
Hughes Hubbard & Reed

Firm Expands Efforts With Nonprofit to Help Immigrant Children

News & Events | Pro Bono

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When Alex Hess recently took on a case from Kids in Need of Defense (“KIND”), she expected to be thrown in at the deep end like she was by other nonprofits on her previous pro bono matters. But Hess was pleasantly surprised to find a KIND mentor locked in arms with her every step of the way. After Hess successfully resolved the case, it was featured in the June edition of the ABA Journal.

“Working with KIND is phenomenal. They truly are amazing,” she told News@Hughes. She explained that KIND is different because unlike other mentor attorneys with extensive caseloads of their own, KIND attorneys work almost exclusively as mentors. “KIND understands that you need quick answers. At the drop of a hat they will send legal summaries or model documents to help complete the mission. You’re never trying to do something blind. It’s an invaluable resource and I think they do a great job with their model.”

Now Hughes Hubbard is expanding its pro bono initiative with KIND, a national nonprofit that provides legal counsel to unaccompanied immigrant children in the U.S. Launched in 2008 by Microsoft Corp. and actress Angelina Jolie, the Washington, D.C.-based organization has served 3,500 children facing deportation. More than 125 law firms and corporate legal departments are providing KIND with pro bono assistance.

Vilia Hayes, co-chair of the firm’s Pro Bono Committee, conceived the plan to expand the partnership after receiving glowing reports from HHR attorneys like Hess. “I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to help these unaccompanied children in the U.S.” she said. “Our attorneys say the experience is very rewarding. It leverages pro bono hours with changing somebody’s life.”

Apart from the KIND cases on which Hughes Hubbard are already working, the firm will take on five to 10 additional matters, which will be supervised by a group of litigation partners, including Ted Mayer, Vilia Hayes, Bill Maguire, Bill Beausoleil, Jason Benton and Neil Oxford. The group meets periodically to share resources, experiences and advice on how to manage the cases.

Many of the children are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (a pathway to legal permanent residency), which gives attorneys a chance to make a dramatic difference in their lives with a relatively limited time commitment. A 90-minute training program was held at the New York office on Sept. 21 that offered CLE credit. Attorneys learned the essentials of representing children before the immigration court and administrative agencies. Topics included asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, prosecutorial discretion, immigration court procedure and working with the child client.

In the KIND case that Hess worked on, under supervision by partner John Wood, Hughes Hubbard represented a minor from El Salvador who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border alone to escape parental neglect and abuse. The child was detained at the border and then brought to a facility in Virginia. A family friend from El Salvador flew from Virginia to pick him up.

In June 2011, Hughes Hubbard moved the Arlington County (Virginia) Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court to grant the family friend custody over the child and make the necessary factual findings to permit his application for SIJS. The court granted his application and Hughes Hubbard subsequently successfully moved the immigration judge to dismiss his removal proceedings and submitted the necessary paperwork to complete his journey toward legal permanent residency. The child obtained legal permanent residency in July 2012.

Hess said the expanded partnership is a "fabulous" idea. "KIND is undoubtedly a worthy cause," she said. "KIND's entire model is based on the fact that these kids are facing our justice system without any help at all. There's no moral dilemma as to whether you're on the right side. With these kids, just having someone stand next to them before a judge makes a huge difference in their lives."