

# Outreach

Gardner Carton & Douglas LLC's  
Pro Bono Commitment

Volume 1, Number 1

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## GCD PRO BONO COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dewey Crawford  
Antonio DeBlasio  
Karin Donahue  
Andre Fiebig  
Kevin Freeman  
Mark Furlane  
Robert Guenther  
Maureen Donahue Hardwick  
Steven Murawski  
Tracy O'Keefe  
Jesse Ruiz  
Matthew Share

Welcome to the premier issue of *Outreach*, a quarterly newsletter showcasing GCD's strong commitment to providing public service to the community and to the legal profession. Many of our lawyers devote substantial amounts of time delivering legal services to charitable, cultural, educational, religious and political organizations, as well as to individuals with financial need. In each issue of *Outreach*, we will highlight individual pro bono activities and share with you important information related to the firm's pro bono initiatives.



### GCD's Pro Bono Committee meets to discuss the Firm's pro bono initiatives

GCD encourages all lawyers to engage regularly in some form of pro bono activity. The Model Rules of Professional Conduct strongly endorse pro bono service by every attorney. The American Bar Association has recommended at least 50 hours of pro bono legal service each year. GCD shares the ABA's sentiments and encourages each attorney to participate in at least 50 hours of pro bono activity in one or more of the following areas:

- Poverty Law
- Civil Rights and Public Law Rights
- Representation of Charitable Organizations
- Administration of Justice

GCD has established a standing Pro Bono Committee to coordinate and monitor the Firm's pro bono legal work and to ensure that all GCD lawyers are alerted to new pro bono opportunities. The committee posts information on the pro bono opportunities page of the GCD intranet each month.

**On behalf of GCD and the Pro Bono Committee,  
thank you for your commitment to pro bono legal service  
and thank you for giving back!**

# Getting Involved

## GCD Clinic: Our Lady of Mercy Church

When **Jesse Ruiz** joined the Firm, he noticed that the Chicago Volunteer Legal Services clinic that GCD sponsored in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood was in a low-need area of the City. He approached the Pro Bono Committee about sponsoring a new clinic and after contacting CVLS, GCD began staffing the clinic at Our Lady of Mercy Church in July of 1999. On the fourth Saturday of every month at least four GCD attorneys and paralegals staff the clinic and see approximately six to 12 clients. The parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy Church hold a special Mass and brunch each year as a token of appreciation to the GCD employees who dedicate their time to the clinic throughout the year. **Jesse** finds his work at the clinic to be a unique and fulfilling experience.

*"It's challenging because we are usually working with issues and areas of law that we are not accustomed to," said Jesse. "It's rewarding work because we often times help people with problems that can have a profound impact on their lives."*

When **Tony DeBlasio** received his first Distinguished Service Award in 1995 from the CVLS Foundation, we knew he deserved it. When he received his second award in 1999, it reaffirmed his continued dedication to pro bono work. **Tony** is co-chair of the clinic at Our Lady of Mercy Church with **Jesse Ruiz**.

As co-chair, **Tony** makes sure that the clinic is well-staffed, well-attended and runs as smoothly as possible. The clinic's clients are typically low-income individuals who do not speak English.

**Tony** finds his work at the clinic to be very satisfying.

Many times, clients need help with a fairly simple legal matter, but they don't know which action to take first. However, the issue may involve a claim against them for as much as half their annual salary.

*"Guaranteed, no matter how you felt that morning, when you leave the clinic you feel great. It makes your day," said Tony.*



Tracy O'Keefe, Carrie Rivera and Program Coordinator Ramonita DeJesus are flanked by parishioner translators of Our Lady of Mercy

## Chicago Community Ventures

It was no accident when **Rob Guenther** met Lauren Robinson, the Director of Business Advisory Services for Chicago Community Ventures (CCV) at a recent meeting of the Public Interest Law Initiative's Pro Bono Initiative. He had been looking for a good opportunity to get the Firm's corporate attorneys involved in a unique type of pro bono work.

CCV is a not-for-profit community economic development group. CCV is developing a private equity fund and a revolving loan fund to make investments in low- and middle-income businesses in Chicago's Enterprise Zones and Empowerment Zones. While CCV hopes to make a return for its investors, the Fund's ultimate goal

is to create jobs and stimulate the economy throughout the Chicago metropolitan area.

GCD is serving as counsel to Chicago Community Ventures on a pro bono basis. Many of GCD's corporate attorneys have committed to the endeavor. Currently, **John Boelter, Charles Kolin, Ed Tabaczyk** and **Rob Guenther** are actively undertaking projects for CCV.

*"It's important that we keep ourselves grounded," said Rob. "Working with CCV gives us an opportunity to be a part of an organization that will make a meaningful, positive contribution to our community."*

## GCD Helps Latino Business Community

The Pro Bono Committee has recently developed a new non-litigation opportunity that helps individuals or small business entities from the Latino community form new business entities in Illinois. Specifically, Gardner Carton & Douglas has agreed to accept referrals from the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce of individuals or small business entities from the Latino community that cannot afford legal counsel. Once referred, a GCD attorney assists the pro bono client in forming an Illinois C Corporation, S Corporation or Limited Liability Company. The Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce has already referred one individual who is forming an S Corporation.

