

DAY IN THE LIFE

CURATED BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

Challenges Never Stop at Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

BY BARBARA BUCKLEY, ESQ.

The music comes on softly, gradually increasing in volume. It's 5:20 a.m. and my day begins.

After climbing on my stationary bike with a cup of coffee in my crowded laundry room, it's time to begin the day. Ten minutes is allotted to check Facebook and play Candy Crush. After that, it's on to work emails. The first one is a status report: after two years of litigation involving a brave woman who sought help from an undercover police detective to stop her brutal pimp from trafficking her, she gets her "T-visa," a visa that stops her from being deported and separated from her young son. A hard-fought victory: this is the best way to start off the day.

There are five grant reports to review – one supporting attorneys for abused children; one for attorneys representing vulnerable seniors in guardianship actions; one to represent teens in foster care who are denied educational services due to them under federal law; one for all programs; and another to help victims and survivors of the October 1 shooting. All of the reports want different statistics and outcomes. I make a few changes, and approvals are sent. There is an email exchange with a general counsel from a gaming property – he wants breakfast to talk about how his law department might support Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada – another wonderful email that doesn't come along every day. After 60 minutes, it's time to get to the office.

At the office, I begin the day with an interview with a potential new Legal Aid Center attorney. Hiring the right people guarantees success. Because of that, I interview every lawyer hired by Legal Aid Center and have since I became executive director 24 years ago. Is it time consuming? Yes! But the quality of Legal Aid Center staff is why we are successful. The candidate is an experienced litigator with empathy for the poor as she grew up in a poor part of Las Vegas in foster care. It's time to check references. Then a strategy meeting on a new initiative to help victims of domestic violence navigate the Temporary Protective Order (TPO) process in the court. We just began providing that service at the courthouse, helping 13,298 victims in addition to the 51,222 individuals in need of divorce and custody helped at the Family Law Self Help Center every year. We need a new statewide TPO application so we can convert the paper process to an electronic "Turbo Tax" style interview, making the process easier for victims and more likely to result in success. Fortunately, a Nevada Supreme Court justice has agreed to chair that initiative.



It's only 10 a.m. in my typical day, but I am nearing the 600-word limit for this article. Suffice it to say, my day is frenetic and rewarding. Building and sustaining a

civil law legal aid delivery system to help the 800,000 individuals who earn at or below 200 percent of poverty and qualify for our assistance is a daunting task. Every day, I focus on mission: How can we better serve the clients in need? How can we right wrongs and change lives? How can we gently urge others to join us in this cause?

After 30 years at Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, I know this – the challenges never stop, and I have the most rewarding job in the state.

BARBARA BUCKLEY is the executive director of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, graduating from the University of Arizona Law School summa cum laude in 1989. She also served in the Nevada Legislature for 16 years, was voted most effective legislator for six consecutive legislative sessions, ultimately becoming Speaker of the Nevada Assembly, the first woman to hold that role in the state's history.