



Aidan R. Welsh is chair of the Connecticut Bar Association Young Lawyers Section for the 2017-2018 bar year. She is partner at Schoonmaker George & Blomberg PC in Greenwich, where she handles complex divorce and family law actions involving significant assets and client custody issues. Attorney Welsh frequently speaks on issues related to family law for the CBA and has authored several publications in this field. She graduated with honors from UConn School of Law in 2006.

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Giving back and connecting with the communities we serve is essential to the development of our future leaders in the legal field. One of the main goals of the Connecticut Bar Association Young Lawyers Section has always been to provide our members opportunities to get involved volunteering in the communities that we serve in and to encourage pro bono service. As chair of the Young Lawyers Section this year my focus is no different. I believe that public service and pro bono work is essential to the growth and success of young lawyers.

The benefits of public service are significant for young lawyers, as well for lawyers of any level of experience. These benefits include increased feelings of personal sat-

isfaction, valuable work experience, job satisfaction, exposure to a variety of areas of practice, networking and practice development opportunities, and increased job opportunities.

Personal and Job Satisfaction

Public service and pro bono opportunities can provide feelings of personal satisfaction and achievement that may not always be available when working in private practice. Such opportunities can allow you to support a worthwhile cause, effect positive societal change, and provide equal access to justice for those in need. As a young lawyer, a significant amount of your time can be spent behind a desk as you learn skills to hone your craft. While this is a necessary part of the learning experience, sorting through boxes of discovery documents is admittedly not always exciting and invigorating. Donating your time and energy to a cause that you find meaningful and worthwhile can increase your satisfaction in all that you do. Using your skills to create change allows you to see the direct impact of your hard work. There is nothing more satisfying than that.

Valuable Work Experience and Exposure to a Variety of Areas of Practice

Many young lawyers do not receive significant opportunities to see the inside of a courtroom, work directly with a client, or put on a contested hearing, and find themselves limited to working on one area of law. By donating time working with an organization that has clients that are in need of legal assistance but cannot afford such representation, young lawyers will find themselves exposed to areas of practice outside of their every day job and provide

them with opportunities to take leadership roles in a case. This will allow the lawyer to gain years of experience in a relatively short time period. When hiring, experience is almost always the first and most important requirement employers focus on. Opportunities to obtain experience by performing pro bono services is endless.

Practice Development and Networking

As a young lawyer the focus of practice development is initially on learning the skills necessary to perform the tasks of your every day job. However, very quickly, especially in the private sector, expectations will be set for you to develop your practice and bring in clients. Even if you are working in the public sector, contacts are equally important to be made in order to support the organization you work for and to excel at your job.

There is no better way to improve upon your networking skills than to meet new people and get out of your comfort zone. By participating in public service projects and pro bono work you can meet numerous professionals, potential clients, and friends. Networking does not come easy to everyone; it is a skill which can be learned and improved upon. The more you do it, the better you can become at it. Involvement with nonprofit organizations is a no pressure way to hone this essential skill.

Increased Job Opportunities

Doors to job opportunities will open the more experience a young lawyer has. What better way to get experience than to increase your knowledge base by performing pro bono work? Pro bono opportunities will provide lawyers with legal experiences they would not otherwise get for many

years and allow for valuable resume building information. Involvement in public service projects will have the same effect. Employers want to find well rounded employees that will reflect the virtues and values their firms and organizations want to highlight to clients and constituents. Being involved in the community is always a positive attribute for a lawyer to both employers and clients.

Public Service Opportunities This Bar Year

As chair this bar year, I have appointed both a public service director (Joanna Kornafel of Zeisler & Zeisler PC) and a pro bono director (Melanie Dykas, staff counsel at Locke Lord LLP) so we can better serve our community and provide worthwhile opportunities to our members. Over the course of this bar year, our members have had, and will continue to have, opportunities to participate in a variety of public service projects. Our main project this year is our partnership with Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization that partners with people in your community, and all over the world, to help them improve a place they can call home.

