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Pro Bono – Law Firms

One Firm Worldwide – Covering Pro Bono Globally

The Editor of The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel interviews Laura Tuell Parcher, Partner, Jones Day.

Editor: Two years ago you were chosen to be the full-time, firm-wide partner in charge of Jones Day's pro bono activity. What are your major accomplishments so far?

Parcher: We have been able to forge new relationships with numerous outstanding non profit organizations that are really making a difference in people's lives and advancing the rule of law.

Editor: This must be the dream job for you.

Parcher: It is. I went to law school in part with the idealism of saving the world. I have been very fortunate to work at Jones Day. While I really enjoyed my practice as a trial lawyer, I always did pro bono work and found that to be the most personally rewarding.

Editor: When you took the assignment, did you find any common threads running through what individual offices of the firm were doing in the way of pro bono?

Parcher: The firm has always had a strong commitment to pro bono and public service. The domestic offices do a substantial amount of similar types of projects and matters. The international offices are much different. I wouldn't say across the board that there were similar pro bono issues that the offices were working on but the commitment to pro bono was certainly present in every office.

Editor: What did you find among those of your partners who joined from different civil law traditions? Was the sense or

the focus of pro bono work different from one office to another?

Parcher: Yes. Certainly the cultures in the different countries in which we have a presence impacts the type of pro bono assistance that is needed. In addition the major practices vary by office. Some are more corporate and less litigation based. It was a challenge to determine what types of work we could do in each of the international offices. Certainly in some European countries the government provides a significant amount of legal representation to the poor, so there is less call for traditional legal aid type pro bono services, but a great need for transactional lawyers to assist non profit organizations with corporate issues.

Editor: Do you find that young lawyers qualified in countries with civil law traditions have the same desire to save the world?

Parcher: I think they do. There is not as strong a local tradition of providing pro bono services in some of the countries where we have a presence, but that culture is changing. As lawyers see the opportunities, they are truly excited and motivated to become involved.

Editor: That's encouraging.

Parcher: There is great enthusiasm, and not just at Jones Day, but I see it in countries, particularly in Europe, but also in Asia where many law firms are working together to grow pro bono programs.

Editor: What is the firm's pro bono strategy?



Laura Tuell
Parcher

Parcher: The firm is committed to making a difference in the communities in which we have a presence. We have identified overarching goals, including the rule of law, guaranteeing educational opportunities for children and addressing the need for affordable and safe housing. We are doing that work in offices all over the world. Our real strategy, however, is to assist lawyers to undertake pro bono projects that interest and inspire them. A big part of my job is identifying what our lawyers' interests are and how to partner them with non profit organizations to engage in that type of work.

Editor: If a young lawyer identifies something that he or she is really committed to, how do you manage the balance of the time that they can spend on pro bono work and their overall commitment to the firm?

Parcher: Pro bono work at the firm is treated the same as paying client work, both in terms of the resources that the firm commits as well as for the evaluation of lawyers within the firm. The balance is case-by-case, depending on the needs of the case and the availability of lawyers. We encourage our lawyers to be responsible as to how they balance their time, but their time is valued the same and the firm is committed, once we take a case, to making sure each client gets the best representation possible.

Editor: Our readers understand what a responsible law firm does domestically, but many may not be quite as clear what the opportunities are internationally.

Parcher: One example, we undertook representation of the Grameen Foundation that creates micro loan banks. It started in Bangladesh and wanted to expand to Asia and South America. We represent Grameen in a variety of contexts through our U.S., Mexico City, Shanghai, Beijing, and Madrid

Please email the interviewee at lparcher@jonesday.com with questions about this interview.

offices working together to assist those efforts. We also have been assisting Lawyers without Borders in Kenya. We started working with them a little over a year ago with a program that trains Kenyan lawyers and judges. Each one-week session trains about a hundred lawyers and judges. When we go back the following year, we identify some of those lawyers that have been trained, and we work with them to train the next group of lawyers. Hopefully, in three or four years there will be enough lawyers trained as trainers so the program will become self sustaining. Two of our partners went on the Kenya project last year and were very impressed with the quality of the program. Thereafter we worked to increase our relationship with Lawyers without Borders. We have lawyers from D.C., New York, Houston, Pittsburgh and London all working together on that project right now, and two of our partners will be attending the training in Kenya this year in August. I am incredibly excited to be one of them.

Editor: Who are the trainees?

