

Reflections by Syeda Tasnim, New York Women's Bar Association Fellow at Her Justice

This Spring semester, I had the wonderful opportunity to work part-time at Her Justice in New York as the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation Fellow.

I am a second-year law student at NYU School of Law and I was looking for inspiration and professional fulfillment. Prior to law school, I had worked for a pro bono law firm in Southeast Asia that provided legal assistance to women and children who were victims of trafficking. This experience inspired me to become an attorney, but law school study made the ability of law to vindicate rights and correct injustice too abstract. Working at Her Justice rekindled my inspiration.

Her Justice provides free legal services in the areas of family, divorce, and immigration law to low-income women and survivors of domestic violence, and provides services to *pro se* litigants. The staff at Her Justice is well versed in numerous languages which helps better serve their diverse client base. Her Justice also has a social services department to assist clients with personal and family needs that often accompany their legal problems.

During my Fellowship at Her Justice, I had the great opportunity to work on matters in both immigration and divorce law. I worked under the guidance and supervision of Mr. Timothy Fallon, an immigration attorney. I learned how to assess the eligibility of clients for certain visa status: for example, victims of crimes who are assisting the police may be eligible for the U Visa while victims of trafficking may be eligible for the T Visa. I also learned to prepare paperwork necessary to undertake U or T Visa applications. I conducted client interviews, drafted HIPAA petitions, filled numerous types of USCIS forms, and conducted case studies.

I was not surprised to learn that immigration processes are encumbered with bureaucratic and administrative red tape. Clients have to wait for months, or years, to obtain a visa or work permit. However, the Her Justice lawyers are skilled at using the immigration processes masterfully to address the immediate needs of the client.

I also had the great opportunity to work on divorce cases with Ms. Margie Bechara and Ms. Wendy Silva. Ms. Bechara allowed me to conduct client intake interviews, be the contact person for clients, draft initial divorce documents, and prepare and assist in the service of process to defendants.

In undertaking such responsibilities, I learned much about the practical difficulties of conducting litigation and client interaction and management. Low-income clients are often unable to expend resources to track their abusive husbands to serve them personally with divorce papers in a manner that meets legal standards. However, Her Justice is making great strides in upholding the rights of domestic violence victims. Recently, Her Justice assisted a client who is a survivor of domestic violence to win a landmark award of 100% of the marital property.

Apart from working on specific immigration and divorce cases, I conducted legal research on issues such as the egregious conduct standard of marital fault in equitable distribution of marital property and service of process through social networking sites.

The tenacity and strength of the clients served by Her Justice inspire the lawyers and volunteers there to dedicate their legal practice to the public good. The work done at Her Justice has inspired me to look for meaningful ways in which I can assist those most in need of legal services. I am grateful to the New York Women's Bar Association Foundation for giving me this opportunity.