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Outside the Law

Professional Spotlight

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Toni Anne Nuñez  Feb 14, 2020 5 min read



Time is the Coin: Excerpts from an article by Toni-Anne Nunez

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Carl Sandberg once wrote “*Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you...*” In the abstract, it’s easy to think we will have enough time to accomplish everything we want to and need to in a given day, month, or year. But life can be overwhelming – balancing family, friends, work, and other commitments often highlights how little time we actually have. We must be assiduous in our choices. We have but one precious life, one we should never take for granted, and our greatest gift of all is time.

As the Director of Metro Volunteer Lawyers, I spend some of my time searching for and seeking out the best in all of us. The program is designed not only to help those who desperately need legal assistance but to provide opportunities for attorneys to give back. There can be no question of the need; in every facet of our lives, we hear about the plight of others: people live paycheck to paycheck, on the verge of homelessness. Some may even reach out to us, frightened and alone, in need of legal assistance but without the resources to afford it. And then we must ask the hard question: is the legal expertise we can provide available only to those who can afford to pay for it? Is that just? Addressing this need goes far beyond just providing pro bono services to the indigent. This is about spending time with people, sharing your resources and your money and your good fortune. This is about showing interest and compassion; this is about being human. This is about helping those in need in our community, and, although overwhelming, this need is not insurmountable.

It is true that many of us are always giving. We give to our local communities and places of worship, and we give to food banks or volunteer at shelters. And while the importance of these roles cannot be understated, I ask that you consider your skillset as an attorney. Just as a doctor would offer a greater contribution by working at a free clinic than serving food at a shelter, so too an attorney can offer a greater contribution by utilizing his or her invaluable expertise. Indeed, only an attorney can interpret a legal document, conduct discovery, attend a hearing and represent a client in Court. And the reality of today is that there are a great many people who need someone to interpret a legal document, conduct discovery, attend a hearing and represent them in Court.

2018 US Census Bureau data shows that there are about 249,000 residents in the six Denver metro area counties who qualify for free legal aid services, based on incomes at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level. To qualify for free civil legal aid services in Colorado, an individual must make less than \$15,175 annually, which amounts to less than \$1,300 in a month. The 2018 report from the Colorado Office of Attorney Regulation ("OARC") states that we have some 24,000 active attorneys here in Colorado. Only 600 of that 24,000 are on the MVL list of volunteer attorneys. I ask that you consider adding your own name to that list, so that we may increase both our numbers and our capacity to meet the need.

We understand the value of your time, and the magnitude of what we are asking. But we all make time for the things which are important to us. If pro bono work is a priority in your life, and it should be, then making time for it is possible. We offer as many resources as possible to make this an effective process – if you are concerned about malpractice insurance, or want to volunteer during business hours, or require CLE credits, or are searching for a mentor or staff to support you in your giving, or are trying to convince a senior partner to allow pro bono work to be included in your yearly billable requirement, please come and speak with us. We are happy to address these concerns and more.

We need to stop and pay attention to our community. The truth is that all the marketing, positive encouragement, professionalism arguments, convenience of options and guilt will not convince you to volunteer an hour, much less 20 or the aspirational 50 which Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct requires. You will volunteer when you decide that it is how you wish to spend the coin of your time. Our cases can be difficult, but what cases aren't? Our cases can be emotional, largely due to the significant impact they have on the lives of our clients. Our cases can ask you to think outside of the box and to be patient, understanding and tolerant. Our cases can ask you to be human.

If you have between one and three hours, then please consider volunteering at our Power of Attorney Workshop, Post Decree Consultation Clinic, Family Law Court Program, Family Law Unbundled Program, or our Walk-In Clinic at the Denver Indian Center. If you can give more time, please consider taking one of the nearly 100 cases from our referral desk. We provide ongoing

staff support, mentor matching, significant resources and practical backing. We provide legal services for nearly every aspect of the civil law arena, and are happy to refer you to a community partner if we don't provide the kind of services you are interested in.

I ask that you do some soul-searching and discover for yourself if you wish to spend your coin with us by donating your time and knowledge. If you believe that justice and the law should be available to everyone, not just those who can afford it, and if you recognize your unique ability to meet this need, then perhaps you already know the answer. The rewards for the work are indescribable and have the potential to change your life forever (if you allow it).

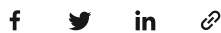
We will soon be launching a new website to help attorneys find places where they can offer their services (successiontoservice.org), and you can always visit MVL at www.denbar.org/mvl.



Toni-Anne Nunez is the Director of Metro Volunteer Lawyers, the pro bono arm of The Denver Bar Association co-sponsored by the Adams/Broomfield, Arapahoe, Douglas Elbert and Jefferson County Bar Associations. She holds a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Windsor, Canada, where she also served as director and group advisor of the university's Community Legal Aid Program. She went on to become a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada in Ontario, and after spending some time working for Canada's largest law firm, she relocated to Colorado in 1994.

Shortly after moving to Colorado, Nunez started as an intake volunteer for the Legal Aid Society (now Colorado Legal Services). After passing the bar exam, she continued to work as a volunteer attorney, devoting her energies to Project Safeguard in Judge Brian Campbell's Denver courtroom. Her dedication to helping underserved populations with their civil legal matters fueled her longstanding commitment to volunteering with MVL's Family Law Court Program and taking on individual cases in a pro bono capacity.

She practiced at two family law firms in Denver before becoming the Director of Metro Volunteer Lawyers.



Someone's Gotta Say It

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7

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