



VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHTS

Move Outside Your Comfort Zone

by Kenny Jacobs, Jacobs Alexander Law

After my first semester of law school I started to seek out ways to get practical aspects of what we had discussed or studied in class. I would attempt to volunteer for as many clinics or opportunities as I could. In a small town, there weren't as many opportunities as there are in Omaha, so I ended up traveling to Sioux Falls to work with East River Legal Services on a monthly basis. Their office hosted a clinic-type setting where students met with pre-screened clients for simple, no-property, no-children divorces. The students would then draft the complaints, decrees, and, if needed, service by publication motions and orders to provide to the overseeing attorney for his review and filing.

As a third-year student I traveled to Sioux Falls to continue the divorce clinic as well as volunteer at the public defender's office twice a week. I was able to meet with clients, draft briefs, and I was even able to cross examine an officer for a motion to suppress hearing. Immediately after the bar exam I was offered a job at the same public defender's office where I had volunteered. Although Sioux Falls was not the city I pictured myself living in, as a graduate in 2009 I was thankful to have any legal-related job. After deciding to move on from the public defender and look in Omaha, where my wife and I wanted to live, I hung my shingle in September 2015.

I got involved in volunteering with the Nebraska Bar when I saw the Self-Help Desk in late September as I was walking into the Douglas County Courthouse. I figured I had some free time as I was just getting established and had missed the opportunity to volunteer when I was a public defender as it was frowned upon due to malpractice insurance issues. I also remembered the times I helped as a student and thought it would be nice to get involved in volunteering again.

Volunteering with the NSBA has given me an opportunity to move further outside my comfort zone which has been a rewarding experience. It has also allowed me to meet fantastic members of the bar who have been very helpful in my transition, not only into private practice, but also into a new bar association. I would encourage anyone looking to expand their experience or practice to move outside their comfort zone by volunteering with VLP and the Nebraska Bar.

Kenny Jacobs graduated from Truman State University in Kirksville, MO, gaining a Bachelor of Science in Justice Systems and Business Administration after which he graduated from the University of South Dakota Law School with his JD. During his time in law school Kenny worked in the law library, for the Omaha Federal Public Defender's office, and for the Minnehaha County Public Defender's office in Sioux Falls, SD. Additionally Kenny spent time working

at the R.D. Hurd Family Law Clinic receiving the first ever R. D. Hurd Pro Bono Student of the Year Award in 2009. Today, Kenny works as a founding partner of Jacobs Alexander Law located in the heart of downtown Omaha just around the corner from the Courthouse. He is licensed to practice in Nebraska, Missouri, and South Dakota. In addition to general practice issues, Kenny focuses on Criminal Defense and Family/Juvenile Law.



VLP welcomes Kenny as part of its attorney network of volunteers. Kenny is a regular volunteer at the Douglas County Help Desk and he offers pro bono legal assistance in family law cases. Kenny is also a leading member of a volunteer team helping to develop and launch a pro bono divorce clinic in Douglas County, tentatively scheduled to start in late fall 2016. Please join VLP in welcoming Kenny to private practice in Nebraska and thanking him for his commitment to pro bono service.

Thank you, Kenny!

Volunteering at the Help Desk— An Opportunity to Ascend the New-Lawyer Learning Curve

by Christina L. Usher, Mattson Ricketts

As a new attorney in my second year of practice with Mattson Ricketts Law Firm, I was still just a neophyte on the law learning curve, but I felt like I was beginning to get my "law legs" firmly underneath me. When I was able to take a breath and survey the landscape around me, I discovered that my developing practice was devoid of one thing in particular: face-to-face client time. I do a lot of transactional work or support work for other attorneys so I am rarely alone with a client where I am the sole person the client is looking to for support, comfort and a good answer to a complex problem. Enter the Help Desk.

With the encouragement of Mattson Ricketts, I decided to volunteer at the Help Desk two hours per month for the opportunity to work with a wide variety of clients. The Lancaster County Help Desk is located on the third floor of the courthouse and is currently open on Thursdays from 10am–2pm. I knew volunteering would be challenging, particularly because I do not have a background in family law, but I also knew it would be a great opportunity to hone my client counseling skills.

