



August 12, 2011

Dear Charles H. Revson Law Student Public Interest Fellowship Program:

Thank you very much for the opportunity that the Charles H. Revson Law Student Public Interest Fellowship provided me to work in a public interest placement this summer. I enrolled in law school with the purpose of pursuing public interest, and I was very happy to be able to further that career goal this summer. I obtained my internship with Partners for Women and Justice (“PFWJ”) through an interview at the New York University Public Interest Career Fair. I worked with PFWJ from May 31, 2011, through August 12, 2011.

Partners for Women and Justice is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides low-income and abused women with pro-bono legal representation and advice in cases involving domestic violence and family law. Its primary focus is assisting women in final restraining order hearings, but it also provides access to a divorce clinic for qualified callers. PFWJ is a really tremendous asset to the community, as it helps women and children maintain safer family lives and provides legal assistance to those that may not otherwise be able to afford it. I was astonished by the prevalence and, in many cases, severity of domestic violence within my community and by the many forms that it takes.

During my summer internship, I was responsible for interviewing prospective and established clients, conducting legal and factual research on a variety of topics, and preparing legal memoranda and briefs. My research and writing experiences focused on substantive areas such as the effect of final restraining orders on custody, psychiatrist-patient privilege, punitive and compensatory damages flowing from final restraining orders, predicate acts under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, and procedural due process rights associated with final restraining order hearings.

I also helped staff attorneys to prepare for court hearings and had the opportunity to observe attorneys counseling clients. I really enjoyed the high level of client interaction to which I was exposed; in some cases, I was able to follow the client’s case from the initial

interview to the final disposition at the final restraining order hearing. This made the work I did seem more personal and rewarding, as I was able to see the difference that PFWJ made in the lives of these clients on a first-hand basis.

In addition, I had the opportunity to appear in Family Court under the supervision of PFWJ and Rachel Coalition attorneys on three occasions. Before my appearances, I had a large amount of involvement with each of these cases, and I felt well-prepared by the attorneys each time. This was comforting, because my only experience in court prior to this was observation, and I was eager to provide strong and effective service for these PFWJ clients. I conducted two direct examinations, and I also argued a motion to reconsider based on a brief that I had previously written. In conjunction with one of the direct examinations I conducted, I prepared exhibits to be submitted to the court. Appearing in court allowed me to realize the foundation that my law school classes provided, as I was able to exercise the skills that I learned. It also made me feel more prepared for the work that I will be doing to help low-income clients in the Family Law Clinic at the Seton Hall Center for Social Justice next semester.

I was pleased to have received very direct supervision and feedback on all of my work. I received thorough training and was able to observe several client interviews before beginning to perform them individually. I also received comments and critique on the briefs, memoranda, and interview write-ups that I submitted to my supervising attorneys, which helped me to improve as the summer progressed. I had ample opportunity to speak on a one-on-one basis with the PFWJ staff attorneys and paralegals. I would highly recommend this internship to another student. I felt that it gave me a very well-rounded experience. I enjoyed working with clients and, because of the small office size, I was able to gain a lot of hands-on experience and receive personal attention. Over the summer, I learned a lot about domestic violence and family law, as well as about the judicial process and the court system in general. The close and frequent interaction that I had with clients enabled me to feel as though I helped people, some in the worst positions of their lives. I also very much enjoyed the collegial atmosphere in the office and the friendliness of those working at PFWJ; working in an area as serious, heavy, and sometimes disheartening as domestic violence law, it is necessary to be a part of a friendly and supportive office environment. My internship at PFWJ was a great experience to have as I prepare to graduate and practice law in another year.

Upon graduation, it is my goal to obtain employment with a non-profit organization. If I cannot do this immediately upon graduation, I plan to perform a large amount of pro-bono service. If it is not already part of my legal practice upon graduation, I would like to dedicate pro-bono service to domestic violence. In addition to family law, I am very interested in the field of animal law. Through this internship, I have also become increasingly interested in the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse, and would like to become further involved in helping victims of domestic violence and their pets (who are oftentimes also victimized by batterers) either through pro-bono service or work with non-profit organizations and shelters. I learned through my PFWJ internship and its work with other organizations that combating domestic violence requires a holistic approach; providing more temporary pet foster and shelter networks to domestic violence victims would help to further this team-approach to safer communities.

I would like to sincerely thank the Charles H. Revson Law Student Public Interest Fellowship Program for enabling me to work with PFWJ and continue to grow my passion for public interest this summer. I really enjoyed working directly with clients while gaining daily legal experience. This fellowship allowed me to improve my legal and communication skills, and I feel even more confident in my decision to pursue public interest law upon graduation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Newton