
Firm Develops New Community Partnerships

2011-02-28

The firm's innovative community partnership program is a hallmark of its commitment to pro bono and community service. WilmerHale's focused philanthropy model—which includes multi-year financial support, pro bono legal representation, volunteer service and in-kind donations—allows attorneys and staff to come together and have a direct impact on their local communities.

In Boston, the firm's current partners are Cathedral High School, Citizen Schools and Discovering Justice; in Washington DC, they are Bread for the City and the See Forever Foundation/Maya Angelou Public Charter Schools. Now, several new partnerships are taking shape in the New York and Boston offices, and at the Business Services Center in the Dayton area.

In New York, the firm has formed a relationship with [Sanctuary for Families](#), a nonprofit organization that serves domestic violence victims and their children. Though there are other organizations with which the office has worked and will continue to work, this is its first formal partnership.

“One of our tasks at the beginning of 2010 was to figure out which entity in New York would make the most sense in keeping with the firm's partnership model,” says Partner [John Pierce](#), chair of the New York office's

Public Service Committee and a liaison to Sanctuary. “We met as a committee and talked about what kind of organization we thought would be appropriate, and we sent out emails to the office for suggestions. In the end, the most enthusiastic calls were from people who had worked with Sanctuary.”

Counsel Sarah Pfuhl and others had already done pro bono work for the organization, and former WilmerHale partner Mike Sharp had been on its board. Both spoke highly of Sanctuary, and the committee believed that the cause of supporting victims of domestic violence was a compelling one.

The availability of volunteer opportunities was also an important element of the decision. “Our goal was to partner with an organization that would offer a range of contribution and volunteer opportunities for attorneys and staff,” says New York Office Administrator Vikki Candiotti, who will also serve as a liaison to Sanctuary. “This organization has a number of different ways we can assist.”

This past holiday season, the New York office participated in Sanctuary's Adopt-a-Family program, fulfilling the wish lists of three families, and collected coats to donate to the organization's Butterfly Boutique, which provides free clothing to victims and their families. The firm's Women's Leadership Initiative will sponsor a clothing drive for the boutique in the spring, and the Public Service Committee will soon be organizing a day of career training for women served by Sanctuary. In addition, a more formal channel has been set up to match attorneys with pro bono opportunities offered by the organization.

In Boston, a new partnership has been formed with [Hyde Square Task Force](#), a nonprofit organization that each year serves 1,000 youth from the

Jamaica Plain and Roxbury neighborhoods through leadership development, college preparation, arts and cultural enrichment, youth-led community organizing and community-building events.

“We wanted to work with teenagers, and we thought they had a very exciting program,” says Partner [Mary Jo Johnson](#), who will serve as a liaison to the organization, along with Counsel [Dan Esrick](#). “They have a very committed staff and a really engaging director, who we thought we could work well with, and they provided a lengthy list of ways we can help them.”

At the Business Services Center, an inaugural community service event was held at [The Foodbank](#) in Dayton in November. Six staff members from various departments spent an afternoon sorting food and getting to know one another. In December, a group of discovery attorneys volunteered their time to assist [Montgomery County Children Services](#) and [For Love of Children](#) in stuffing stockings for area foster children. Though these one-off events will continue to occur, a committee has been set up to choose an organization with which to formally partner.

“We're looking for a grassroots nonprofit that will meet the firm's full philanthropic model,” says Human Resources Manager Kay Phillips. “We really want to take the WilmerHale model and use it to create a good community service program that reflects the types of interests our employees have in the community.”

“Dayton is not a large metropolitan area, so it's possible for the office to have a major impact on the local community, simply because of its size,” says Managing Director Harold Gibson. “We're excited about that opportunity, and we want it to be a reflection of the office itself.”

Read more about the firm's innovative community partnership program.