When the housing crisis began to really heat up in ‘05 and ‘06, my years of experience in real estate financing allowed me to represent families whose homes were at risk because of predatory lending practices. More often than not, the victims were older people who trusted those advising them. My being a fellow senior citizen gave me insight into the natural inclination to trust family members and advisors. I also learned that my years of experience proved most helpful at a time when it was needed.

– Robert E. Deignan
Partner, Baker & McKenzie LLP

I am very pleased to be able to continue my practice, after 50 years with Baker & McKenzie, concentrating on advising NFPs and NGOs regarding corporate best practices and providing training for their board of directors. Good governance is essential to meeting their missions.

Robert E. Deignan
Senior Counsel, Baker & McKenzie LLP
Then & Now:
Lifting Lives, Strengthening Access

2009
Incorporating pro bono into my practice ensures that I never lose perspective about the need for legal assistance from all parts of our community. One month I may give incorporation advice to a small family-owned business, the next month I may help a family obtain guardianship over a disabled relative, and the following month I might help a non-profit change its tax-exempt status. Pro bono brings the law and courts to people who are otherwise overlooked by our legal system.

– Jordan Heinz
Associate, Kirkland & Ellis LLP

2014
Improving access to justice within our community is a responsibility we all have as lawyers. Even after nine years of practice, I still incorporate pro bono into my practice, and encourage those attorneys around me to do the same. It is my way of taking a small step toward fulfilling this responsibility and creating a more just and equal place to live.

Jordan Heinz
Partner, Kirkland & Ellis LLP
Then & Now: Lifting Lives, Strengthening Access

2006
Pro bono gave me an unprecedented opportunity to be a lawyer. As a very junior associate, I was lead counsel and first-chair in a jury trial for the victim of a racially motivated hate crime. My client depended on me to steer his case through the court and to present it to the jury. When the jury returned a $152,500 verdict for my client I knew we had both won. My client won the money he needs to go to college. I won the confidence to aggressively advocate for my clients in motions practice, discovery and trial.

– Steven V. Hunter
Associate, DLA Piper

2014
Pro bono has always been near and dear to my heart and a big part of my practice. Although I still take on some of the “thorny” cases, now, as a partner, I am able to take more of a leadership role, recruiting, training and mentoring younger attorneys at my firm in their pro bono work. I enjoy my “new role” just as much as my last.

Steven V. Hunter
Partner, Quarles & Brady
Then & Now:
Lifting Lives, Strengthening Access

2005
After a successful civil suit for an inmate whose long-term future would be a dismal cell, I was struck by my client’s genuine appreciation. I had brought a sliver of reparation to a stormy life, and, in the process, better perceived the agony of prison. Pro bono brought me into contact with a life that I would have otherwise never encountered. It helped make me a complete lawyer and a more complete person.

– Michael B. Hyman
Partner, Much Shelist Freed Denenberg Ament & Rubenstein, CBA President

2014
When I accepted my parchment representing the privilege to practice law, I also accepted a commission to serve individuals who would otherwise go unrepresented in court. Now, as a judge, I have seen the real detrimental consequences that occur from a lack of legal counsel in matters involving basic quality of life issues. In the past 10 years, the need has only increased and far exceeds the available response. Especially at this time, especially in this community, fulfilling your commission to serve has never meant more.

Hon. Michael B. Hyman
Justice, Illinois Appellate Court
Delivering the closing argument in a capital sentencing hearing is hands-down the most moving professional experience I have had or ever will have. It is difficult to put into words the sense of responsibility and privilege I felt at the thought that another human being was relying upon me to argue for his very life. And when the jury came back with a “no death” verdict, I felt a high that was higher than any good mood you could imagine. Maybe doctors get to experience that feeling all the time -- but it isn’t often that a lawyer can say “I saved a life today.”

– Terri L. Mascherin
Partner, Jenner & Block LLP

Law is a calling, and one of the things we are called to do is represent those in need. Never was the call so clear to me as when I was asked to represent Hyungseok Koh. Mr. Koh, a sixty year old Korean American man, was charged with killing his son – following a lengthy interrogation, mostly in English. We investigated and found strong evidence that the son, who had serious mental health problems, had probably killed himself. We presented that evidence, and the jury acquitted Mr. Koh after less than two hours of deliberation.

– Terri L. Mascherin
Partner, Jenner & Block LLP
2007
Although it’s been a challenge to fit pro bono into my schedule over the years, I can’t imagine my life or my career without it. I come from a family committed to helping others and I work at a firm equally committed. I got hooked early on doing asylum cases as an associate and I’m also a pro bono mediator. I try to schedule my pro bono responsibilities around my family and work obligations and I’ve always included my children in my volunteer work whenever possible. The knowledge that I can make such a difference in the lives of others is incredibly compelling and meaningful.

– Jennifer T. Nijman
Partner, Winston & Strawn

2014
As I’ve progressed in my career, from big firm to boutique firm, pro bono remains an important part of my practice. In 1988 I was drawn into pro bono when I helped a Guatemalan family obtain asylum. Last year, the family called to tell me their son, now 22 years old, was being deported. I opened a new pro bono case and stopped the deportation. I am just as drawn in now as I was 25 years ago.

Jennifer T. Nijman
Partner, Nijman Franzetti LLP
Maricela could not enroll her son in kindergarten because her name was not on his birth certificate. An undocumented resident, she was working and had given birth under an assumed name. We arranged for a fingerprint expert to testify that her fingerprints were on the hospital’s ceremonial certificate. The state issued a corrected document. As the son of Mexican immigrants I was happy that I could help Maricela and her son. Education is a cornerstone of our democracy and lawyers have to use our education and skills to ensure that others have the same privileges we enjoy.

– Jesse H. Ruiz
Partner, Gardner Carton & Douglas

As I have progressed in my career, my pro bono efforts have evolved as well. While I still make time to help individual clients, such as helping a young immigrant student obtain deferred action, I have also tried to better leverage my efforts by serving as pro bono legal counsel to organizations that in turn help and serve a number of individuals and address challenging societal problems such as youth violence. I hope that my efforts to help these organizations in turn helps many others.

Jesse H. Ruiz
Partner, Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP
President, The Chicago Bar Foundation
I started volunteering at a neighborhood legal clinic more than 35 years ago. Although my direct involvement in pro bono cases ended when I entered public service three years ago, there is still nothing more satisfying than winning a case or solving a problem for a pro bono client. Like most endeavors that involve service to others, pro bono has benefited me far more than my clients. It has made me a better lawyer and a better person. My career and my life would have been poorer – and duller – without it.

Stephen R. Patton
Corporation Counsel, City of Chicago
As an in-house attorney at a company with a two-attorney law department, it is a challenge to do significant pro bono work. But I try to lift lives and strengthen access in whatever way I can. I advise organizations seeking tax exempt status; work as a faculty advisor to The John Marshall Law School BELAW program; and, help in training and other aspects of the Justice Entrepreneurs Project. By doing pro bono work, you truly are lifting lives and strengthening access. We can all do our parts in small or great ways.

Daniel Cotter
Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary, Fidelity Life Association
President, The Chicago Bar Association
I realized that pro bono could have a huge impact on someone’s life when, as a first year law student, I attended the press conference announcing the exoneration of Rolando Cruz for a murder he did not commit. Hearing how pro bono work saved this man from the death penalty had a profound influence on me. Now that I am at Skadden, I represent indigent criminal defendants and perform a variety of other types of pro bono work.

Michael Y. Scudder
Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP