I met Irene more than 20 years ago, when she needed help with a neighborhood dispute. Since then, we’ve dealt with everything from pension issues, to health insurance, to simply explaining that official-looking letters are really only junk mail. Much of what I do for her isn’t legal work, but rather the sort of thing a family member would normally do for an elderly relative. I’m glad that I can fill, even if only partially, that role for someone.
Less than four months after I started working at Winston & Strawn I found myself first-chairing a pro bono jury trial. My client, who had been waiting for this day for nearly 3 years, won. As we left the courthouse, I could tell that, in addition to feeling vindicated, he appreciated having been able to access the justice system. Getting to know and work with this client has been my most rewarding experience as an attorney so far.
As a judge in the Probate Division, I hear cases concerning disabled adults. If pro bono attorneys were not available, disabled people would have to be brought into court, no matter their condition or desires. This doesn’t happen because volunteer attorneys are willing to act as the court’s Guardians ad Litem. Without the hours they spend meeting and talking to these disabled adults, their family and friends, the court would not have the tools we need to make decisions that are in the best interest of our wards. Justice and fairness would be thwarted.

Hon. Jane Louise Stuart
Circuit Court of Cook County
The attorneys in my firm embrace pro bono legal services, serving as guardians ad litem for low income elderly and disabled adults. I strongly believe in and am dedicated to protecting and preserving the dignity and the rights of all individuals—and that includes the right to equal access to justice. I am proud of all of the good, kind and caring attorneys in Chicago who, through their pro bono legal services, are kind to strangers.

Robert A. Clifford
Clifford Law Offices
President, The Chicago Bar Association
Equal access to justice is absolutely central to the American concept of law and freedom and who we are as lawyers. As a litigator, first in private practice and now for the government, I have seen the real difference that pro bono attorneys make when they represent low-income and other vulnerable people. Pro bono attorneys literally make that fundamental principle come alive. As lawyers, we can all use our time and talents to help make the legal system more accessible and fair to all.

Kaarina Salovaara
President, The Chicago Bar Foundation
Kindness to Strangers

My motivation for leaving a successful computer consulting career to become an attorney was never money. It was to make a difference in the lives of underrepresented people. I did pro bono work as soon as I obtained my law license, speaking to minority groups, serving as guardian ad litem for minors and disabled adults, and representing clients in contested guardianship cases. I also helped to start Street Justice, Inc., a legal clinic in Austin on Chicago’s west side. This year I started my own firm. My primary focus is probate, thanks to the experience I gained from my pro bono work.

Donna L. Otis
Otis Law Group, Ltd.
My parents were immigrants and instilled in me a deep appreciation for all that this country has to offer its citizens. With the support of my employer, McDonald’s Corporation, I and other members of the McDonald’s legal department have been able to help immigrants obtain the right to live and work legally in this country. Our clients, many of whom have suffered serious physical and mental abuse, seek a chance to pursue the opportunities we often take for granted. I can think of no better way to use my legal education and experience than to help these deserving immigrants achieve their dreams.
About 20 years ago, long before I retired, I began to volunteer with a pro bono organization. Although I intended it to be my way of “giving back,” it quickly became apparent that I was getting more satisfaction and enjoyment than I was giving. At the beginning, I took on court cases because I had a secretary to type the paperwork. Now that I am my own secretary, I handle fewer court cases. Mostly I answer clients’ questions on the telephone and consult with the staff attorneys.

I still love the place.

Richard M. Freeman
Retired Attorney
I have represented immigrant women who have been repeatedly battered but refused to be broken. They seek safety, protection and justice for themselves and their children, often battling cultural, linguistic and economic barriers. My clients’ courage in the face of strong adversities reminds me of the tenacity of the human spirit. The rewards and satisfaction as an attorney are priceless.

Molshree Sharma
Mandel Lipton Roseborough and Sharma, Ltd.
A few years ago, as I pursued my practice in public finance, Faith was a complete stranger to me. She was four years old when we first met and I became her guardian ad litem. At times, Faith’s case was a challenge as I struggled to determine what truly was in her best interest.

Faith is no longer a stranger–she is a bright, sweet and happy little girl that I have been fortunate to know. Faith is also a reminder to me of why pro bono really matters. Pro bono work, including my experiences with Faith, have enriched my legal practice.

Rose E. Gallagher
Chapman and Cutler LLP