

PARTNERING for PRO BONO

TYLA FACILITATES PRO BONO INITIATIVE FOR TEXAS COUNSEL

BY PATRICIA L. GARCIA

While there is one Texas attorney for every 322 Texas citizens, there is only one Texas legal aid attorney for every 10,838 indigent Texans. Texas Young Lawyers Association President Jennifer Evans Morris is well aware of those statistics. That is why

she wanted TYLA to do something to help meet the needs of low-income Texans.

"TYLA's focus this year has been on providing practical resources to help those we serve better deal with the economy — we specifically wanted to do something tangible to increase access to justice," Morris says. "We knew the need for legal services would spike this year and that demands on attorneys to bill and pay the bills could potentially cause a decrease in pro bono services. We looked for an innovative way to make pro bono easier for in-house counsel and to encourage firms to promote pro bono services to their associates."

That's how *Partnering for Pro Bono* (PFP) was born. *Partnering for Pro Bono* is an initiative to encourage and facilitate pro bono work between in-house

counsel and law firm lawyers. Through a series of questions on the PFP website (**www.tyla.org/partneringforprobono**), inhouse counsel are matched with law firm lawyers. Once matched, the newly formed team selects an available case from the PFP website. Cases are supplied through the Texas Lawyers Help website (www.TexasLawyersHelp.org) and include a wide variety of legal areas. Participating attorneys are covered by profes-

sional liability insurance supplied by the State Bar.

Morris acknowledges that there are corporations already working with firms on pro bono matters, but adds that "*Partnering for Pro Bono* is a way to simplify pro bono partnerships and to open up even more opportunities for pro bono work."

TYLA Director **Brooke Ulrickson Allen** says the project is beneficial not only for needy Texans, but also for the attorneys who participate. "It is the right thing to do to give back to our community," Allen says. "And, by participating, you can gain up to five hours of free CLE credit, network with other attorneys, and expand your field of practice by taking a case outside your normal practice area."

Morris agrees, saying Partnering for

Pro Bono offers firm lawyers a chance to gain experience and inhouse counsel an opportunity to work with an attorney with a flexible schedule and additional resources.

HOW IT WORKS

Partnering for Pro Bono is a web-based program that partners in-house counsel with law firm lawyers to facilitate and increase pro bono participation in Texas.

- Participating lawyers are matched on a TYLA-sponsored website, www.tyla.org/partneringforprobono.
- Partnered lawyers select cases of interest from local legal aid and volunteer lawyer programs made available online through the Texas Lawyers Help website (www.TexasLawyersHelp.org).
- The State Bar provides professional liability coverage.

422 Texas Bar Journal • May 2011 www.texasbar.com

Attorneys who have signed up for the program say that participating in the program is simple to do. "So far, I've really enjoyed the experience," says Jennyfer Gray, in-house counsel to FAIRPAY Solutions in Dallas and who represents one client through the initiative. "It's easy to participate — the work is already done for you. Just look at an email and reply for the cases you are interested in. The initial intake is already completed.

"The mentoring is terrific too," Gray says. "I have some family law experience from years ago, but having a current family law attorney double-check my work gives me peace of mind. Being a small part of [my client's] success plan is such a positive part of my job. It really puts me in touch with the idealistic law student I was years ago."

Colton Lawrence, website coordinator for Texas Lawyers Help, which is administered by the Texas Legal Services Center in Austin, was instrumental in coordinating efforts to get the cases posted on www.TexasLawyersHelp.org and worked with the State Bar Legal Services Division to promote the effort to pro bono coordinators throughout the state. This resulted in 175 new cases posted to the site. He says

the program creates a system for both pro bono coordinators and corporate counsel and law firm attorneys. "The value of our partnership is enhanced by extending the network of attorneys who might take pro bono cases and by offering pro bono coordinators another avenue to promote the cases for which they still need assistance," Lawrence says. "Partnering for Pro Bono will make it easier for corporate counsel and law firms to find viable cases already vetted through the legal aid system."

In addition to State Bar and the Texas Legal Services Center, TYLA worked with the Texas Access to Justice Commission and the Texas Access to Justice Foundation. The Foundation held a contest that encourages legal aid providers to post cases on TexasLawyersHelp.org. The State Bar Corporate Counsel Section provided TYLA with a grant for Partnering for Pro Bono



Texas Young Lawyers Association Director Brook Ulrickson Allen helps an attorney sign up for Partnering for Pro Bono, an initiative to encourage and facilitate pro bono work between inhouse counsel and law firm lawyers.

and invited TYLA to the Corporate Counsel Institute to present the intiative.

The TYLA Low Income Texans Committee implemented Partnering for Pro Bono. TYLA Treasurer Alyssa Long served as executive committee adviser while TYLA Directors Katy Boatman, Giugi Carminati, Michael Deadman, and Sam Houston served as co-chairs of the project. Vice chairs included Allen, Long, Soraya Hanshew, Clint Harbour, Danny Razo, Clint Woods, and Baylor Wortham.

For more information about Partnering for Pro Bono or to sign up for the program, visit www.tyla.org/partneringforprobono.

PATRICIA L. GARCIA

is associate editor of the Texas Bar Journal.

SIGN UP FOR PARTNERING FOR PRO BONO **AND WIN AN IPAD!**

If you sign up for Partnering for Pro Bono (www.tyla.org/partnering forprobono), find a partner, and take a case by June 15, your name will be placed in a drawing to win an iPad at the State Bar Annual Meeting, June 23-24 in San Antonio. You also can earn five hours of CLE credit free while assisting with legal services to the poor.