Another non-litigation opportunity is GCD's renewed alliance with the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF). GCD has committed to providing two volunteers once a month to conduct intake at LAF's offices in downtown Chicago. After the intake, attorney volunteers can choose whether or not to actively take on the matter depending on their interest and its fit with GCD's pro bono policy. When GCD agreed to make this commitment, Dick Hess of LAF commented that our effort will greatly help LAF with the overwhelming influx of requests for legal assistance they receive.

## Aid to a Family in Crisis

**Mary Devlin Capizzi** just concluded the pro bono representation of a woman dying of brain cancer. The stricken mother and her family needed help in understanding their options during this difficult period, particularly in preparing financial and health powers of attorney. In light of the mother's terminal condition, and with a short time frame, **Mary** worked closely with the family to make sure the necessary documents were completed.

## In Their Own Words

"It's a wonderful feeling to know that you are really helping someone." - **Priya Jenveja**

"We're here to help people. We're lucky and fortunate and we shouldn't take that for granted."

- **Jesse Ruiz**

"We're professionals, but we are basically noble servants." - **Paul Kim**

"I'm in a service profession. I feel as though I am required to help those less fortunate than I am. It's a sense of obligation I feel as a lawyer." - **Tony DeBlasio**

## Pro Bono Legal Service Programs

In order to encourage the participation of attorneys and paralegals in pro bono work, the Firm has established relationships with several service providers. A variety of programs exist, allowing our attorneys to match their interests with service to the community.

### Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation (CVLS)

CVLS is an organization of 2,000 volunteer attorneys and paralegals that represents low-income Chicagoans in civil matters. CVLS operates free neighborhood legal clinics throughout Chicago. CVLS helps clients with divorces, guardianships and economic defense cases as well as emergency legal needs. **For more information contact Tracy O'Keefe, Jesse Ruiz or Tony DeBlasio.**

### Center for Disability and Elder Law (CDEL)

CDEL was the first legal service provider in Illinois devoted solely to providing direct, accessible legal services to people with disabilities. CDEL's mission has expanded to include services to senior citizens. Volunteer paralegals are trained in interview techniques by the CDEL staff and perform client intakes over the telephone. **For more information contact Tracy O'Keefe.**

### Lawyers for the Creative Arts (LCA)

LCA provides free legal assistance and legal education to artists and arts organizations throughout Illinois. Volunteer pro bono attorneys for LCA educate artists and arts organizations about their legal rights and responsibilities. Attorneys work matters in such areas as copyright law, trademark law, arts and entertainment business formation, contract cases and litigation. **For more information contact Ira Kalina.**

### Midwest Immigrant and Human Rights Center (MIHRC)

MIHRC provides advice in political asylum applications by using volunteer attorneys who are assisted by MIHRC staff. Once a month MIHRC sends law firms a list of current cases that require staffing by a volunteer attorney to staff.

### Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, Inc. (MACC)

Representing MACC small business members is an initiative aimed at capitalizing on corporate attorneys' and paralegals' skills, while contributing to the economic development in the Latino community. GCD accepts MACC referrals for small businesses that require counseling, advice and assistance to complete and submit the forms necessary to form a corporation in Illinois. **For more information contact Steve Murawski.**



## GCD Paralegals Receive National Pro Bono Recognition

At the June 7<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Paralegal Meeting, five GCD paralegals received certificates of achievement and pins from the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA), recognizing that they dedicated more than 24 hours to pro bono service during 2001. The honored paralegals were **Kevin McGivney, Shelley Clifford, Terri Krivis, Sonja Jones** and **Tracy O'Keefe**. **Jim Parsons** distributed the NFPA awards.

**Kevin** worked more than 50 pro bono hours, mostly devoted to the City of Chicago Gun Litigation. **Terri, Shelley** and **Sonja** worked 30+, 50+ and 24+ pro bono hours respectively. Much of their pro bono time was spent conducting telephone intakes with prospective pro bono clients for the Center for Disability and Elder Law (CDEL). It was through their determined efforts that more than 58 CDEL clients received much-needed legal assistance during 2001. **Tracy** worked more than 100 pro bono hours coordinating the staffing of pro bono cases for various agen-



**Shelley Clifford, Tracy O'Keefe, Kevin McGivney and Terri Krivis accept their awards**

cies and attending the Chicago Volunteer Legal Service Clinic as a case intake volunteer.

### Priya Jenveja Fights for Her Client's Life

Aminata Danedoubi, a citizen of Niger, Africa, owes her life to **Priya Jenveja**. Aminata fled to the United States seeking asylum after her cousin, President Barre, was assassinated by his own military guard in a coup. Aminata protested her cousin's death and demanded an investigation.

Soon afterwards, Aminata felt her own life was in danger. She received an invitation to attend a medical mission, which she discovered was actually going to be an attempt on her life. With the assistance of a labor union, Aminata was sent to the United States under the pretext that she was attending a labor seminar. When she arrived stateside, she immediately filed for asylum.

