

INDIVIDUAL HONOREE



HELEN RESPASS, *Thomson Reuters*

Dedicated attorney promotes pro bono for in-house lawyers and offers customized legal guidance to nonprofits through clinics and special projects

Lawyers Alliance is proud to work with an increasing number of attorneys from corporations. Integral to this effort are attorneys such as Helen Respess, who champions pro bono among her colleagues and is an excellent visionary and project manager. At pro bono legal clinics, Helen has counseled nonprofit clients on contracts, employment law questions, financial best practices, and risk management issues. Through document reviews and other projects, she has helped a community center and community development organization to update personnel manuals and procedures, resulting in smoother operations.

Employment:

Thomson Reuters
Senior Legal Editor at
Practical Law
Member of Thomson
Reuters Pro Bono
Committee

Graduate of:

A.B. Princeton University
J.D. Columbia Law School

Lawyers Alliance clients:

Abyssinian Development
Corporation
Bay Ridge Center
Maspeth Town Hall
New York City Charter
School Center
New York Council on
Adoptable Children
Project Hospitality

Q. What motivates you to participate in, or support, pro bono?

Pro bono work is both thrilling and humbling. It's thrilling to be able to use my legal skills to provide access to justice to the poor and underserved, to break down legal barriers to their success, and to support the on-the-ground nonprofits that are delivering vital services to this community. It's humbling to be part of life-changing work that helps the most vulnerable in society find safety, economic security, and hope for the future.

Q. Share a tip for making time for pro bono during the COVID pandemic.

It's easy to get swallowed up by pandemic challenges. To make time for pro bono, try these steps. First, focus on why pro bono is important to you. This can inspire and motivate you to act. Pick a cause you feel passionate about. Passion will carry you through the late nights of pro bono work, if it comes to that. Then, jump in, sign up, and schedule it. If it's a potentially big or unpredictable project, invite colleagues to join you to distribute the workload and share the experience.

Q. Share a fun or unexpected moment from pro bono work through Lawyers Alliance.

It's always fun to participate in a Lawyers Alliance clinic with friends and colleagues. There's anticipation to working together on a pro bono project, and such camaraderie in the experience. One memorable moment was advising a nonprofit from my colleague's neighborhood. We swapped stories and knew many of the same community leaders. It makes our pro bono work more meaningful when we can see the nonprofit's positive impact in our own community.

Q. What's the most rewarding aspect of pro bono work?

When my pro bono work enables nonprofit clients and the people they serve to succeed and restores dignity, hope, and control over their lives. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31: 8, 9

"The information was invaluable, and a great resource. This meeting has helped lay the groundwork for compliance and policy review for Bay Ridge Center to take compliance and operations to the next level. It was also wonderful to meet a neighbor, and we hope organizations within the Bay Ridge community can strengthen our community as a whole."

— Todd W. Fliedner
Deputy Executive Director, Bay Ridge Center