

A Team Runs Through It

DLA Piper has created a dedicated group of pro bono specialists

Lisa Dewey has been a full-time pro bono lawyer at **DLA Piper** since 1999. That didn't change when she made partner in 2003, but her job expanded eight years later, when she was chosen to also head the firm's global pro bono nonprofit affiliate, *New Perimeter*. She also leads a team of counsel in North America who likewise focus exclusively on developing and overseeing pro bono projects. All of this has given Dewey an unusually broad perspective on this subject. The interview has been edited for style and length.

What drew you to pro bono?

Lisa Dewey: I went to law school with the idea that becoming a lawyer was a way to improve peoples' lives. After graduation, I clerked at the D.C. Superior Court, where I learned a lot about the city and the issues people were dealing with in court on a daily basis. One of the reasons I was attracted to DLA Piper in the first place was because it had a very strong culture and value system of doing pro bono and contributing to the community.

You became DLA Piper's full-time pro bono lawyer in 1999. Is this all that you do, or is it just a part of a bigger job?

Dewey: Pro bono work is my exclusive focus. I started as full-time pro bono counsel at the end of 1999, and then I was promoted to partner in early 2003. Since mid-2011, I also have been serving as the director of *New Perimeter*, which is our non profit affiliate dedicated to global pro bono. In my role, I help support our offices in North America.

I focus on setting the strategic vision for the pro bono program – looking at project development while ensuring that all of our lawyers feel supported in doing the work. I also maintain relationships with the legal service providers in the communities where we have a presence.

I also work closely with and lead our North America pro bono and *New Perimeter* teams. We have two pro bono counsel who are co-directors of the U.S. programs: Anne Geraghty Helms, who is based in Chicago, and Richard Gruenberger, who is based in New York. Our team also includes Crystal Doyle in Chicago, Suzanna Brickman in Palo Alto and Aditi Eleswarapu in New York. They support various offices in the U.S. as well as global pro bono initiatives through *New Perimeter*. In addition Sara Andrews in Boston serves as Senior International Pro Bono Counsel for DLA Piper and Assistant Director of *New Perimeter*. The firm also has an international pro bono team led by Nicolas Patrick and Claire Donse. And, of course, we work closely together to promote our three areas of global focus: children's rights, migration rights and rule of law.

What was pro bono like when you first got to DLA Piper, and how has it changed since then?

Dewey: Pro bono has certainly grown since I joined the firm, and the nature of the work has evolved over the years. This has resulted in amazing opportunities for the program to not only be more strategic, but also to have a greater impact on the communities where we live and work. When people join the firm, they understand that pro bono work is part of who we are. It is not a sideshow – it is integrated into everything we do. Our goal is to have a positive impact and to add the most value we can as lawyers and as a law firm. Over time, I think we've also seen increased collaboration – not only with legal service providers but also with our corporate clients, academic institutions and other law firms. We value this opportunity to collaborate. Pro bono provides this wonderful opportunity to connect on different levels – with our clients, our communities and with each other.

What did you see as your biggest challenges when you took over the program?

Dewey: I think one of the biggest challenges and opportunities was getting to

know as many people as possible at the firm to find out what they were interested in doing and how to leverage their experiences and relationships in the community. I spent a lot of time getting to know our lawyers and staff, as well as groups in the community and legal service providers.

How do you measure success? Do you keep statistics? If so, can you give me a sense of what they tell you?

Dewey: The simplest metric people look at is the number of hours that lawyers devote to pro bono work. I can tell you that in 2016, globally, DLA Piper devoted 217,000 hours to pro bono initiatives. *The American Lawyer* publishes a pro bono issue every summer ranking the top 200 law firms by their pro bono performance using two metrics. One is the average number of pro-bono hours per lawyer. The other metric is the percentage of lawyers with 20 or more pro bono hours.

But I think the greater point is really the impact of the work. Are we having an impact on our communities? Are we figuring out more innovative and efficient ways of doing pro bono? That kind of impact is often not measured in hours. We certainly keep track of pro bono hours and the participation and outcomes of particular cases, but I think it's bigger than that. When we're developing signature projects or creating new legal services clinics in our communities, we look at how we can provide legal services in places that don't currently have access to those services. Even if we're able to help people in a way that doesn't generate a lot of hours, that's really important to us. That's how we approach our work.

A lawyer can have a significant impact on a person or organization's life without spending a ton of hours on a matter. For example, an eviction matter in landlord-tenant court might be negotiated in a few hours, and prevent someone from having to move out of her home.

Are lawyers encouraged to participate? Are they under pressure to participate? How does that work?

Dewey: They are encouraged to participate. It's part of our culture here at DLA Piper. It's something that everyone does, and I think lawyers see it as a real opportunity to have a positive impact on our communities. There are several benefits of doing pro bono for lawyers. First of all, the fulfillment that our lawyers get from being involved in pro bono and changing someone's life is one of those things that's impossible to measure. We surveyed our lawyers and asked what motivated them to do pro bono. The number one response was that they wanted to help someone in need. I think, also, our lawyers gain really wonderful professional development opportunities from doing pro bono. Our associates oftentimes are getting into court or having opportunities to interact with clients in ways that they might not otherwise. Finally, for a big law firm like ours, working on pro bono allows you to work with people across offices and across practice groups. It's a good way to get to know people and to integrate as a firm.

