

## Volunteerism in a Post 9-11 World: Resources for the Pro Bono Seeker

**A** NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE OF FEBRUARY 19, 2003, "Volunteerism Among Lawyers Surges, Encouraged by Slumping Economy," suggests that because of the sluggish economy, many more attorneys are devoting time to pro bono work. The article observes, "Some of the lawyers who have volunteered have been laid off. Others said they were not able to find jobs after law school and were hoping to make themselves more marketable to firms. Still others are on loan to service organizations from firms that are now pursuing pro bono opportunities, or firms, where there is less work." And especially relevant in the New York area, "Some experts say the increase may also have to do with post-Sept. 11 altruism."

Perhaps it is simply because volunteerism is as cyclical as business; and today, attorneys have more time to give. Whatever the reason for why more attorneys are donating their time to help folks who cannot afford legal assistance, we are certainly glad to hear it. As some New York legal aid agencies are happily coping with "an epidemic of lawyers wanting to volunteer," Cindy Feathers, Director of Pro Bono Affairs for the New York State Bar Association urges attorneys to stick with volunteering, and says, "If you really care about this, don't just do it by the seat of your pants."

In encouraging AILA members to volunteer, the AILA Pro Bono Committee does not want you to feel you must "do it by the seat of your pants." Using this medium, our intention was to publish an online immigration law-related resources guide that could help you in your pro bono cases. However, there is far too much useful information on the Web to outline here. In the near future, the Pro Bono Committee will be working with the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF) to publish a more comprehensive directory of useful sites, and it will serve as a living document to be updated as often as feasible.

In the meantime, the sites listed below are on almost every "Links List" and are

credible and reliable. They all offer free online articles and publications, while some offer low-cost publications for order. Most also offer the opportunity to register for regular e-mail newsletters or bulletins.

So for those of you looking to raise your level of volunteerism, here are some resources that we hope will help you:

### American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)

[www.aila.org](http://www.aila.org)

This one is self-explanatory. We all know what AILA offers on InfoNet. And if you don't know, it is a benefit offered to dues-paying members. If you are a member, you should check it out at least daily for updates—statutory, regulatory, policy, administrative, judicial, etc. If you do not know how to use InfoNet to conduct research, sign up for a free telephonic training session.

Furthermore, the InfoNet "Links" page will refer you to a plethora of other sites that cover legal research, policy research, executive office and relevant agencies, government information sites, judicial research sites, human rights and refugees, law and professional associations, immigration-related organizations, news and information services, Internet search engines, and other links.

### American Immigration Lawyers Foundation (AILF)

[www.ailf.org](http://www.ailf.org)

AILF's Legal Action Center was created in part to assist attorneys in representing their clients in litigation matters. Online resources now include invaluable practice advisories written on various legal topics regarding current issues; post 9-11 resources; and litigation updates. The Legal Action Center section also contains a brief archive containing briefs written by immigration lawyers nationwide prior to May 2000; these briefs are helpful as a research starting point and for historical perspective. The new AILF Immigration Policy Center publishes cutting-edge Policy Reports and fact sheets that also are available online.

### Commission on Immigration Policy, Practice, and Pro Bono

[www.abanet.org/immigration](http://www.abanet.org/immigration)

As part of its mission, the ABA Commission on Immigration Policy, Practice, and Pro Bono provides continuing education and timely information about trends, court decisions, and pertinent developments; and develops and assists the ongoing operation of pro bono programs that encourage volunteer lawyers to provide high quality, effective legal representation for individuals in immigration courts.

### American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

[www.aclu.org/ImmigrantsRights](http://www.aclu.org/ImmigrantsRights)

The Immigrants' Rights Project (IRP) of the American Civil Liberties Union works to defend the civil and constitutional rights of immigrants through a comprehensive program of impact litigation and public education. The IRP files constitutional and



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class action lawsuits protecting the historic guarantee to judicial review, enforcing fair employment practices, and maintaining constitutional safeguards against detention practices and biased asylum adjudication.

#### Asylum Law Web Site

[www.asylumlaw.org](http://www.asylumlaw.org)

Asylumlaw.org was founded on March 1, 1999, with the sole purpose of using the Internet to help lawyers worldwide prepare the best asylum cases they can. It contains information for asylum seekers, case support, legal tools, and current asylum/refugee news.

Registration is fast, free, and confidential. Once approved, you will have access to special content, including a database with over 1,500 entries of knowledgeable attorneys who have collectively represented more than 32,500 asylum seekers from virtually every country in the world.

Registered users can contact these lawyers and advocates directly to learn about country conditions or the asylum process. Other content for registered users includes a discussion forum, a brief bank, and a database of expert witnesses.

