

**Mary R. Garrubba-Bates,**

**Allegheny County**

Mary R. Garrubba-Bates is an attorney with Reed Smith LLP in Pittsburgh.

**Describe your pro bono work.**

I became involved with the Washington City Mission as a member of its board of directors 10 years ago. The mission houses homeless people who face many problems that restrict them from moving forward with their lives. I quickly realized it wasn't enough just to house the homeless, because many of the mission's residents encountered problems that were legal in nature. Wanting to help, I founded The Legal Clinic, or TLC, and now I, along with other volunteers, spend time each month aiding the residents in their legal matters. I estimate that TLC helps more than 50 residents each year to work through issues unique to their circumstances that present hurdles they could not otherwise overcome.

I remember a woman at the shelter who was a recovering alcoholic and six months successfully into the mission program. Unexpectedly, a constable showed up to take her to jail because she had accrued more than \$3,000 in unpaid parking tickets. I intervened, rode with the client in the back seat of the constable's car to the magistrate's office, and I was able to convince the magistrate to allow the woman to complete the mission's program instead of her being put in jail. That decision allowed the woman to continue her road to recovery, successfully complete the mission program, and ultimately begin to work at a grocery store, which enabled her to pay off the parking tickets. It was a win-win for everyone.

I am humbled to have received the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation's Louis J. Goffman Award, the Legal Services Corporation's National Pro Bono Award, and the Washington County Bar Association's Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award for outstanding pro bono support and service. I currently serve on the board of directors for Southwestern PA Legal Services Inc., the primary provider of free legal services for low-income citizens in Washington, Greene, Fayette and Somerset counties, and I am a member of the Public Service Committee for the Allegheny County Bar Association. Recently, I volunteered for the H.E.L.P. Clinic, Adoption Legal Services Project and participated in Allegheny County's Expungement Day.

**Why do you participate in pro bono?**

I have found that legal issues are often near-impossible barriers for homeless and other indigent people to overcome in their quest for restoration, independent living and opportunity. I have a deep passion for helping people who have a desire to change but don't know how on their own.

**How did you first become involved?**

When I served on the Washington City Mission's board, homeless residents discovered that I was an attorney. They would tell me about their legal problems that kept them from achieving restoration and independence. I founded The Legal Clinic to help them, and I've been helping them ever since.

**Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your**

**regular practice areas? If so, how did you adapt?**

Yes, but as a litigator, I have to think on my feet and often research unusual issues. Those practices flow over to resolve legal issues that contribute to homelessness too. I would never tell any client that I cannot strive for a successful resolution. Mission clients typically ask for hugs, though.

**What have been the personal rewards?**

I am gratified any time I achieve a successful outcome for an individual who was paralyzed with distress. But I advocate that anyone can help, no matter what their vocation. Donations of time, clothing or necessities all can be ways that volunteers can help to change a life for the better.