

BY PATRICIA L. GARCIA

FRANK I. SCURLOCK AWARD

D rowsing through the October 2006 issue of the *Texas Bar* Blownal, Jeffrey A. Stocks stopped on one particular article. It focused on the South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR), a joint project of the State Bar, the American Bar Association, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association that provides pro bono legal services to

asylum seekers detained in South Texas. The article included dates for ProBAR training, one of which Stocks decided to attend.

Stocks signed up to participate and a few months later received ProBAR email with case facts. He sat on the email for about a month before he decided to take the case. "I got hooked on the first case I took," Stocks says of the case, which involved a Guatemalan boy who was abused by his caretakers. Stocks eventually helped the boy gain asylum. He has finished high school, is working full-time, and regularly keeps in touch with Stocks.

Carly Salazar is ProBAR's pro bono coordinator. ProBAR nominated Stocks for the award. Salazar says what Stocks does is more than simply help his clients gain asylum. "Jeff has become a mentor and a friend to his child clients who often

have no family," she says. "He understands the unique challenges these young clients face and steps up to the challenge of being their advocate in law and life."

Since 2007, Stocks has taken on at least 11 ProBAR cases involving minors. Some cases involve asylum claims and others qualify for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) visa for child abuse victims. Each case takes approximately 160 to 240 hours of legal work. "I am totally compelled by the gumption of some of these of these kids," Stocks says.

Stocks owns Houston construction company Gen-Tech Construction, L.L.C. When it comes to his legal practice, Stocks does only pro bono work. "The main reason I do pro bono work, beside the fact that it's an ethical duty, is because these kids don't have anybody in their lives. For a lot of these kids, I'm a lifeline."

> Stocks' work has garnered him the 2010 Frank J. Scurlock Award. Named for the first chair of the State Bar of Texas Legal Services to the Poor in Civil Matters Committee, the award honors an attorney who has provided outstanding pro bono work in the field of providing legal services to the poor. TexasBar-Books has provided Stocks with a complimentary practice manual (up to a \$645 value) of his choice to help in his representation of pro bono clients. Stocks' commitment to pro bono

is not the only reason he is worthy of the award, Salazar says. Stocks has volunteered his time and expense to participate in CLE presentations for pro bono attorneys in Houston and San Antonio to promote legal services to minors, she says. Salazar calls Stocks an inspiration who often makes the

six-hour drive from Houston to Los Fresnos to visit his clients despite offers from ProBAR attorneys to do so.

Stocks admits that he was a bit reluctant to work with ProBAR because the cases fell beyond his corporate legal practice. "I was scared to death," he now laughs. "But ProBAR really held my hand. I knew nothing about immigration law, much less about asylum and SIJS cases. Now, some of my friends that are in immigration law will call me and ask me questions." 🕹



Jeffrey A. Stocks

Jeff has become a mentor and a friend to his child clients who often have no family. He understands the unique challenges these young clients face and steps up to the challenge of being their advocate in law and life.

> — Carly Salazar ProBAR Pro Bono Coordinator

PRO BONO AWARD

Technology and social media have increased productivity in the legal world for years. Now, they are helping to increase the amount of pro bono work performed in Dallas. Through the **Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program**'s E-Mail Referral Program, Dallas volunteer attorneys can easily learn about cases through bi-monthly emails. Lawyers can then choose to contact DVAP for more information or simply

delete the email. Of the 171 cases emailed in 2009, 160 were accepted. The remainder of the cases were placed via regular mail or facsimile, at continuing legal education events, and at law firm clinics. "Referring cases by email involves less cost to the program," says DVAP Managing Attorney Michelle M. Alden. "It is also a lot quicker" than traditional ways of referring cases.

