

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service is celebrating the National Celebration of Pro Bono this month. The theme this year is “Law in Everyday Life”. The goal is to highlight the ways in which access to legal assistance affects historically excluded and low-income individuals across the country in all aspects of life. With this in mind, Colorado Legal Services celebrates the work of our pro bono attorneys. We take the opportunity to highlight Buck Mann.

Buck has been a volunteer attorney at Colorado Legal Services since March 2015. Before joining us at Colorado Legal Services, Buck practiced several types of law in various settings as a salaried attorney, former criminal prosecutor, and federal government trial attorney. He reports changing positions more often than the traditional attorney because he was always looking for a new learning experience and an opportunity that would push him out of his comfort zone. As he became more experienced, he was eager to mentor new attorneys and established formal and informal programs to share the tricks of the trade. During transitions, Buck was always concerned about those he had supported. All throughout his employed years, Buck took *pro bono* cases.

Once he retired, Buck knew he wanted to give back to his community in a way that reflected the same beliefs he had embraced while employed. At the time, Buck’s sister-in-law was a member of the Board of Directors for the Denver Bar Association. She introduced Buck to the Executive Director of Colorado Legal Services, Jonathan Asher. While meeting with Mr. Asher, Buck expressed a desire to provide direct service to our clients. Typically, retired attorneys do not want litigation experiences while volunteering at Colorado Legal Services. They would much rather take a more supportive role. Buck, on the other hand, was eager to take the same kind of cases as the Colorado Legal Services staff attorneys, including the cases that have “undesirable” opposing counsel or difficult clients. In addition, Buck agreed to be placed in our Family and Children’s Unit where the cases can be very demanding.

During his time at Colorado Legal Services, Buck has been the attorney of record in a large number of cases. He has logged thousands of hours of volunteer time since his start. There is no way to compute the value of his sharing and supporting Colorado Legal Services attorneys – not only in the Family and Children Unit, but throughout the state. Buck is a part of our staff list serve and when an attorney posts a question on that site, Buck often times has the wisdom and experience to make a meaningful suggestion for the identified issue.

Buck’s philosophy with a challenging case is to refuse to think the problem cannot be solved. His creative approaches include figuring out what is important and what is not and then focusing on the things that matter the most. He likes to maximize his options and find solutions with staying power. This attitude has proven well for our clients. Ms. Francesa Morgan, and her successor, Bekah Pfahler, the Supervising Attorney in our Family and Children Unit reports that Buck appreciates the serious scope of the work we do but balances out some tough situations with his sense of humor. He doesn’t shy away from challenges and often times goes the extra mile by visiting a client in their home or meeting them in a neutral territory. Buck’s demeanor with our clients is calm and non-judgmental, which makes them feel comfortable and secure. He is always looking for ways to better the office. He recently was able to get a large donation of exhibit notebooks, which are luxury items in our supply room.

When Buck was asked about his favorite moments at Colorado Legal Services, he quickly replied that he enjoys working with clients who are not native English speakers and have limited resources. He appreciates being able to help walk them through the court system and identify a safe path going forward. He said one of his favorite cases is a complicated one he took on for the Denver District Attorney's Office. Lara Mullin from the Denver DA's office says, "One of my favorite 'Buck cases' was when he was able to negotiate a settlement for one of our clients that made a significant difference in her life. The order provided financial support for our client that will nicely take care of her needs. The client said the only unfortunate result was the settlement meant she no longer qualified for our services because she was no longer considered to be at poverty level. We consider this to be quite a victory."

In 2017-18 Buck was asked to assist the Migrant Farm Worker Division prepare a complex human trafficking case for trial in the U.S. District Court of Colorado in February 2018. The case had been pending since 2014. Although the two attorneys who were handling the case were experienced attorneys, they requested Buck to help "coach" them for their first federal court jury trial involving such complex issues. This led to six months of several half-day preparation sessions to build the attorneys' trial skills, help with the strategic planning, and answer all their questions as they prepared for trial. It worked beautifully, and Buck facilitated from behind the scenes to help these attorneys achieve a remarkably large and hard-won trial verdict for a family of trafficked immigrant farm workers who had been subjected to debt bondage and forced to perform free labor for a well-known farm and market in Southern Colorado. While the victory clearly belonged to the lawyers who tried the case, much of the strategy, planning and skills-training work for that outcome was facilitated by the experienced volunteer attorney.

