PRO BONO WEEK

Started in 2013, Pro Bono Week is an international event in the last week of October with the goal of celebrating the Pro Bono activities of many different professions, lawyers included. Each year during this week, thousands of professionals use their skills to help both local and international communities. Pro bono means “for the public good” in Latin. Pro bono services are rendered without expectation of compensation to individuals or organizations in need. The recent economic downturn has made these services even more important. This week’s celebrations are an attempt to spotlight this increasing need and to recognize those who have made a significant impact on the community through their pro bono activities.

Lawyers are in a unique position to offer pro bono services. The legal system is difficult for most people to navigate. As part of communities all around the world, lawyers have the ability to give back and advocate for people going through processes where specialized knowledge is often required.

There are many ways you can get involved during Pro Bono Week. If you would like more information about pro bono opportunities, ask one of the members of our Pro Bono Advisory Board for some ideas! We can help you find a pro bono opportunity that suits your interests and your busy schedule.  

By: Adam Koulish
2L Colleen Gibbons offers two pieces of advice to any law student who wants to become more involved in pro bono activities. First, take advantage of every opportunity possible in order to find something that matches your personality and passions. Second, if you can’t find a program that interests you, “It can’t hurt to ask.”

And that’s exactly what Colleen did this summer as an intern at the Volunteer Lawyers Project. After hearing a fellow employee discussing a Continuing Legal Education Opportunity and later attending the seminar, Colleen asked Nicholas DeMartino if he would be interested in any student help for his project. And thus, Colleen Gibbons created a new pro bono activity at the College of Law: the Volunteer Advocate Lawyer for Animal Abuse Court (“V.A.L.A.C.”) project.

The V.A.L.A.C., which is still early in its development, is a project that intends to get volunteer lawyers involved with animal abuse cases at a legal and personal level. Attorneys (and law students) would be assigned an animal (dogs & cats for now) that has been recently removed from its home due to a police citation for animal abuse against its owner. Volunteers would have the chance to visit the animal in a shelter or animal hospital, check on the animal’s health, and provide the court with information about the developing case. The goal of the project is to speed up the process of removing animals from dangerous and abusive environments, fostering the animals in a positive setting, and eventually finding the animals forever homes.

Colleen recently hosted Mr. DeMartino at the College of Law and garnered a great deal of interest from her fellow law students. Volunteer and community service activities are nothing new to Colleen, as she participated in various service oriented undertakings while earning her PhD in Human and Community Development from the University of Illinois. Colleen urges any law students with a passion for service to search for opportunities inside and outside of the law school to further strengthen the College of Law’s presence in the Syracuse community. And if you cannot find an opportunity that fits your interests, it never hurts to ask! 

By: Ben Cranston

For information about upcoming pro bono opportunities, contact the PBAB at probono@law.syr.edu
Samantha Aguam (Sam) is a staff attorney at the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP). In law school, she did not necessarily know that she wanted to do public interest, but after completing an urban law clinic she realized she really enjoys it. When she graduated law school, she started volunteering at the VLP. That event eventually led to the job she has today. Sam enjoys public interest work because there is never a boring day and she finds it rewarding. She works on a variety of cases and deals with many areas of the law. Sam finds that she needs to be creative to solve her client’s diverse problems.

Sam also really likes how collaborative the Syracuse community is. She finds that local lawyers are willing to give advice to her when she calls with a difficult question, volunteer their time to help on pro bono cases, and volunteer at the Talk to a Lawyer Clinic. Sam also likes how appreciative her clients are. Sam also likes working for the VLP because she gets to work with some amazing women. The VLP’s Executive Director, Sally Curran, inspires Sam because she has made significant improvements to help make the VLP a more effective and efficient organization.

Sam recommends that law students who want to get into public interest, “get their foot in the door early”. She recommends doing a public interest clinic, volunteering at pro-bono organizations like the VLP, or getting a public interest internship. She also recommends getting to know some public interest attorneys in the city you want to work in. For students who want to go into private practice but contribute to public interest, Sam recommends choosing a firm that will support their lawyers doing pro bono work. She notes that many firms in Syracuse are supportive in this way!

By: Megan Thomas
NATIONAL PRO BONO WEEK
OCTOBER 26-29, 2015

Monday, October 26th (11:45-12:50)
Lunch with Rebecca Sanchez-Roig, L'90
Room 362 - McIntosh Seminar Room
Lunch will be provided. RSVP required.

Tuesday, October 27th (5:30-7:00)
Pro Bono Celebration
MacNaughton Collaboratory
Food and Non-Alcoholic Drinks Provided. RSVP required.

Thursday, October 28th (11:45-12:30)
Public Interest and Pro Bono Panel
Room 352 - Bottar Lecture Hall

On volunteering…
“Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?’”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Upcoming Pro Bono Events:

National Pro Bono Week
Talk-to-a-Lawyer Clinics Available Every Week!
VALOR Day by V.I.S.I.O.N. - February 6, 2016
&
1L Opportunities to join the Pro Bono Advisory Board!

Contact the PBAB for more information!

Pro Bono Advisory Board Members:
Pro Bono Fellow: Kristin Warner
3L Co-Chairs Lucia Urizar & Matt Crouch
2L Co-Chairs Ben Cranston, Megan Thomas, & Adam Koulsh