Parcher: Most of the participants are already trained lawyers and judges. The training focuses on trial skills, including opening statements, closing statements, cross-examination, preparing witnesses and some education on particular issues of law. For example, we produced materials on when prior statements are admissible, how to qualify an expert and case studies that address issues related to human and civil rights. There is a database containing a significant quantity of case law, which facilitates our ability to research Kenyan law, identify issues that arise and figure out how the Kenyan courts are resolving those issues.

Editors: Is the program going to be expanded to other countries?

Parcher: The goal is that Kenya becomes self-sustaining fairly shortly and LWOBs is working to identify additional countries to begin similar programs in Africa.

Editor: Tell our readers about Room to Read.

Parcher: We started a relationship with Room to Read also about a year ago. Room to Read was founded ten years ago, and is active in nine countries in Asia and Africa. It has established 10,000 libraries, constructed 1,100 schools, published in-country 5.5 million books, and is assisting over 9,000 girls with long-term scholarships. We find that their business model is one that

really promotes both scalability and sustainably. Their work with both girls and providing the building blocks of literacy and education has an enormous impact on the future income, HIV rates, family size and maternal health of the 4.1 million children their program benefits. Jones Day began working with Room to Read about a year ago on some IP issues internationally and then helping them domestically with various corporate issues, reviewing contracts, working on leases and those kinds of things. We have lawyers in San Francisco, New York, and Washington working with them currently and we will be expanding to the international offices as the IP work grows. In addition the Jones Day Foundation has made a grant to Room to Read of \$100,000 to build 22 libraries and publish 30,000 children's books in India. So we are growing our relationship with Room to Read, which is consistent with our goals of working on education.

Editor: What are some of the new areas of pro bono work your are seeing?

Parcher: I have had a lot of exposure in the last year to organizations or other social entrepreneurs who are trying to start them and are struggling with what corporate structure to adopt when the ultimate mission is something socially responsible, such as renewable energy and inexpensive technologies that would make a huge difference in developing countries.

Editor: They are hard questions but great law firms can be enormously helpful in doing that balancing act.

Parcher: One of the challenges is that the ABA and others have strict definitions of what constitutes pro bono hours. Where pro bono work is done on behalf of a corporation – that corporation must be established as a non profit under those definitions. The legal profession is going to have to decide whether to expand the definition of pro bono to include these hybrid corporations that might not be non profits but that clearly have a mission of advancing social responsibility. I would advocate that the legal community look at the definition of what constitutes pro bono and broaden that definition to facilitate assisting this entrepreneur movement that is growing so quickly and that has the potential to make a significant positive impact on the world, particularly the developing world.

Editor: How do you see the future of pro bono activity, for the firm specifically and for the profession broadly?

Parcher: I see a broad and deep commitment by lawyers, not just in the U.S. but internationally, to engage in more pro bono and more public service. I see more law firms cooperating with each other and building support groups in countries where there hasn't been a lot of support for pro bono work and collaborating together among themselves and with non profit organizations to figure out how to grow and build pro bono work. One of the interesting developments is a group called the Public Interest Law Institute. They hold a European forum every year and bring together NGOs from all over Europe. I went a couple of years ago and found that a lot of the non profit organizations or NGOs weren't aware of the pro bono assistance that is available from law firms. This forum is doing a terrific job, as does the Public Interest Law Institute, in helping non profit organizations define their needs and then partnering them with law firms that can assist them. I see these pockets growing all over the world. I think that it is incredibly exciting and I am very thrilled that Jones Day can be a significant player in that movement.

Editor: If there is one question that I should have asked that I did not ask, what would it be?

Parcher: There is an Afghanistan project we haven't discussed. About two years ago we were approached and asked to join the Public Private Partnership for Legal Reform in Afghanistan, a collaborative effort between the State Department and law firms. Another of my partners, Peter Garvin, and I sit on the executive committee of that organization. Peter went to Afghanistan with other representatives of the partnership to identify how the partnership could be useful in helping to advance the rule of law in Afghanistan. We participated in bringing Afghan lawyers and judges for training programs over here on rule of law issues. They met judges, including Sandra Day O'Connor, at a reception at Jones Day. They also had an opportunity to meet Hillary Clinton when they were taking a tour of the State Department. We have also set up an LLM program at several universities and law schools around the country that have offered to provide a free LLM to practicing lawyers in Afghanistan, and we have assisted in bringing those lawyers to the U.S. and getting them settled at those schools. It has also been another very rewarding project where the change is going to come slowly but the work is incredibly important.