DVAP's innovative use of technology is not the only reason the State Bar Standing Committee on Legal Services to the Poor in Civil Matters honored DVAP with its Pro Bono Award for the program's outstanding contribution in guaranteeing access to the legal system by the poor. In the early 1980s, the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program started offering neighborhood legal clinics. DVAP's clinics have

grown to 11 neighborhood legal clinics per month at seven community locations and five monthly pro se divorce clinics, in 2009 alone.

"Through a focus on recruiting, we have had quite an increase in the number of legal assistant volunteers, in addition to an increase in the number of volunteer attorneys," Alden says. In addition, DVAP accepted 3,976 new cases and closed

4,215 cases in 2009. More than 600 attorneys and 233 support staff assisted DVAP's 15 full-time employees to put on 101 neighborhood clinics, helping 3,384 people last year. The attorneys worked on cases ranging from small claims and bankruptcy to guardianship and consumer cases and provided 17,061 hours of assistance.

To aid volunteer attorneys, DVAP offers free continuing

legal education, as well as staff and volunteer mentors, and legal malpractice insurance coverage for pro bono cases. The president of the Dallas Bar Association also sends each volunteer a thank you letter.

Alden says the Dallas legal community's generosity is what makes the DVAP clinics a success. "Frankly, if it weren't for our volunteer attorneys and support staff, most of these folks would not be able to obtain legal services," she says. "The Dallas legal community is so supportive. They're terrific."

Alden cites a DVAP case where a mother was reunited with her kidnapped son as proof that their work is important. The case was an emotional one for the mother and child, as well as for the DVAP attorney who helped. More important, Alden says, is that without DVAP, the mother



Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program

likely would not have received the legal help she needed.

In the coming year, DVAP will look to help those who are in the military and those who have served in the military. "We're excited about our new monthly veterans clinic with Fulbright & Jaworski and Gardere," Alden says. "There is a lot of need within the veteran population and we are able to go above and beyond with the help of these firms." •

Frankly, if it weren't for our volunteer attorneys and support staff, most of these folks would not be able to obtain legal services. The Dallas legal community is so supportive. They're terrific.

— Michelle M. Alden DVAP Managing Attorney

566 Texas Bar Journal • July 2010 www.texasbar.com

Each Mother's Day, **Wafa Abdin** receives several phone calls. Of course, she receives calls from her two adult children, daughter Zaina Al-Mohtaseb and son Saleh Al-Mohtaseb. But then there is the call from a young man whom Abdin helped gain U.S. residency when it seemed that all hope was lost. There was also a call from a young immigrant whose wife and parents had been killed in political violence. His

daughter had been kidnapped. His brother had his hands chopped off. The one person who helped the young man was someone he viewed as a mother figure: Abdin.

In 1990, Wafa Abdin was a successful English teacher at a private school in Jordan working on her master's degree in English literature at the University of Jordan in Amman. She and her husband decided to relocate to the United States. Abdin and her husband, Nabil Al Mohtaseb, found that the immigration process was a long and difficult one. That's when Abdin decided to switch

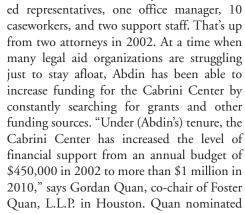
careers; she'd become an immigration attorney to help others like her. "My father was an attorney and judge, and the immigration process was still really difficult for us," says Abdin, legal director of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Houston-Galveston's St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigrant Legal Assistance (Cabrini Center). "As an immigrant myself, I understand that many times immigrants come through a system they don't understand. This helps me to relate to my clients on a deeper level.

"Often, you don't just assist clients with their immigration status," she continues. "Even those who are going to be deported, you work with them to make sure their detention is as comfortable as possible. In other cases, you are helping clients with financial needs, like utilities and permanent housing. It's not enough to represent clients — you have to connect with them."

Abdin's commitment to helping immigrants earned her the 2010 J. Chrys Dougherty Legal Services Award. The honor recognizes an outstanding legal services staff attorney. Texas-BarBooks has provided Abdin with a complimentary practice manual (up to a \$645 value) of her choice to help in her representation of pro bono clients.

