

PRO BONO Opportunities

CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION PROGRAM

The Crime Victim Compensation Program is an innovative project developed by the VSB Young Lawyers Conference (YLC) in conjunction with the Criminal Injury Compensation Fund. It provides pro bono attorneys to crime victims seeking compensation for crime-related injuries. The fund was established in 1977 after a legislative finding that “many innocent persons suffer physical injury or death as a result of criminal acts . . . such persons or their dependents may thereby suffer disability, incur financial hardships or become dependent upon public assistance.” Declaring that governmental financial assistance to crime victims was a “matter of moral responsibility,” the Virginia General Assembly subsidizes a major portion of the fund through fines paid by convicted criminals. Monies are disbursed to victims by the Virginia Workers’ Compensation Commission, the fund administrator. Pro bono attorneys are needed to assist crime victims through the commission’s appeals process. CLE-approved training is available. Interested attorneys should contact Maya Eckstein, chair of the VSB YLC Pro Bono Committee, at (804) 788-8200.

PROTECTIVE ORDERS FOR HANOVER RESIDENTS

The Hanover Pro Bono Protective Order Project is another innovative program co-sponsored by the VSB YLC. Other partners include the Virginia Poverty Law Center, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, and the Hanover Domestic Violence Task Force. The project provides pro bono legal representation for battered women seeking protective orders in Hanover County. It offers volunteer attorneys from Richmond and neighboring areas valuable courtroom experience, malpractice insurance coverage, specialized training, CLE credit, and the option of Virginia income tax credits for their services.

Because of the small number of practicing attorneys available to provide pro bono assistance and the growing number of protective order petitions in Hanover, battered women seeking protective orders were increasingly unrepresented in the J&DR Court. The new program was developed to mesh the interests of urban attorneys and other nearby practitioners with the emerging needs of a more rural population.

Volunteers represent battered women with cases listed on the protective order docket, so the work is time-limited and task-specific. Attorneys can help vulnerable women protect themselves and their children, and help place families on a path to lives free from violence. Specialized CLE-approved trainings on litigating protective orders are available for volunteer attorneys. Interested parties should contact Pamela Russell at the VPLC (804-782-9430) for further details.

SUPPORTING RURAL LEGAL SERVICES

Rappahannock Legal Services (RLS), Inc.—Fredericksburg is interested in hearing from attorneys who are willing to accept pro bono referrals of low-income clients. RLS provides free legal services in non-fee-generating civil matters to those who cannot afford an attorney. The use of pro bono attorneys is an integral part of the RLS mission. This is true more than ever due to an increase in cases, and a decrease in funding. In addition, the use of pro bono attorneys is required by RLS’ federal funding regulations.

RLS has historically offered state income tax credits through the Neighborhood Assistance Act Program (NAP) to cover a portion of service and other donations made by law firms and local businesses. As of July 1, when a new NAP provision takes effect, RLS will be in a position to offer tax credits to individuals for up to 100% of the amount of a financial contribution between \$50 and \$200. This development meshes with new public service rules covering pro bono activities (see Virginia Rule 6.1: “Voluntary Pro Bono Publico Service”, which encourages Virginia lawyers to voluntarily donate 2% of their professional time to pro bono legal services, or to provide financial support to legal service programs as an alternative method of fulfilling their responsibility). Attorneys interested in volunteering professional services or in making a monetary donation to help this rural legal services program may call Executive Director, William L. Botts, III, or Pro Bono Coordinator Shawne L. Dunham, at (540) 371-1214 for more information (e-mail: rlsfred@erols.com).

LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

Political dissidents and members of the “wrong” ethnic group are sometimes forced to leave their homelands in fear for their lives. Some come to the United States where they have only a year to apply for asylum. This requires in-depth interviewing to assess the individual and research his or her country. It is a unique learning experience and often is the only way to save someone’s life. For more information call Marilyn Breslow (804-355-4559) at Refugee and Immigration Services of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond.

Visit the Pro Bono page on the VSB Web site for pro bono training and opportunities listed at

www.vsb.org/probono/

Pro Bono Profiles: Maya Eckstein “The Privilege of Being”

by Nechama Masliansky

Maya M. Eckstein is a young litigation lawyer at Hunton & Williams. Her *pro bono* efforts have brought her statewide attention, but she cringes at the suggestion that she could be called a role model.

She points to Steve Rosenfield, this year’s recipient of the Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Pro Bono Award who has devoted his entire professional life to *pro bono* work, including years of taking death row civil rights cases for “next to nothing, or nothing at all.” In contrast, she says, she is only a few years out of law school and is still beginning her career.

Nevertheless, Maya has accomplished enough in a short time to have been deemed worthy of the R. Edwin Burnette, Jr. Young Lawyer of the Year Award by the Young Lawyers Conference (YLC) of the Virginia State Bar in 1999. She was presented a Service Award in 2000 from the YLC for her work in the past year when she successfully spearheaded the YLC’s Domestic Violence Safety Project. She has taken on other YLC initiatives and has been active in several other organizations.¹ In addition, she serves on at least one *pro bono* case panel.

Ask Maya what motivates her to get so involved in *pro bono* matters, and you will get a lawyer-like answer: “It’s our responsibility as lawyers. It’s the right thing to do. If someone has the time and ability, I don’t see an excuse for not doing it. Why not do it?” She says that she can understand that someone like a solo practitioner may not have the time.