Do associates use their pro bono work for their billable hours? What about the partners?

Dewey: Pro bono is noted and considered for associates and partners at the firm. Associates have a certain amount of pro bono time that is counted as billable.

I know that Verizon is one company that you've partnered with on pro bono projects. Are there other organizations that have been prominent in your pro bono work?

Dewey: Collaboration with corporate clients is a significant part of our pro bono program. We have worked with Pfizer's in-house lawyers for many years to hold a monthly legal clinic at the NYU Cancer Institute to help patients who need end of life documents or advanced directives. We've also teamed with Hewlett Packard Enterprise in California, helping juveniles and adults who need their records expunged or sealed so that they can have access to opportunities and get a fresh start.

What role has the Pro Bono Institute played in your work?

Dewey: We have had a very close working relationship with PBI for as long as I can remember. Esther Lardent, who was the founder and first president of the Pro Bono Institute, was a real powerhouse and known by many as the goddess of pro bono. She was a good friend of our firm and a good mentor and friend of mine personally. She also served as the co-chair of *New Perimeter's* advisory board for many years. Last March

Lisa Dewey serves as U.S. Pro Bono Partner at DLA Piper and Director of *New Perimeter*, the firm's nonprofit affiliate that provides long-term pro bono legal assistance in under-served regions around the world. In this role, she guides the vision and strategic direction of the firm's domestic and global pro bono programs. She works extensively with DLA Piper lawyers, as well as the firm's clients, legal aid providers, nonprofits, government agencies and NGOs, to develop and implement collaborative pro bono projects. She can be reached at elizabeth.dewey@dlapiper.com.



here at DLA Piper in Washington, D.C., New Perimeter and PBI co-hosted a gathering on global pro bono. We brought together over 80 lawyers from law firms, in-house departments and global NGOs who came together to talk about global pro bono.

We also work with PBI and CPBO closely on “Clinic in a Box” programs. These clinics provide in-house counsel the opportunity to conduct a legal audit of nonprofit organizations or small businesses. The clinics are produced in collaboration with legal departments or chapters of the Association of Corporate Counsel and local public interest organizations.



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– involves not only DLA Piper lawyers, but also several in-house departments, students from the University of Chicago and legal service providers. Everybody in our office rallies around that project to support low-income individuals in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood through a monthly legal clinic.

In short, what is so gratifying for the firm is the positive impact our pro bono work ultimately has for those who need it the most. Implementing a signature pro bono project and having access to a pro bono lawyer is like a fork in the road – having a lawyer can put a client on a path to a better

future. Over time, we have been able to see that because we have made long-term commitments to certain projects. Finally, we get much joy by teaming with others and with one another through our pro bono program.

What are some of the things that your pro bono clients get from the services you provide?

Dewey: There are many benefits we could discuss, but I’ll give one quick example as an illustration. We have been representing tenants in landlord-tenant court in D.C. as part of the Housing Right to Counsel Project in which several law firms and legal service providers in the city have come together to support tenants facing the devastating consequences of eviction. In most landlord-tenant courts around the country, there’s a huge power imbalance where landlords are typically represented by counsel and tenants are not. In a recent case, one of our lawyers represented a single mother with several children who had received an eviction notice. We were able to enter an appearance, and very quickly resolve that case in her favor.

Other examples involve our transactional lawyers, where we’re representing nonprofit organizations, helping them achieve their missions as organizations. For example, we represent food banks across the country that are working to help feed hungry people in our communities. Providing them with that transactional pro bono help allows them to focus on their missions without fear. Another example would be the new skills that the beneficiaries of our New Perimeter projects acquire. New Perimeter teams of DLA Piper lawyers are often building local capacity in underserved regions of the world by teaching and training law students, government lawyers and sometimes judges. We often stay in touch with these lawyers and learn about how they have used their new skills to benefit their communities and countries.

What does DLA Piper, as a firm, get out of this program?

Dewey: Providing pro bono services is part of our ethical obligation as lawyers that we take very seriously, and part of the glue that holds us together as a firm. For example, one of our signature projects – the Woodlawn Legal Clinic in Chicago

Is it essential to have a partner in charge of the program full-time?

Dewey: Yes. The fact that we’re able to create the kinds of programs that I’ve described and that we’re able to be proactive and strategic in our communities happens because the firm has invested resources. The fact that we do have a full-time pro bono team is a real demonstration that the firm is putting its money where its mouth is.

What are the projects that you’re really proud of for the impact they’ve had – whether that’s easy to measure or not.

Dewey: I am very proud of the fact that we have a full-time pro bono team. We’re not just reacting to the opportunities that come to us. We’re really creating our own work in ways that we think make the most sense. I mentioned the Woodlawn Legal Clinic in Chicago. That clinic and that team actually just won an internal pro bono award here at the firm. We created that project a little over eight years ago now and it has continued to grow over time. We’ve now served over 1,000 people in the community who otherwise would never have had access to a lawyer. That’s just one example. We’ve created probably close to a dozen similar legal services clinics across North America so that we’re going to where the need is. That’s something that I’m very proud of. When we think about access to justice, and we think about ways that we can work with others to make that happen, there’s nothing better than seeing that come to fruition.



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