The Cabrini Center represents individuals in immigration

legal matters, including citizenship applications, asylum and deportation cases for adults and unaccompanied minors, family visa and adjustment of status applications, and violence against women and human trafficking victims who are applying for legal permanent residency. Services are often provided at no charge; other times a minimal fee is required. The Cabrini Center operates with Abdin, seven attorneys, three accredit-



rs Abdin for award.

Wafa Abdin

Quan says Abdin's empathy for her clients is what makes her a staunch advocate for her clients. "Wafa has fought fiercely on behalf of a countless number of Cabrini Center clients," he says. "She has been a trailblazer in the immigration community in the Greater Houston area."

Abdin has had to learn quickly about her position at the Cabrini Center; she was named the center's director less than one year after she graduated from the University of Houston Law Center. When she started, many of the programs now in place were non-existent. Abdin was the one who implemented daily meetings among staff attorneys and helped forge good relationships with law enforcement. She's made the Cabrini Center run more efficiently to help serve as many clients as possible.

Despite the difficult work Abdin faces each day — the financial struggles of a legal aid organization, her clients' heart-breaking stories, and the sad reality that some of her clients will be deported — she enjoys the opportunity to help others who inspire her with their resilience despite the traumatic experiences they have endured. "My work is very special," Abdin says. "Once you have a vision of what you are doing, you can really enable yourself to do so much." •

Wafa has fought fiercely on behalf of a countless number of Cabrini Center clients. She has been a trailblazer in the immigration community in the Greater Houston area.

— Gordan Quan Co-chair of Foster Quan, L.L.P.

W. FRANK NEWTON AWARD

Patricia M. Cofty gives her free time to a Teen Court Program. Teresa Villaseñor Harris has done volunteer work with the Mexican Consulate. Tom O'Meara staffs a freeze night shelter in downtown Austin on cold winter nights. These are only a few examples of what attorneys and support staff with the Fowler Law Firm, P.C. contribute that sets the Austin firm apart from others. The firm is not just one that

lives pro bono at work — community service extends into each attorney's personal life. "It's really in our family tradition to serve the public," O'Meara says. "We really believe that we are here to serve the public. By doing that, we are building our community."

As the firm's founder, Laura Fowler set out in 2007 to assemble a team of

attorneys who are committed to making a meaningful difference in their community. Before founding the firm, Fowler had been part of Texas' largest woman-owned firm, which was also one of the Top 100 firms in the state. Fowler had also distinguished herself as one of the top real estate and school law attorneys in the state. But, she found that her true passion was community service and set out to create a firm whose attorneys were as passionate about serving others as she was. "There was never a need for me to be a cheerleader of community service," says Fowler. "Growth and profits are not the central or even primary reason we all come to work every day. In our daily law practice, we embrace the principles of kindly outreach and compassion to those less fortunate and in need."

Despite a tough economic climate, the firm has been able to grow quickly from six attorneys to 15 and from four support staff to nine. The reason for the firm's growth? The firm's organization and business model gives each attorney the freedom to pursue projects and pro bono opportunities that speak to them personally, thus increasing participation and contributions. "Laura really encourages our pro bono work," Harris says. "We are all allowed to really follow a path that we are passionate about."

Attorney Jack Ratliff observes that "so often the attitude is 'Pro bono work is just okay.' That's not the attitude here." In some cases, the firm's charitable spirit passes to clients, who then go on to serve the public in various ways.

Despite its size, the firm is a pro bono and community service powerhouse. In 2008, the firm donated 810 hours of pro bono work and \$40,387 to scholarships and nonprofit

organizations. In 2009, those numbers increased to 2,183 hours and \$46,386.24. For contributed hours and monetary donations in 2008 and 2009, the firm appeared in the Austin Business Journal's Top Corporate Philanthropists. In 2009, the Fowler Law Firm was awarded Top Pro Bono Firm by the Travis County Women Lawyers Association.