Last fall we worked directly with Habitat for Humanity to build homes in Hartford. Future homeowners through the program are selected locally, with criteria centering on their need for decent housing, their ability to repay an affordable mortgage, and their willingness to partner with the organization to build or improve their home. Habitat for Humanity builds new homes that are durable and healthy for the lowest possible cost. They also repair and rehabilitate existing homes and revitalize neighborhoods. In the spring, we will be working with them again, this time in Fairfield County.

On November 4, 2017, Young Lawyers Section members, along with Co-interim Executive Director Carol DeJohn, put on their hard hats and helped build homes located in downtown Hartford. The sense of accomplishment after sawing, nailing, and building a porch was amazing. The bonding that occurs when you rely on your fellow colleagues to hold the wood steady while you are holding a high powered hand saw, is priceless. Plus, everyone looks good in a

hard hat. I encourage everyone to join us in the spring for our next build.

In addition to our work with Habitat for Humanity, the section used its annual holiday networking event to raise monetary and in-kind donations for My Sisters' Place and the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH). My Sisters' Place is a nonprofit organization committed to ending homelessness by empowering women, families, and others in Greater Hartford to achieve independence and stability in their community by providing housing and supportive services. The mission of CCEH is to end homelessness one family at a time for the 1,000 families in Connecticut that experience homelessness in any given year. Due to the support of our sponsor, Faxon Law Group, and our CBA members that attended the event, we were able to make a generous donation to both organizations and raise awareness for the issues that both groups seek to address and eradicate.

During the spring, we will also be working with Dress for Success, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire, and the developmental tools to help them thrive in work and in life. So, time to get those suits you no longer wear out of the closet and donate them to a woman in need! Give them the opportunity and confidence to succeed at their next job interview.

In addition, each year, the CBA YLS encourages our members to participate in the Civics First Mock Trial program by serving as lawyer mentors and judges. Civics First runs both a middle school and high school mock trial competition for schools throughout the state. This volunteer opportunity provides our members a great chance to mentor and teach future lawyers.

Pro Bono Initiative This Bar Year

YLS Pro Bono Director Melanie Dykas created the 10-10-10 Pro Bono Program. As part of this program, our executive committee members committed to performing at least ten hours of pro bono services during the course of the bar year. We encourage all members of the bar to join us in this commitment.

On October 10, 2017, the Young Lawyers Section hosted the annual Pro Bono Fair. This event connects nonprofit organizations in the state with lawyers who are interested in performing pro bono services. To expand our membership base this year, we partnered with both the University of Connecticut School of Law and Quinnipiac University School of Law. The event was held at both law schools to encourage attendance and participation. The goal of this event is to make it easy for our members to get legal experience by providing a direct path to those organizations that need pro bono assistance. The more experience a young lawyer has working in the legal field, the more marketable that lawyer becomes. We are working on developing a new program for the spring, so stay tuned for more opportunities to get involved.

The Benefits of Giving Back

Over the past several years I have taken my own advice to heart. I currently serve on the board of two nonprofit organizations in Connecticut, YWCA Darien-Norwalk and Opus Person 2 Person. The mission of the YWCA is to eliminate racism and empower women. They provide safe places for women and girls, build strong women leaders, and advocate for women's rights and civil rights in Congress. Person 2 Person is a community-supported agency that provides emergency assistance for basic needs, and support for individuals and families as they move toward stability.

My involvement in these organizations has opened doors to meeting many professionals, state and local politicians, and potential clients. In addition, I have met many individuals who have become close colleagues and friends. My confidence has grown as a lawyer and public speaker through my experiences; I have developed and honed my networking skills. My connections in my local community have furthered both my personal and professional life in significant ways. My daily satisfaction has grown exponentially since getting involved in public service work. Priorities come into focus more when you understand and realize the hardships that other individuals experience on a daily basis. To me there is nothing more worthwhile and rewarding than giving back. Get involved and give back. The benefits are endless. **CL**