

# THE FACES OF PRO BONO WORK:

## Nevada Lawyers Who Are Making a Difference, And Why

**CARLA COULTHARD, ESQ.**

"Though my primary swing-zone is transactional work, pro bono work for me is a convergence of my skill set, my desire to see justice for all and my goal to help those in need," said Coulthard. "My partnership with Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada has enabled me to fulfill those desires." Initially, she was anxious about tackling pro bono work involving issues foreign to her daily practice; as a transactional lawyer, she rarely interacted with the court. Moreover, after leaving a national firm to become a solo practitioner, she no longer has support staff to assist in managing a case. The impetus to start her own firm had been a desire for the flexibility necessary to actively take on the role of a new mom.

"These trepidations unreasonably delayed my leap into the pro bono world — shame on me," she said. Her apprehension regarding taking on pro bono work was alleviated through the support of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, whose staff provided both support and the expertise necessary for answering her questions. "Further, the mentoring and guidance of the Legal Aid Center's staff created, and continues to create, priceless opportunities — for me as a volunteer attorney, and for the people I serve: my clients," she said. "More than anything, pro bono service allows me to reach into the hearts of my clients, making their world a better, safer place."

**CRISLOVE IGELEKE, ESQ.**

Crislove Igeleke is a recipient of the Public Interest Law Association (PILA) grant, and currently interns at the Nevada System of Higher Education. The opportunity is providing



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her with experience working with legal counsel for a government agency. In addition to being exposed to the public practice of law, the PILA grant has also been a financial help, allowing her to spend more days working in the office while also volunteering for the Thomas and Mack Legal Clinics Kid's Court Program.

"While busy 2L summers are filled with great experiences, they can also be expensive," Igeleke explained. "I am glad the PILA grant was able to help with those costs."

### HAI LING CHU, ESQ.



Hai Ling Chu is the principle attorney of HLC Legal. She graduated from the William S. Boyd School of Law and has been licensed in Nevada since 2011. Her firm focuses primarily on estate planning, with a secondary focus on tax controversies. Chu frequently participates in pro bono

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activities, assisting with community clinics and rural outreach, and she has taken several pro bono cases through Nevada Legal Services.

Chu believes pro bono experiences are invaluable. "Pro bono is incredibly rewarding," she explained. "There's nothing like being able to help someone who had given up all hope."

### J. DOUGLAS CLARK, ESQ.



J. Douglas Clark is a solo practitioner in Reno, where he practices exclusively in trusts and estates. He is the founding president of the Probate Bar Association of Washoe County and the past president of the Estate Planning Council of Northern Nevada. Clark is also the past chair of the State Bar of Nevada's Probate and Trust Section.

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In addition to his practice, Clark regularly volunteers with the Lawyer in the Library Program in Reno. Last year, Judge Connie Steinheimer presented the Probate Bar Association with an opportunity to contribute to the Lawyer in the Library program, which was being conducted in the Washoe County Law Library. The program provides probate-and-trust-specific advice to the public, through lawyers experienced in their specialized area of law.

According to Clark, the program has been very successful. Two attorneys are usually present for each session, and there has been no trouble enlisting volunteer lawyers for the program's Wednesday evening sessions.

"The public has shown a great need for basic advice concerning estate issues that every family faces sooner or later," explained Clark. "The attorneys who have participated in the program have expressed their willingness to participate again, indicating that they have also personally benefited from providing pro bono services to the public. It has been a pleasure to participate in a meaningful pro bono program."

### **KRISTON HILL, ESQ.**

Kriston Hill is a deputy public defender at the Elko County Public Defender's Office, where she is an ardent, zealous and compassionate advocate for clients facing criminal charges. Hill has been volunteering for Nevada Legal Services since her admission to the bar, and has continued to volunteer at its self-help clinics on a regular basis.



"I find it extremely gratifying to provide assistance to those who would otherwise be left to wander through the treacherous legal system alone," said Hill. "The people who are served through the self-help clinics are seriously underprivileged and in desperate need of assistance."

### **KIM COOPER, ESQ.**

Kim Cooper is the managing attorney for Cooper Law Group. An alumna of the William S. Boyd School of Law, she has

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been practicing law since 2005. Cooper has years of experience in the practice areas of intellectual property and consumer law.

Active in pro bono, Cooper frequently volunteers for Nevada Legal Services' community clinics and seminars. When asked about her pro bono experiences, Kim said, "Participating in clinics and seminars is a great way to provide pro bono services. Your time commitment is limited to just a few hours and you get the immediate satisfaction of helping people right there on the spot."

### MADelyn SHIPMAN, ESQ.



Madelyn Shipman, known to most as "Maddy," retired from the Washoe County District Attorney's Office in 2005, after a long career as a public attorney. During her 10 years with the D.A.'s office, Shipman held the positions of Assistant District Attorney and chief of the Civil Division. She

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continues to practice law part-time with the firm Laxalt & Nomura, Ltd. and as counsel to the Sun Valley General Improvement District. Shipman also serves as a settlement judge for the Nevada Supreme Court.

Shipman always makes time to volunteer her legal expertise as: an advisor to the Tahoe Pyramid Bikeway Project, Legislative Committee Chairman with the Nevada Dispute Resolution Coalition and a regular participant in the Lawyer in the Library program at the Washoe County Law Library. Shipman enjoys being able to assist people with their issues by providing legal guidance and, sometimes more importantly, providing an ear when needed.