The Fowler Law Firm, P.C.

The firm's attorneys say they are grateful for legal aid organizations that help them pace themselves with pro bono work. O'Meara says the legal aid organizations he works with are good about only referring a set number of cases to him so he can balance his firm work with his pro bono work.

The Fowler Law Firm, P.C. is one of the 2010 recipients of the W. Frank Newton Award for its pro bono and community service work. The honor recognizes the pro bono contribution of attorney groups whose members have made an outstanding contribution in the provision of, or access to, legal services to the poor.

Fowler says she hopes other firms will embrace pro bono not only as a duty but also as a business strategy. She says that if a firm's focus is on pro bono and community service, it is still very possible to grow and make a profit. Fowler recognizes that firms are businesses that need to turn a profit, but by fostering an environment of giving, things work themselves out. "If you can attract great attorneys and support staff with huge hearts who truly understand the value and importance of public service, practicing law every day becomes a pure delight." •

Growth and profits are not the central or even primary reason we all come to work every day. In our daily law practice, we embrace the principles of kindly outreach and compassion to those less fortunate and in need.

— Laura Fowler Founder, Fowler Law Firm, P.C.

568 Texas Bar Journal • July 2010 www.texasbar.com

2010 PRO BONO AND LEGAL SERVICES AWARDS W. FRANK NEWTON AWARD



Marathon Oil Joe Simmons Legal Pro Bono Program — Houston

Mention the words "team" and building" in the same sentence, and things like trust building exercises and company retreats come to mind. What comes to mind when the legal team at the Houston office of Marathon Oil Corporation hears those words, though, is "pro bono." "Some firms play golf. We staff clinics," says Marathon Assistant General Counsel Richard L. "Dick" Horstman. "Doing pro bono helps enrich our jobs."

A pro bono program was established company-wide in 2008. The Houston legal department of Marathon Oil has participated in pro bono work through the Houston Volunteer Lawyer Program, the United Way, and the Women's Home. Since then, Marathon Oil has received several awards for its work: an Equal Access STAR Award from the Houston Bar Association, Outstanding Contribution to the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program by a Corporate Legal Department for 2008 and 2009, Marathon's Living Our Values Award for the Philanthropy/Community Outreach Program of the Year, and the 2010 Bench Bar Award for Corporate Legal Department.

With Marathon's help, more seven law clinics were staffed in 2009, with 433 hours of legal work donated. An additional 36 hours were devoted to the clinics by outside attorneys enlisted by Marathon.

Through HVLP's Equal Access to Justice Program, Marathon handled 15 cases in 2009. Marathon was especially receptive to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases, where lawyers work to prevent the deportation of unaccompanied minors. Many of the children face abuse or neglect if deported. In addition, Marathon partnered with Baker Botts to work as general counsel to the Women's Home. The Women's Home is a shelter for homeless women in the Houston area that offers counseling for mental illness and substance abuse. Together, Baker Botts and Marathon provided 29 hours of work by assisting in reviewing releases and helping with a major construction project.

Last year, Marathon hosted a two-hour training session for any attorney in Harris County who would be participating in a will-a-thon and a CLE seminar on immigration law. Several attorneys who participated in the CLE seminar have since volunteered to handle SIJS cases.

While immigration law and family law are different from the day-to-day legal work most Marathon attorneys take part in, there has been no lack of enthusiasm to participate in pro bono opportunities.

"Pro bono work is very consistent with Marathon's values," says Marathon Vice President and General Counsel Sylvia Kerrigan. "We always had a particular emphasis on community service. We have such fantastic lawyers that it seemed entirely consistent with what we already do."

The Marathon Oil Joe Simmons Legal Pro Bono Program — Houston is one of the 2010 recipients of W. Frank Newton Award for its pro bono and community service work. The honor recognizes the pro bono contribution of attorney groups whose members have made an outstanding contribution in the provision of, or access to, legal services to the poor.

