

A Call Out to Volunteer

I joined the advisory board for Metro Volunteer Lawyers (MVL) in early 2016. I had only been in private practice for a year and, although I had heard of the organization and been to the Barrister's Ball, I did not know much about its mission. Prior to 2015, I had worked as a staff attorney for the Colorado Court of Appeals and was not permitted to do any outside legal work, even for pro bono clients. My firm, Ciancio Ciancio Brown, has been very active with MVL and they urged me to become involved as a representative from the Adams Broomfield Bar Association. After attending quarterly meetings for the board, volunteering, and meeting with the committees I had been assigned to, I have had the privilege of learning and being part of an organization that gives attorneys, new and old, opportunities to fulfill the most fundamental and noble tenet of our profession: to bring justice to those who would otherwise lack meaningful access to the courts and the legal system.

MVL services individuals referred by Colorado Legal Services and who meet certain financial guidelines. MVL provides eligible clients assistance in the areas of Family Law, Bankruptcy, Landlord-Tenant, and helps those needing Power of Attorneys. Its outreach is extensive. It holds clinics at the courts in the wider metropolitan area for pro se litigants and offers a frequent, general clinic at the Indian Center. It now

offers unbundled services and provides attorney representation for individuals needing it, such as when the other party has an attorney or the case is contested. MVL's experienced staff guides volunteers and clients alike at the legal clinics, resulting in an efficient and productive process. For attorneys assigned to handle specific cases, MVL offers valuable mentoring assistance which takes stress off of those attorneys who become embroiled in an unexpectedly challenging or complicated case. MVL has built into its system support for both its clients and its volunteers and, in that way, is able to meet the needs of a significant segment of the urban population that would otherwise be shut out of the judicial process or forced to fumble blindly through it.

I contacted Gina Tincher, a litigation attorney at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, who recently took on a case for MVL, to find out about her experience. MVL initially contacted her firm's pro bono eviction team to ask for assistance with a case. The client, a disabled 64-year-old man, had been living with his brother in the brother's home for about 20 years. The brother passed away, leaving the home to his son, who then sold the home to a third-party developer. The developer planned to scrap the home to build condos and initiated an eviction action to remove the client. Because the client had no lease

with his brother, he lacked a strong defense against the eviction.

Gina's team still appeared on his behalf at the possession hearing and successfully negotiated a longer move-out period of two weeks, as well as the dismissal of the eviction action upon compliance with the move-out deadline. Gina used the two weeks to find subsidized housing for the client. She encountered several complicating factors: the client did not qualify as low-income, even though his income was limited to his social security benefits of about \$800 per month, and he had several pets he was extremely attached to. Gina found one multi-tenant apartment which was extremely small and did not allow pets and so the client has, instead, been living in his car with his pets. While the outcome of the case might seem less than ideal, Gina and her team registered the client for the Denver Housing Authority's lottery which they hope will soon yield some good news for him. In addition, the client now works with a caseworker at a mental health center and has access to fresh produce, which he uses to cook meals for the other homeless individuals near where he stays. The most moving part of Gina's story is that the client joined her for Thanksgiving.

I also spoke with Janet Price, a certified paralegal at my firm, who regularly volunteers for MVL at the family law clinic held at the Denver District Court. She

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told me that she has always felt that she should give back and MVL provided the only forum where she could contribute as a paralegal. Volunteering also helped her become familiar with family law when she was starting out in that area. She related that she took a multi-year break from volunteering, but when she joined Ciancio Ciancio Brown, she started volunteering again because it was encouraged and supported. She said that MVL made it easy to get involved through their website, and that when she showed up for her first clinic, she received a thorough introduction to what MVL does and what they wanted their volunteers to do. Because she is familiar with the paperwork required for a family law case, Janet was able to jump in right away and help the clients without further guidance. However, for volunteers not as familiar, a staff person is always present to answer questions. Janet feels like the clients are always very appreciative of her efforts. Janet finds helping clients navigate the judicial district forms, which can be confusing especially to those who have little exposure to the legal system, and answering questions to be very fulfilling, as it seems to reduce her clients' stress and give them more confidence to engage with the court to get the relief they need.

I've outlined these experiences to show that what MVL does is not only vital, but it is structured to make it easy for attorneys and paralegals to volunteer and get legal services to those who desperately need that assistance. MVL makes sure that clients who need help get it and that volunteers who encounter the unexpected get the necessary support. Volunteering for MVL is an excellent way to serve our legal community and firms can contribute to that effort by encouraging their attorneys, and paralegals alike, to get involved. There are always clinics to sign up for and cases needing attorneys assigned. Please check MVL's website and either hit the volunteering tab or give them a call. Do that today — there are a lot of people needing and deserving of your help. 🙏



Are We Seeing a Return to Decency Thanks to the Pandemic?

(Maybe, but Probably Not)

Here I am, writing again from the joyful comforts of my home. This issue talks about “Silver Linings” and my editor says I’m supposed to speak to that. The last time I’ve fussed with a silver lining is around my 32nd birthday, which came with a touch of grey...but I digress.

Don’t be fooled, this all has been just fine for me, thanks.

I don’t have to make plans to cancel them anymore. No more blasé pleasant-ries. I already know the event isn’t happening! (Saves a lot on postage!) Not that I really get out and see people, anyway.

People tell me about ‘virtual’ this and ‘online’ that. All I need to need to say is I haven’t Zoomed since my 20s.

Even day-to-day life has ways of becoming more convenient.

The grocery stores these days even have an hour for people my age to shop in peace. And it’s about time...and to make things even better, there are arrows directing where the other hooligans can walk, leaving me to carry about my business.

Furthermore, traffic has been a breeze

with such few people on the road.

I’ve had extra time to clean up the backyard and start the garden I can now complain about for the rest of the summer. (Don’t forget to wear your sunscreen.)

Masks add to a new level of decency where not only do you not have to feign a half-hearted smile to maintain politeness, you also are not required to shave or fuss over the ever looming 5 o’clock shadow.

Maybe a millennial or two even picked up a sewing machine (or good ol’ needle and thread) and learned how to sew!

Linings on linings, if you ask me. (Which, to clarify, my editor did.)

Either way, it’s a pressing time for so many out there. Whether it’s staying at home quietly, Zooming until your eyes go crossed, turning off your internet completely, or actively taking strolls to the park, take care of yourselves. 🙏

Laszlo Scofflaw