

The Pro Bono Spotlight features attorneys chosen by the Texas Access to Justice Commission or the State Bar of Texas for their exceptional commitment to pro bono work. Find pro bono opportunities, support, and inspiration at probonotexas.org.

Amy FARISH

FOR AMY FARISH, A COLLEGE FRESHMAN COURSE IN AMERICAN POVERTY ILLUSTRATED THE WIDE NEED FOR LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR LOW-INCOME CITIZENS. SHE WASTED NO TIME DIVING INTO PRO BONO WORK, GAINING INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE EVEN AS A SUMMER ASSOCIATE. BUT SHE QUICKLY LEARNED THAT ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN PRO BONO WORK OFFERS MANY OTHER BENEFITS BESIDES THE JOY OF SIMPLY ASSISTING OTHERS. FARISH, A PARTNER IN YETTER COLEMAN AND THE FIRM'S PRO BONO MANAGER BASED IN HOUSTON, SPOKE TO THE *TEXAS BAR JOURNAL* ABOUT HER BEGINNINGS IN THE WORLD OF PRO BONO AND WHAT SHE'S LEARNED ON HER JOURNEY OUTSIDE OF HER BILLABLE HOURS.

INTERVIEW BY **WILL KORN**
PHOTO COURTESY OF **AMY FARISH**



I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN PRO BONO SINCE MY TIME AS A SUMMER ASSOCIATE. Over the years, I've handled a variety of legal issues including divorces, landlord-tenant disputes, immigration work, and guardianship cases. Recently, I've taken on the role of managing the pro bono cases for our entire firm, which allows me to stay engaged with all the exciting work our attorneys choose to pursue.

PRO BONO WORK OPENED MY EYES because there are countless people in our community who desperately need essential legal services but can't get access to them without our help. During my freshman year of college, I took a seminar course

on American poverty where I was introduced to the concept of systemic inequity. Understanding that someone can have a full-time job and still have an income level at or below the poverty line really opens your eyes to the depth of need.

HANDLING PRO BONO WORK HAS SIGNIFICANTLY BENEFITED MY LEGAL CAREER IN SEVERAL WAYS. As a second-year associate, I drafted briefs to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit, served as second chair during oral arguments, and independently managed a resentencing hearing. I also handled mediation, represented clients in court for prove-up hearings, and developed invaluable client management skills early in my career. Pro bono cases often provide the first chance to manage your own workflow and set the pace for drafting, revising, and filing documents. These experiences have accelerated my professional growth and offered hands-on learning opportunities for me that might not have come as quickly through standard casework.

JUST JUMP IN [TO PRO BONO WORK]. It might feel intimidating at first because it is something new but imagine how much more prepared you are than someone who has been trying to navigate the legal system without training or resources. In my experience, courts love to see young attorneys doing pro bono work and often understand if you are still finding your way.

One of the biggest misconceptions about pro bono work is that you need to be an expert. Organizations like Houston Volunteer Lawyers and Kids in Need of Defense in Houston offer extensive resources, templates, and support from staff attorneys. What they need most is your time and dedication to serving clients.

I AM HUMBLLED BY THE GRACE AND GRATITUDE MY CLIENTS SHOW. Their appreciation for being heard and supported, even in tough situations, is truly rewarding and a reminder of the profound impact of doing this work.

YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND TIME FOR PRO BONO, EVEN WHEN IT FEELS LIKE YOU CAN'T. Just as you manage to fit in your billable work, working a pro bono case into your larger case load helps you find ways to incorporate it into your daily routine. Once you do it, you will never look back.

I HAD THE HONOR OF HELPING A YOUNG WOMAN FROM EL SALVADOR obtain special immigrant juvenile status. She fled her home due to gang violence and made the journey to Texas alone where she reunited with her mother and brother who had been forced to leave years earlier. When I met my client, she was scared and struggling at her new school and felt the impact of COVID-19 isolation very keenly. During the course of our case, she became so much more confident. **TBJ**