Most recently, Buck offered to join a complex case filed by our Health and Elder Law Group as co-lead trial attorney. The case had been pending for several years and involved claims filed in District Court against the State of Colorado's Medicaid program that provided in-home skilled nursing benefits to the most critically ill poor people in the state. The case had been set for trial in late 2022 and needed an experienced trial attorney to guide the case through discovery, dealing strategically with a team of experienced attorneys from the Colorado Attorney General's Office, and getting the case ready for trial. Buck partnered with the group of subject matter expert attorneys in our Health and Elder Law Group to collaborate on moving the case ahead for trial. It was a high conflict case, among other reasons, because of the unusually challenging circumstances of our comatose client, and the unyielding opposition of the Colorado Attorney General staff attorneys. Buck recruited pro bono expert witnesses from the University of Denver senior faculty, took case-changing depositions, and worked collaboratively with the Supervising Attorney in the legal group to assemble a well-conceived trial strategy. Two months before trial, the State of Colorado conceded the case fully, and agreed to revise their substantive Medicaid program benefits and supervision to address the issues raised in the case. Dozens of catastrophically ill people (separate from our client) were benefitted by this "impact" case, and the collaborated work that was done.

Upon completion of that Medicaid case, Buck returned to the daily work of the Family and Children Unit, which is his long-term assignment, with the understanding that when and if a future need arises for his

skill set, he will be there to offer help again in other areas. Now at age 72, he continues to believe that he has the capacity for additional trials that can use his 47 years of broad-based trial experience.

Reenie Terjak, the Director of Advocacy at Colorado Legal Services recently had this to say about Buck. "From that first conversation with him seven years ago, I knew he would give CLS all he had. Even though he came to us as a very accomplished lawyer, he still had a lot of professional hunger, especially hunger to make a real contribution in individual people's lives. Where in CLS did we place this 60-ish, white male, former insurance defense attorney? In our domestic relations unit, of course, representing victims of violence, primarily young, immigrant women, many of whom did not speak English well. And what a job he did – he used all of his smarts, and private practice tools to powerfully advocate for his clients. He achieved really good results. He taught the other attorneys in the unit some new skills. He treated all of his clients with kindness and respect. And he did it all with a positive attitude and unending energy. Several times, we had to move Buck's office location; he never complained. He just went with the flow.

A couple of years ago, he mentioned to me that he might like a new challenge at CLS. He thought that maybe he could give more to the entire organization. I told him that I could really use a deputy. Lots of CLS attorneys come to me with questions to which I just don't have ready answers and I know they'd like a substantive response sooner rather than later; otherwise, they wouldn't have approached me at all. I asked him if he was willing to take on a "Litigation Support" role; of course, he readily agreed. Not only that, but he referenced the role of "quartermaster," apparently a term from the military which means "do whatever is needed." That's Buck. I've asked him to research ethical issues, litigation questions, to dive deep into litigation strategy in state and federal cases, in domestic relations, wage and hour cases, messy housing cases, and a very challenging Medicaid case. He has approached every case as an *opportunity* to learn, both about his colleagues and to stretch his own knowledge of the law.

Also, he bakes – for other people. On numerous occasions, he has brought home-baked muffins and scones to the office, just because he can.

Buck is truly one of CLS' unsung heroes. Buck would say he's received as much from CLS and his clients as he's given; I don't think that's the right equation, but I won't argue with my quartermaster!"

When asked about other philanthropic events in his life, Buck immediately reminded me that he is not able to come to the CLS office on Monday mornings because of his commitment to Project Angel Heart. He embraces their mission and takes pride in being able to assist with meal preparations for the terminally ill and housebound clients. For several years he worked with Habitat for Humanity and functioned as a member of the "De-struction" crew. He served as President of Washington Park Northeast Association and was identified as a leader who could handle conflict. His peacemaking skills have earned him the privilege of returning several times to take on the role of peacemaker with this sometimes contentious group. One of his most proud volunteer opportunities was when he was "much younger" and was a Big Brother to a boy who wanted to be a mechanic. Buck worked side by side with

this young boy and let him tinker with an old car Buck was restoring. This young man grew up to be a Service Manager for a GM dealership.

We celebrate the work Buck has accomplished as we strive together toward our important goal – ensuring access to justice for low income persons. His efforts have not only helped improve the lives of many of our clients, but he has also made a tremendous contribution and has been a most positive influence on the work of Colorado Legal Services and the community in which we all live. Colorado Legal Services would be very different without his most significant assistance. The time spent by our salaried staff would be directed more to those we cannot help to those few we can help. We are far more efficient and serve many more people in need because of his labors. We are blessed by his dedication and commitment.