

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to work in the Human Trafficking Clinic at the University of Michigan this summer. The funding from Equal Justice America was critical to making ends meet. At the HTC, we worked with survivors of human trafficking, helping them to rebuild their lives after enduring truly horrific treatment from their traffickers. Our clients were overly trusting people – always seeing the glass half-full, and believing in the goodness of other people. This trust unfortunately led them into very compromising situations.

The typical trafficking victim knows their trafficker; the trafficker often occupies a position a trust – a romantic relationship, a family relationship, or a budding friendship. The trafficker manipulates this trust to get the victim to do something on the trafficker's behalf – often illegal, such as: prostitution, violation of immigration guidelines, or drug dealing. These transgressions render the victim increasingly vulnerable – the trafficker convinces the victim that the rule of law will not protect them. The victim is convinced that if they seek help from law enforcement to escape the trafficker's captivity, that the *victim* will be punished for prostitution, drug dealing, or immigration violations. Eventually, victims often escape their trafficker's captivity, but this can take several months to several years, during which time the victim is often forced to endure things that we all think couldn't happen in *our* community, or in *our* country. Before coming to the HTC, I shared in the naturally incredulous reaction that people have when they hear about human trafficking in the United States. Now I know first-hand (sort of) what kinds of atrocities happen right in our own backyard.

One client came to America expecting to work as a nanny or a babysitter for a few months to earn money to support her family back home. She thought she would be free to leave after a few months, but this was not to be. She was forced into a sham marriage, and forced to do domestic chores at all hours of the day for her trafficker (who was a *family member* of the victim). She was deprived of the opportunity to eat, deprived of sleep, deprived of the ability to speak with her children and husband in Africa. Instead, she was forced to cook, clean, and do arbitrary housework – cleaning the ceiling and walls, rearranging furniture, for no logical purpose except to play mind games. She was never paid. In fact, her identity was stolen by her trafficker; the HTC is currently working to restore her credit. Our clinic also worked with law

enforcement to obtain legal status for her, to obtain benefits, and to obtain travel permission for her children to come to the United States.

Another client was trafficked to the United States from South America and forced to work in strip clubs. She too came to the United States thinking she would work as a nanny or babysitter. The story slowly changed to ‘dancing,’ and by the time it was too late, she realized that she would be forced to work in a strip club. She has been separated from her daughter in South America for several years now. Our clinic has worked to obtain legal status for the client, obtain status for her daughter, and worked with a network of NGO’s to arrange the logistics for her daughter to travel to the United States.

People often ask me how I handled such a heavy subject matter. My response is simple – my involvement comes at the turning point in survivors’ lives. The HTC’s involvement is hopefully the beginning of a turning point when survivors’ lives begin to improve. It is a long and difficult process, no doubt, with lots of crucial support services beyond the HTC. But rather than ignore the reality of what is happening in our own backyard, I wanted to be part of the solution. That choice was made substantially easier with financial support from Equal Justice America.

Thank you,

Zach Robock

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