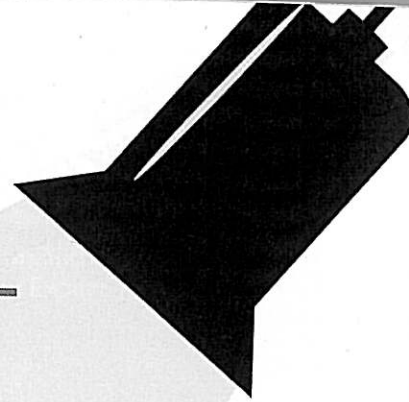


VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Stacy Cozart



THIS MONTH, the Volunteer Spotlight shines deservedly on Stacy Cozart. Stacy is an attorney with Sharon & Kálnoki LLC, a firm specializing in immigration and nationality law. Stacy focuses her immigration practice in both the business and family sectors, and lends her expertise to Legal Aid by providing pro bono services at the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) Clinics.

"The first clinic was a little hectic," says Stacy, who had accepted an invitation by Lisa Gasbarre Black, Cleveland Catholic Charities General Counsel, to help in the first-ever pro bono Refugee Immigration Clinic, a cooperative effort between the Legal Aid Society and Catholic Charities Office of Migration and Refugee Services. "We helped 10 families that day, mostly from Somalia, and all of them have become permanent residents of the United States." Stacy and other local immigration attorneys assisted the refugees in filling out forms and completing the filing packets that were necessary for them to obtain residency. The process of becoming a permanent resident in the U.S. can be daunting, rules change often and the forms are quite complex. For some individuals, the process can take 5 to 6 years.

Since that initial experience, Stacy has provided pro bono services to several Legal Aid Immigration and Brief Advice and Referral Clinics. She works closely with Cleveland immigration attorney Jennifer Peyton and Legal Aid attorney Jill Lange to oversee the clinics and direct CSU and Case law students who provide assistance.

For the past two years, Stacy was appointed the Pro Bono Coordinator for the State of Ohio, American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). In that role, she co-founded the aptly named C. Lyonel Jones Pro Bono Immigration Committee. With the assistance of Ms. Peyton, Ms. Lange and

Mr. Scott Bratton of Margaret W. Wong & Assoc., Co., LPA, Stacy makes a monthly review of immigration cases and assigns them out to one of the forty attorneys who agree to sit on the Committee. Stacy also helped to organize Citizenship Day 2008, an AILA and Legal Aid co-sponsored event. The workshop relied on 26 volunteer attorneys as well as numerous paralegals and students who aided permanent residents seeking U.S. Citizenship. On April 19, more than 30 individuals were assisted at Citizenship Day 2008.

After eight years as an immigration attorney, Stacy cannot see herself in any other role. "I don't know of any other area of the law that people come up and hug you," says Stacy. "It is so rewarding to help someone become acclimated to another country." Stacy sees immigrants as one of the neediest of all populations. "It is nice to be able to take a knowledge base that you have and help people alleviate stress. They [immigrants] get nervous and afraid that if they don't fill out the forms correctly, someone will knock on their door and take them away. As an attorney, I am able to help them and hold their hand throughout the process."

Stacy acknowledges Peyton, Lange and Bratton, as well as the legal immigration community as a whole for their willingness to step up and provide pro bono services. "This [immigration] is a great area to practice in, and Cleveland is a great community to practice within," remarks Stacy. "Without the assistance of other attorneys, the pro bono efforts would be non-existent."

Stacy has been involved as a volunteer with several different Cleveland organizations including Treasurer of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association's Immigration Section; Chair of the Immigration Committee of the former Cuyahoga County Bar Association; and Member of the Ethics Committee, AILA.

Beyond her immigration practice, Stacy enjoys spending time with her husband and 2-year-old daughter.

If you are interested in joining Stacy and others in these worthwhile programs, contact her at cozart@visaskk.com. The personal satisfaction and professional experience you will gain are priceless. ■