A judge was about to deny her asylum claim, but then recommended she obtain an attorney and re-apply. **Priya** took the case and re-filed Aminata's asylum application, researched the law, gathered evidence, drafted affidavits and a

trial brief, and obtained an expert witness to testify.

During the trial, the judge was very hostile to Aminata, in part due to her inability to speak much English and the lack of corroborating evidence that she indeed was the cousin of President Barre. After hours of hard work, **Priya** assembled enough evidence to support Aminata's claim. She then convinced the judge that Aminata's testimony was credible.

Although it is rare for the United States government to appeal a case where the judge ruled for the asylee, this time they did. The appeal process took a year, but the verdict was recently affirmed.

**Priya** is currently working on a petition to allow Aminata's husband and children to join her in the United States. **Priya** is still in contact with Aminata who calls repeatedly to say thank you. "This case is incomparable to anything else I've ever worked on," **Priya** said.

### Paul Kim Reaches out to Nursing Home Resident

A nursing home in Maryland is suing a resident and her son for more than \$16,000 in past due nursing bills. During trial the resident was found to be solely responsible for all expenses and the son had no liability. **Paul Kim** is representing the resident and advised her regarding her options, ranging from her right to sue her son in a third party action to filing for Chapter 7 bankruptcy.

The resident currently has two life insurance policies that include cash values that would make her ineligible for Medicaid. Medicaid is currently paying her bills and **Paul** hopes to find a way to make her Medicaid eligibility continue. The focus of **Paul's** work is to make sure the resident is allowed to stay at the nursing home and receives the type of care that she currently needs.

**Paul** notices a definite difference between his pro bono case and other cases he has worked on. "There is a huge difference between corporate clients and individual clients," said **Paul**. "You can definitely sense closure in your pro bono cases and that's very gratifying."

## An Effective Method for Reaching—and Teaching—Autistic Children

Janelle Williams is the mother of an autistic son and has had countless problems finding good educational opportunities for him. With no real help available, she took it upon herself to teach him and developed a very effective program. Janelle discovered that autistic children learn well if their learning is based upon patterns and colors. Using Janelle's technique, her son began to progress rapidly. She is now instructing other autistic children.

**Brian Rupp** met Janelle when she sought assistance from Lawyers for the Creative Arts to protect her teaching method. "It's very rare to have a patent pro bono case," said **Brian**. Although the laws have broadened to protect her teaching method, **Brian** believes that there are still challenges in protecting this teaching tool because it is a non-traditional type of invention in the eyes of the Patent Office.

The Naperville school district is in the process of using Janelle's teaching method to work with autistic children at its schools.

## From a Dream to a Nightmare

Approximately three years ago, Syamalan (Sam) N., an immigrant from India, used his life's savings to buy a convenience store on Lincoln Avenue. Sam sought the American dream by building a small business to support his family, but his dream turned into a nightmare.

He leased a cash station machine for his store but could not get the needed technical support from the vendor to operate it. Although the machine was inoperative, Sam was still being billed for the lease payments on the machine by the financing company to whom the vendor transferred the lease. Without a cash station machine, Sam's store lost business to the White Hen Pantry a block away.

The things got worse. The financing company sued Sam for back due lease payments on the cash station machine. Other store-related debts were mounting as well. Sam tried to sell the store, but his landlord would not allow assignment of the store lease. Meanwhile, Sam had also fallen behind on his mortgage payments and was in danger of losing his home.

GCD helped Sam with the sale of his house to avoid foreclosure.

## Teaming Up: Gardner Carton & Douglas and Legal Counsel for the Elderly

**Maureen Donahue Hardwick** and **Jennifer Lewis** are handling cases referred by the Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) for which they are preparing wills and health/financial powers of attorney for two elderly women.

"It's been gratifying work because the clients have really appreciated our efforts," said **Maureen**.

She commented that LCE has been very helpful by providing significant mentoring and support in handling the matters.

LCE provides a detailed questionnaire for eliciting the information necessary to prepare wills, and it has good samples of wills and powers of attorney to use as templates for preparing documents for our clients.



**Sam N. signs an agreement to sell his store**

With the proceeds from the sale, he paid off some debt and bought a condo for his wife and two sons, both high honor students (his eldest child received the highest PSAT score in his high school and is a National Merit Finalist.) GCD, thanks to **Mike Condrón**, successfully defended the cash station lawsuit. **Jesse Ruiz** worked with the landlord to negotiate a lease that would be acceptable to buyers. Meanwhile, Sam

had fallen behind on his mortgage payments on his new condo and it was now also in foreclosure. Finally, a new buyer submitted a bid and **Jesse** assembled a GCD team consisting of **Jeff Blumberg**, **Julie Workman** and **Deb Connor**, to negotiate a new assignable store lease and the asset sale. The asset purchase agreement was signed in October 2002 and the transaction closed in January. The proceeds from the sale of the store, about \$35,000, will be

just enough to pay off Sam's debts. GCD labor and employment attorney **Mario Utreras** has worked with Sam on the foreclosure proceedings on his condo.

Thanks to the efforts of the GCD team, the Firm has helped Sam's family dodge financial catastrophe and work their way through a difficult time in their lives.