came to us not as a neglect case, but as a case in which Kimberly's older sister had gotten into a physical altercation with her mother, resulting in charges against both mother and daughter. Upon investigation, ACS realized that Kimberly had not been in school for more than a year. I interviewed Kimberly with a sign language interpreter. It was amazing how her timeline of events was so jumbled. This was not a cognitive issue. When I spoke with a social worker, she indicated that every person needs some means of expressing their thoughts in order to place them in a framework. Deaf children, if they don't have someone who can communicate with them at home, don't have this. Thus, they spend their lives alone in their own thoughts. Kimberly has now returned to a very nurturing school where she attended Pre K and 1st grade. As a result of my interview with Kimberly, the attorneys at Legal Aid realized the importance of requiring that the mother attend regular sign language classes. This will be part of the mother's plan for discharge from ACS monitoring. I will remember Kimberly for her ability to persevere through incredible hardships, and yet maintain a stoic equilibrium that belies her youth.

Throughout the summer I was amazed at the attorneys who had worked child protection cases for decades. They knew their kids, and they rolled with the cases in and out of hearings seemingly with no end in sight. I had imagined that such attorneys would be sour, bitter, and resentful of the paltry sum they were paid for their life's work. Instead, I found a level of professionalism at the Legal Aid Society that was buoyed by commitment to justice for children, and the sheer joy that they could get if they helped advocate for improvement in the life of a single child. How I hope to aspire to such a lofty standard!

Thank you very much for the opportunity to work at Legal Aid. My life is forever enriched.

Sincerely,

Paula Collins
Brooklyn Law School

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Juvenile Rights Practice

Re: Paula Collins, fellow

Martin Feinman
Attorney-in-Charge
Brooklyn Office

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write this letter on behalf of Ms. Collins who had the good fortune to receive a fellowship from Equal Justice America, enabling her to intern with the Brooklyn office of The Juvenile Rights Practice of the Legal Aid Society. I understand that you require an evaluation of her performance.

Ms. Collins was immensely helpful during the past two months, assisting me and two other attorneys prepare our cases. She wrote motions, conducted legal research, interviewed numerous children and adult witnesses, advocated at meetings and court conferences, digested case records and even helped coach a team of high school students who participated in a moot court delinquency hearing which was heard by an actual Family Court judge. She worked independently but diligently, providing detailed and well-written regular progress reports on the status of her assignments.

Of particular note, was her assistance with one case in which she arranged to interview a young client with multiple challenges through a sign language interpreter and did so at the child's school. Ms. Collins showed much insight into both the educational and familial issues confronting the child as well as her family; she remained in close contact with the school officials, enabling me to have ongoing information on the daily functioning of the family. Significantly, Ms. Collins subsequently participated in a court conference

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concerning troubling developments regarding this client. She actively participated in the conference during which she calmly but firmly advocated for the child based on her investigation of the case.

Likewise, on another occasion, she effectively advocated for our position during a heated conference held in a matter involving a mentally ill parent in which she had done significant investigation. Ms. Collins was in command of the facts and more than held her own during a very frustrating meeting. Ms. Collins also effectively acted as an advocate and observer at many meetings held at foster care agencies relating to planning for a child's future services and placement.

Ms. Collins, as an experienced teacher, was able to do an unusually skillful job interviewing our verbal clients. She asked insightful questions, established rapport easily and later provided useful comments concerning the child's development and emotional status. She also provided helpful information concerning school issues and effectively planning for school-based services.

In sum, she was an excellent summer addition to our office. Should you require additional information, do not hesitate to contact me at my email address or by phone (718 250-4283).

Sincerely,

Emily Kitay

Staff Attorney, Brooklyn JRP.

