



As I am finishing my term as chair of the MVL advisory board, I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the multitude of people who I have met and worked with in different capacities to help continue MVL's role as the nationally recognized program that it has become. I will not provide names for fear that I will commit the unforgivable act of omitting someone. However, there are many individuals at the DBA and CBA who work tirelessly to provide much-needed support and direction to MVL. In fact, the presidents, board members, and executive directors of all of the supporting bar associations have stepped up this year in a renewed effort to refocus our programs and services and to help design a plan to reach more people. The staff at MVL are invaluable as well, and provide the needed infrastructure and support to keep moving forward. The advisory board members of MVL have generously increased their roles, providing guidance and support in the

development of new programs, recruiting, and fundraising efforts. Finally, we have returning volunteer attorneys and new recruits who attend FLCP clinics, post-decree clinics, power of attorney clinics, and the Denver Indian Center Clinics, and take on full representation cases for MVL. We rely heavily upon the volunteers to make these efforts, as without them we could not function as an organization providing such services to those in need. Thank you for everything you do for MVL!

At the same time, I would like to issue a challenge to all of us to really invest in performing pro bono legal activities. I know that each of us probably does something that fits the definition of volunteering, and of course the amount of that volunteering seems to ride a wave where each of us has done more in some years than others due to family, work, and other commitments.

But in terms of really providing pro bono legal representation, I challenge each of us to do better. We all have the accidental or unintentional pro bono cases when a client doesn't pay the balance of their fee. This example/situation is not pro bono service that I am referring to. Instead, we should recognize that we are called to service in the legal profession, as the Colorado Attorney Oath of Admission states in part:

I will use my knowledge of the law for the betterment of society and the improvement of the legal system; I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed...

Providing pro bono legal services betters our society by providing access to justice that some individuals and families would not otherwise have. It allows us to take up the cause of the defenseless and oppressed and in turn may place us in situations where we do not usually

find ourselves. To me this is where real learning and growth occurs in each of us. Bryan Stevenson, lawyer and social justice activist, says that proximity to those in need teaches us basic and humbling truths, one being that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice¹.

In a recent case I was assigned through MVL, I was able to witness firsthand how having legal representation changed the course of a particular client's life for the better. Prior to having counsel, she had tried to explain to the judge how her position differed from that of her brother's as they both argued to be appointed as guardian for their elderly father. However, it seemed that she didn't know the right words to say or when to say them, and she was confused by the speed of the proceedings. She had unwittingly dug herself into a hole and it seemed that she would not be able to make her way out.

For this client, it wasn't about winning or losing, though we all know winning is

a sort of magic elixir. It was more about being in the conversation and having a seat at the table. It was about having her concerns heard and being respected for having a different point of view. There is an undeniable comfort one feels when walking into a courtroom represented by competent counsel. We helped organize her thoughts and positions into an understandable template, gaining respect of the court-appointed guardian ad litem and ultimately from the opposing attorney and the judge. This case was not overly complicated with legal arguments or factual analysis. Quite simply, it was about access.

By volunteering and serving MVL, you are providing access to justice to families and individuals who need protection, representation, and assistance in a myriad of situations. We presently have a need for attorneys to take full representation on over 200 cases. If you are interested in helping, please contact Ivonne Esparza by email at iesparza@denbar.org or by phone at 303-866-9307.

Thank you to everyone who supports MVL, and in the next year, let us all try to give a little bit more to the cause. 🙌

NOTES

¹Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

STEVE COOK is the managing partner at Smith & Cook, LLC, a general litigation firm with an emphasis in Criminal Defense, Family Law and General Civil Litigation. Stephen is the Chairperson of MVL's Advisory Board, volunteers at the Legal Clinic for the Women in Crisis Center with Family Tree, Inc. and is the Continuing Legal Education Chairperson for the 1st J.D. Bar Association.

Davis Award Nominations Sought

Nominations are invited for the 2019 Richard Marden Davis Award to honor attorneys under the age of 40 who have demonstrated excellence as a lawyer and leadership in Denver's civic, educational, and charitable activities.

For more in-formation visit dgslaw.com/who-we-are/davis-award

Deadline
Sept. 1



DENVER BAR
ASSOCIATION