In the last year of volunteering at the Help Desk, I have dealt with people from all walks of life who were facing problems like evicting a family member from their home, getting a protection



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order against an ex-boyfriend, collecting a debt from a client, setting up a guardianship for a neighbor with special needs, and seeking a divorce from a husband who abandoned his wife in a new country where she can barely speak the language. All of these people had one thing in common—they needed my help to navigate the complex legal system.

And in working with these people in need, I discovered one very important thing: even though I was a relatively new lawyer, I still knew more than enough to be of great service. Once I got out of the law firm bubble and into the real world again, I suddenly realized I had climbed further up the learning curve after law school than I thought. The Help Desk has provided me with opportunities to work with many interesting folks, to learn more about the law outside of my normal practice area, and to be a better counselor at law.

Christina L. Usher joined Mattson Ricketts Law Firm as a clerk in 2011 and as a practicing attorney in 2013. Christina grew up in Lincoln but moved to Philadelphia to attend the University of Pennsylvania-Wharton School of Finance, where she majored in accounting and management. After graduation, she moved to New York, achieved her CPA, and worked as a corporate accountant for large multi-national organizations.



Christina's love of the great outdoors drew her to Colorado, where she worked as an accountant for small businesses and non-profits. After nearly two decades as an accountant, Christina moved back to Lincoln to attend law school and reinvest in her home town. Christina graduated second in her law school class, is a member of the Order of the Coif, and was an Executive Editor for the Nebraska Law Review. Christina is an avid cyclist, hiker, skier, and traveler. She is a member of Rotary Club #14 and the Lincoln Estate Planning Council. Christina's extensive accounting and business background provides a strong foundation for her practice areas of estate planning, real estate transactions, tax, business formations and contracts.

VLP is excited to have Christina as a member of its volunteer attorney team and extends its appreciation to Christina for or moving from her law firm bubble to assist the many persons who visit the Lancaster County Help Desk. Christina also provides pro bono representation to Lincoln area residents. Many Lancaster County residents benefit from her legal experience and volunteerism.

Thank you, Christina!

Tuesday: Swearing In, Thursday: Volunteering With VLP

by Andrew Mock

I enjoy volunteering because I like to give back to the community and assist those in need. It is also a great opportunity to gain experience in many different areas of law while simultaneously improving the situation of others.

Andrew Mock is a Nebraska native from Sidney, NE. He attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln for his undergraduate degree and received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Following the completion of his Bachelor degree, Andrew went on to attend law school at the University of Nebraska College of Law. While there, Andrew earned joint Juris Doctor and Master of Business Administration degrees. Andrew was admitted to the Nebraska State Bar in April of 2016 and currently lives in Lincoln with his wife Alyssa.



Andrew is one of the Volunteer Lawyers Project's notable attorneys for his willingness to volunteer from the moment he became licensed. Within days of being sworn in Andrew volunteered at the Lancaster County Self-Help Desk for his first time, assisting with cases involving many different areas of civil litigation. Quickly adapting to new situations and client scenarios, he is a welcome addition to the VLP volunteer team in Lancaster County.

Welcome, Andrew!

A Message from the VLP: Christina, Kenny, and Andrew are among the many colleagues who have made a commitment to provide regular, pro bono services through VLP. VLP provides pro bono opportunities that are convenient, rewarding and impactful. To learn more about pro bono opportunities through VLP, or to volunteer, please visit the VLP page on the NSBA website at www.nebar.com, email VLP@nebar.com, or call Carol Cleaver or Joshua Woolf at (402) 475-7091. Thousands of Nebraskans are waiting for your help.



VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT PRO BONO HONOR ROLL

The Volunteer Lawyers Project thanks the following attorneys, law students and paralegals who assisted low-income Nebraskans at a Help Center in Buffalo, Douglas, Hall, Lancaster or Scotts Bluff County courthouses, volunteered to provide full or limited representation to one or more persons, mentored a VLP attorney, and who participated in the April 29 “Lawyers In the City” event in Douglas County.

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