### MELISSA L. EXLINE ESQ.,



Melissa Exline is an attorney with Surratt Law Practice, where she focuses primarily on family law and estate planning. Exline has been a lawyer in Nevada since 2003, and is a graduate of the University of Nevada, Reno and Golden Gate University, School of

Law in San Francisco, California, where she wrote for the law review and earned a certificate of specialization in litigation. After taking and passing the California Bar Exam in 2002, Exline practiced civil litigation for more than five years. In September 2008, she began working at Surratt Law Practice, taking her first divorce case to trial in October 2008.

When it comes to pro bono work, Exline feels she has an obligation as an attorney to do her part. "I help because I can — period," she said. "There are so many people who need it, and it's amazing what a huge impact my small contribution has on people's lives."

### OGONNA ATAMOH, ESQ.



Ogonna Atamoh is a shareholder at the law firm of Holley, Driggs, Walch, Puzey & Thompson. She has been with the firm since she was a Boyd School of Law summer clerk. Atamoh lived in Germany before coming

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to the U.S. to study at UNLV, and she has always been fascinated with the comparisons between the legal system in Europe and the United States; she believes the American legal system is far more accessible to the public.

Atamoh is inspired to take on pro bono clients because she feels it is rewarding to help people when they have lost hope and feel helpless in a system that can be confusing and frustrating for those who don't know the bankruptcy rules or code requirements. Atamoh's pro bono clients are always grateful and appreciate the care and attention they receive from her and her support staff. She considers herself lucky to work for a law firm that supports pro bono work. Without the support of the law firm, her legal administrative assistant Olivia Swibies and paralegal Alejandro Pestonit, she said that she would be unable to take on numerous pro bono clients at the same time.

### SHANE J. YOUNG, ESQ.

Shane Young is a 2004 graduate of the Boyd School of Law and has been in private practice since April 2005. Her practice is focused primarily on commercial litigation, as well as transactional business and regulatory matters. She is experienced in litigating breach of contract disputes involving purchase and sale agreements, confidentiality agreements, restrictive covenants and matters governed by the Uniform Commercial Code. Additionally, on the transactional side, her focus is on matters relating to regulatory compliance, investigations and entertainment law, including negotiation of licensing and music publishing agreements.



In addition to representing business clients through the firm, Young regularly volunteers time in various community and pro bono matters. She currently serves as the chair of the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada's Advisory Council and has been a regular recipient of the Legal Aid Center's Pro Bono Project "100 Hours Club" Award (2008-2013). Further, she has worked with the Children's Attorney Project and represented over 10 minors in the system. Young's other pro bono efforts include Veteran Stand Down and the Homelessness

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Prevention Clinic. She recently took a case on appeal with the Nevada Supreme Court to represent an indigent father seeking to reinstate his parental rights with his 3-year-old daughter.

"As a mother of five, and long-time local from Las Vegas, I take great pride in giving back and helping others, especially children," Young said. "It saddens me to see that we have so much need here on multiple levels, and I wish I could do more. That's why I encourage my fellow attorneys to give back as well. Imagine the difference we could make if each attorney volunteered."

### PATTY LEE, ESQ.



According to Patty Lee, there are fabulous benefits to be derived from doing pro bono work. She shared this story about one of her recent pro bono cases:

"Recently, I was retained by a woman from Burma. [She and her young son] travelled to the U.S. to visit my client's mother. While they were here,

she (a political dissident), filed for political asylum for both her and her son; it was granted. [Her] ... husband's visitor visa expired, and he was forced to go back to Japan. After about a year apart, my client came to Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada seeking an attorney to help her get 'divorced' and to maintain sole legal and physical custody of her son."

In just this one case, Lee learned all about seeking and obtaining political asylum; how political asylum impacts domestic rights; the Hague Convention, with respect to service of process in Japan; dealing with "constructive marital" issues; and how to say "thank you" in Burmese (Kyeizu tin ba de). "As a commercial litigator, I doubt I would have ever encountered this type of interesting and complex issue in my every-day practice," she said. "These skills are now all in my tool box, and some aspects — such as the Hague Convention — actually translate nicely into my commercial practice."

According to Lee, the best part of the case was getting her client the divorce and sole physical and legal custody of her son. The client has since moved to Washington, D.C. with her fiancé and son, and recently sent Lee a hand-knitted table cloth that, according to Lee, "rivals anything Martha Stewart could ever dream of." She says it is an "overwhelmingly awesome feeling" to help someone through the darkness and into the light.

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## **ASHLEIGH WISE, Law Student and PILA Grant recipient:**

"I have broadened my horizons after being awarded the PILA grant. Most of my public interest experience is based around the taxpayer side of tax controversy. Working at the IRS has shown me the other side of the equation. I look forward to taking what I learn this summer and applying it to my future endeavors."

## **KOSTAN LATHOURIS, Law Student and PILA Grant recipient:**

"As an enrolled and active member of the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, my primary objective is not to become a lawyer; it is to be an advocate for social and political change, to address the problems faced by American Indians. The Public Interest Law Association Summer Full Grant has allowed me to pursue this passion by endowing me with the means to spend this summer as a legal intern with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Solicitor, Division of Indian Affairs — for which I am extremely grateful. As a result, I have gained experience working with those responsible for providing legal counsel and representation to the Secretary of the Interior, acting as federal trustee to American Indian tribes and their members."