But if you talk with Maya a little longer, you may discover another, deeper motivation. Neither of her parents did volunteer work as she grew up. They were both busy scientists, raising three children. So that’s not it. But the reasons were close to home. Although the family is not religiously observant, “. . . Passover—every year—we have to be home for.”

Maya’s grandparents lived in Poland when the Germans invaded during World War II. Her father, Yoram, who was two years old at the time, and her mother’s family all fled East, ending in the labor camps of Siberia and exile under Stalin. Maya’s mother, Yona, was born in Kazakstan. Both families returned to Poland after the war, where they lived under Communist rule. In 1957, Maya’s parents and their families emigrated to Israel, where they experienced freedom for the first time in almost 20 years.

The two émigrés met in Israel, married and had a son, Gabriel, then Maya, and another daughter, Michal.

Yona became a chemist and Yoram became a hydrogeologist. They both obtained Ph.D.s, taught at universities, and worked in industry. As a result, Maya has lived in Israel; Boston; Reno, Nevada; Kent, Ohio; and Newark, Ohio (near Columbus). Maya’s siblings are also thriving, apparently as accomplished and brilliant as their parents.

A handful of her parents’ relatives survived the Holocaust. Most of the relatives live in Israel, where Maya visits them as often as possible.

Her parents never discuss the events that occurred during the war—except at Passover.

Every Passover, the family gets together, and Maya’s father leads the service. His subject is always about one’s personal passage to freedom, she says. It is also about the idea that, “but for what they suffered, I would not be here. But for people helping the Jews in the Holocaust, I would not be here.”

“It’s a responsibility. My life has to mean something, to justify their sacrifices. I couldn’t go through life not doing anything and justify my existence.

“Because I am a Jew and my ancestors were murdered because they were Jews, I can’t let that be nothing to me,” Maya says.

Three months ago, Maya married. Her husband, Neil, who is not Jewish, “understands and respects” her feelings, she says. Before they were engaged, she took him to Israel. It was important to her that she marry someone who would “understand, appreciate and respect my background.” (A previous boyfriend told her he could not understand why “six million people killed 50 years ago” meant anything to her. She decided that she could not marry him.)

Maya majored in journalism at Kent State University. She decided to become a lawyer, she says, because “everyone I was covering as a journalist—the decision-makers, the people in power—had law degrees.” She earned a J.D. at Syracuse University in 1995.

Now she says, “I am in a position to help people, whether clients or others. I hope in the future I will be more able to help people.” She explains, “People in a position of power have more ability to help others—to influence others, to put the programs into place to help people.” She cites the example of Lewis Powell and Legal Services.

She talks about new YLC initiatives, including a Crime Victims Compensation Program to provide *pro bono* assistance to crime victims—a good project for *pro bono* attorneys, she says, because each case has a defined beginning, middle and end. She is open to “all ideas and possibilities” for other projects. “We



Maya M. Eckstein

need people to think of ideas for programs.” She offers her aid in helping to get those programs under way.

For Maya, at this time of her life, there is no alternative but to keep developing new programs that help people. “This is the price we pay,” she says, “for the privilege of being.” [↗](#)

Nechama Masliansky is a staff attorney with the Virginia Poverty Law Center in Richmond. She formerly was executive director of the National Center on Women & Family Law, a sole practitioner, and an executive editor at Matthew Bender & Co.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Julie D. McClellan, “Maya Eckstein Named 1999 R. Edwin Burnette, Jr. Young Lawyer of the Year,” *Virginia Lawyer* (June/July 1999), p. 70.

Tell Us Your Story

Last year, the Council of the Virginia State Bar approved a Resolution to Enhance Pro Bono Publico activities by lawyers in the Commonwealth. The Resolution (www.vsb.org/probono) reflected then-pending changes under the new Rules of Professional Conduct. It recognized the spectrum of volunteer work that lawyers engage in and encouraged attorneys to see that civil legal and indigent criminal defense programs were appropriately funded. It also encouraged members of the bar to share information about their good works to inspire like-minded professionalism and to inform the general public about the valuable contributions being made by lawyers across the state.

Since then, attorneys working collaboratively with other professionals and community groups have initiated new or strengthened existing public service projects at the local, regional, and statewide levels. Designed to help meet traditional and emerging needs for free and nominal fee legal services, such efforts are often spearheaded by younger members of the bar. Fortunately, their enthusiasm finds strong encouragement from experienced practitioners and from every level of the Virginia judiciary.

More than a snap shot, this article focuses on major influences on one notable young professional’s life. Whether you are a newer member of the bar or considering retirement, please let us know about your own public service work and/or that of your colleagues and mentors. Or, when the next client in a series of those benefiting from your sliding fee scale asks for feedback on how they might thank you for your outstanding service, why not encourage them to contact the bar? Our goal is to feature the compelling work of public-spirited lawyers and others who go out of their way to ensure that the public has access to free and affordable legal counsel. We hope to highlight work being done in each of Virginia’s judicial circuits and we can help locate authors to interview subjects for future stories. Telephone and e-mail inquiries may be directed to VSB Publications Director Rod Coggin at (804) 775-0585 or coggin@vsb.org.