Austin, Texas-based Human Rights

Documentation Exchange (HRDE), one of the oldest organizations devoted to the collection and dissemination of information relating to asylum claims, closed on March 31, 2002. The organization shipped its entire library of expertly researched packets to [asylumlaw.org](http://asylumlaw.org).

#### Immigration Legal Resource Center (ILRC)

[www.ilrc.org](http://www.ilrc.org)

In 1979, the Immigrant Legal Resource Center began as a group of volunteer attorneys and law students who recognized the pressing need for legal support to agencies working with immigrants and refugees in the San Francisco Bay Area. Responding to the wave of refugees fleeing war and repression in Central America in the 1980s, the ILRC was instrumental in organizing legal services and providing vital expertise.

ILRC staff attorneys provide on-site and telephone consultation, training workshops and seminars, and educational curricula on immigration issues to pro bono attorneys and nonprofit agencies serving immigrants throughout the United States. They also offer litigation support in select cases, including representing clients, filing

*amicus* briefs, serving as expert witnesses, and providing analysis of rules and laws—both proposed and enacted.

#### **National Lawyers Guild/National Immigration Project**

***www.nationalimmigrationproject.org***

The National Immigration Project is a network of immigration lawyers, law students, jailhouse lawyers, and legal workers who work to end unlawful immigration practices, to recognize the contributions of immigrants in this country, to promote fair immigration practices, and to expand the civil and human rights of all immigrants, regardless of their status in the United States.

Advisories and research materials are located on the site; low-cost training materials may be ordered. A Brief Bank is available online; but if you are not a member the National Lawyers Guild, you will be able to search for briefs but not download them. The site includes an extensive list of “Links to Other Sites.”

#### **National Immigration Law Center (NILC)**

***www.nilc.org***

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is a national support center whose mission is to protect and promote the rights and opportunities of low income immigrants and their family members. NILC staff specializes in immigration law and the employment and public benefits rights of immigrants.

The Center conducts policy analysis and impact litigation and provides publications, technical advice, and training to a broad constituency of legal aid agencies, community groups, and pro bono attorneys. There are numerous articles and publications available on the site as well as low-cost publications that can be ordered.

#### **National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)**

***www.nnirr.org***

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations, and activists. It serves as a forum to share information and analysis, to educate communities and the general public, and to develop and coordinate plans of action on important immigrant and refugee issues.

#### **Pro Bono Net**

***www.probono.net***

Launched in late 1998, Pro Bono Net has online communities in New York, Minnesota, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. This site also has two national practice areas— asylum and Death Penalty—which are open to attorneys across the country who would like to donate their legal skills in these areas.

#### **The Pro Bono Institute**

***www.probonoinst.org***

The Pro Bono Institute, housed at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., is “mandated to explore and identify new approaches to—and resources for—the provision of legal

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—Cindy Feathers, Director,  
Pro Bono Affairs, New York  
State Bar Association

services to the poor, disadvantaged, and other individuals or groups unable to secure legal assistance to address critical problems.”

The Asylum Practice Area supports lawyers who are providing pro bono assistance to individuals seeking asylum in the United States. It is hosted by the following alliance of nonprofit asylum providers: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights; Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area; and Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights.

This area is currently open to pro bono lawyers who are handling asylum cases in New York, Minnesota, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. The Asylum Practice Area provides tremendous online support and resources to its participating lawyers, including news, a calendar of trainings and events, online listings of new cases for volunteers, a message board that will allow you to communicate with other members of the practice area, and an online library of training manuals, briefs, and practice materials.

Among the projects operating under the aegis of the Institute is the highly regarded Law Firm Pro Bono Project, which is a project of the Pro Bono Institute and the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service. The Project was created to support and expand the pro bono publico activities of large law firms. Funded by member law firms and the ABA's Fund for Justice and Education, the Project assists law firms in developing effective pro bono programs and in integrating those programs into the practice, philosophy, and culture of the firms.

### The BCIS Asylum Web Site

[www.bcis.gov/graphics/services/asylum/index.htm](http://www.bcis.gov/graphics/services/asylum/index.htm)

The BCIS asylum Web site has been recently overhauled and is now very useful. The site includes the “Resource Information Center” (RIC), which was established to meet the information needs of the Asylum Officer and Immigration Officer Corps in the United States and overseas by providing them with credible and objective information on conditions in the countries of origin of asylum and refugee applicants.

The Asylum Division obtains information from human rights monitors, other government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the media. It compiles this information in a variety of publications distributed to the Officer Corps. ■■■

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**C. Lynn Calder** is Chair of the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Pro Bono Committee. You may contact the Pro Bono Committee with additional sites by sending an e-mail to Susan Quarles at [squarles@aila.org](mailto:squarles@aila.org), or by contacting Nadine Wettstein at [nwettstein@ailf.org](mailto:nwettstein@ailf.org).