

# Lawyers contribute to public good, reap rewards with pro bono work

Every Arizona attorney has taken this vow as part of the Oath of Admission: "I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed."

Therefore, we all have solemnly sworn to engage in pro bono work — a term derived from the Latin phrase meaning "for the public good." Consistent with this commitment, Rule 6.1 of the Arizona Rules of Professional Conduct encourages attorneys to render a minimum of 50 hours of pro bono legal service each year.

According to this rule, the service can take a variety of forms, including providing professional services at no fee or at a substantially reduced fee to the poor or near poor; engaging in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession; and financially supporting programs that provide legal services to the poor.

Rule 6.1 accurately captures the important role each form of service plays in our community. Collectively, we can provide greater access to justice by making donations to organizations such as the Maricopa County Bar Foundation, which provides much-needed funds to local groups dedicated to meeting the legal needs of our community. Likewise, we can set policies and advocate improvements to the legal system through our involvement in professional groups such as the Maricopa County Bar Association.

Yet, as one comment to Rule 6.1 points out: "Personal involvement in the prob-



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lems of the disadvantaged can be one of the most rewarding experiences in the life of a lawyer." That's why, in addition to donating money and serving on boards, many Valley attorneys also elect to roll up their sleeves and provide personal legal service to those in need.

Phoenix offers an abundance of opportunities to represent and work directly with the poor or near-poor. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, about 15 percent of Maricopa County residents (more than 500,000 people) were living below the federal poverty level in 2009. Thankfully, we have the Maricopa County Volunteer Lawyers Program and similar organizations to connect lawyers with low-income clients.

VLP estimates that it assists about 10,000 people a year. Some receive direct representation from volunteer attorneys. For example, in 2009, Gallagher & Kennedy PA attorney Mark Deatherage teamed up with Jay Zweig, now managing partner of Bryan Cave LLP's Phoenix office, to litigate a foreclosure fraud case and restore to their VLP clients the home they had lived in for more than 17 years.

Other pro bono programs bring legal

advice to clients. For instance, attorneys who volunteer with the MCBA's Legal Assistance to Women in Shelters Program make presentations to women in domestic violence shelters to provide them with the information and tools they will need to represent themselves.

Similarly, VLP operates free legal clinics throughout the Valley, including one at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, where attorneys from Gallagher and Jennings, Strouss & Salmon PLC counsel needy individuals on topics ranging from criminal matters to bankruptcy options to landlord-tenant disputes.

Also, many Phoenix law firms actively promote volunteerism. Some firms have formal pro bono committees and policies, while others give their attorneys the flexibility and support to provide services when and where needed. To recognize every firm's contributions would exceed the scope of this article, but a few organizations are worth mentioning.

For example, 92 percent of the attorneys at the Phoenix office of Perkins Coie LLP provide pro bono services. Quarles & Brady encourages pro bono work by staffing a VLP clinic at the Salvation Army offices and giving its attorneys credit against their billable hour requirements for each hour of service provided to indigent people. Finally, *The American Lawyer* recently ranked Snell & Wilmer LLP 48th out of 200 law firms in the country for its dedication to pro bono work.

Though the essence of pro bono is giv-

ing and expecting nothing in return, the reality is that personal pro bono service is extremely rewarding to the attorney. For many legal professionals, especially those

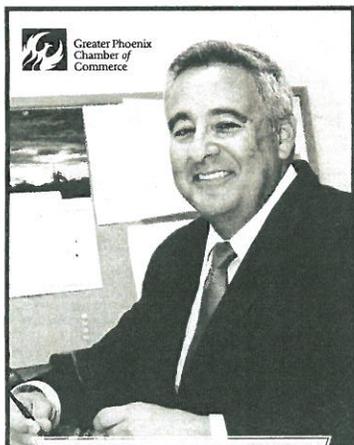
**Pro bono work reminds us ... that legal professionals have the opportunity and responsibility to afford justice and equity to everyone.**

who work in the private sector, pro bono work reminds us of the important role law plays in society and that we have the opportunity and responsibility to afford justice and equity to everyone.

In addition, pro bono work can strengthen an attorney's faith in the judicial system. Reflecting on his VLP foreclosure fraud case, for example, Deatherage gives credit to

both the judge and jury who presided over the trial: Thanks to their commitment to justice, he says, his clients got their home back and the public good was served.

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