"We're really humbled to be honored in this way," says Marathon Senior Counsel Karen B. Lukin. "There are so many great lawyers who do this kind of work. We not only are happy to do it, but we find it to be very rewarding and hope others will take the opportunity to give it a try."

Having pro bono participation from the top to the bottom is what helps make the program work, says Mitchell Lukin, a partner in Baker Botts, L.L.P. in Houston who nominated the firm for the award. He says that in 2009, Marathon's legal management actively participated in the clinics and assisted in the preparation of estate documents for clients. "Certain members also handled cases, including difficult immigration cases, for the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program and/or Catholic Charities," Lukin says. •

PRO BONO COORDINATOR

Ask Maria "Lulu" Villanueva for a picture of herself and she'll reply that she doesn't have one. "I'm always the one taking the pictures," she chuckles. As the clinics coordinator for Texas RioGrande Legal Aid in San Antonio, Villanueva is often behind the scenes. For the last eight years, she's been the

one that makes sure the several legal clinics that TRLA puts on go off without a hitch.

"Her tireless efforts and dedication in coordinating the client part of the Community Justice Program have greatly contributed to the program's success and its expansion," says TRLA San Antonio Branch Manager Ann Zaragoza. "Lulu has always made herself available to provide to others who operate or are considering operating similar programs in other areas guidance or assistance."

Among other things, Villanueva creates clients files, coordinates client attendance, and prepares preliminary pleadings for attorneys who volunteer with the Community Justice Program. The CJP is a collaborative effort by TRLA, the San Antonio Bar Association, and the San Antonio legal community to

provide free legal services to those who cannot otherwise access the legal system. Several CJP clinics are held each month, often dealing with uncontested matters such as divorce, children's court cases, veterans issues, wills, bankruptcy, and landlord-tenant issues. With Villanueva's help, volunteer attorneys basically show up and are ready to assist clients. "The CJP clinics are big and growing," Villanueva says. "It gets pretty hectic sometimes."

Over the years, Villanueva has created some forms and cheat sheets for the clinics, enabling her to efficiently assist the volunteer attorneys in handling their cases. Doing such footwork helps ease volunteer attorneys' anxiety. "We know that this is not their area of expertise, so all of the forms and papers they need are in each attorney file," she says.

Villanueva is the first recipient of the Pro Bono Coordinator Award. The award honors an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to the delivery of, and access to, legal

services to the poor, while serving as the pro bono coordinator for a volunteer attorney organization or group, local bar association, law firm, law school, corporate legal office, governmental law department, or legal services organization. Villanueva, who's been working with legal aid organizations for almost 34 years, says working with TRLA and CJ P has been an honor because clients often have nowhere to turn for help. "A lot of times, clients don't know about the resources that are out there; they don't know there is help, and even if they do, they are unsure of how proceed," Villanueva says. "These clinics help them and they are grateful for that help." She remembers an instance where a woman had been separated from her husband for 20 years. The woman was unable to receive her



Maria "Lulu" Villanueva

Social Security benefits and was having difficulties obtaining a divorce. Through the CJP, she obtained a divorce and was on her way to receiving her benefits. She was so grateful for the help, Villanueva says, that she cried at the clinic.

Often, Villanueva's hard work comes at a sacrifice. "It's been rough. There have been times when I've had to miss family events because I'm helping out at a clinic," she says. "There are times when it's exhausting, but it's also very rewarding. My family has been really supportive of the work that I do. I really enjoy what I am doing — I get to meet and befriend so many wonderful people in the community."

Her tireless efforts and dedication in coordinating the client part of the Community Justice Program have greatly contributed to the program's success and its expansion.

> — Ann Zaragoza TRLA San Antonio Branch Manager

570 Texas Bar Journal • July 2010 www.texasbar.com