

YOUNG LAWYERS

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YOUNG LAWYERS SERVE WEST VIRGINIA IN OUR OWN WAY

Living in West Virginia affords us many unique and appreciable benefits, including a good quality of life, low cost of living, natural beauty and being surrounded by generous, friendly people. That being said, West Virginia has its share of problems. I prefer not to dwell on negativity, so I will not list them here. But we know what they are. As intelligent people who have the privilege of practicing law in West Virginia, our problems must be acknowledged in order to be fixed.

A few months back, my best friend, Lori, who also happens to be a fellow member of the Executive Board of the Young Lawyer Section (YLS), and I had a few hours alone to actually talk without the interruption of spouses, children, pets or life. We talked about the issues facing our state, but it did not end there. We immediately moved on to why we stay, how we fix the

problems we see, and the best way to do good for our state and those who live in it. Lori and I are the type of people who are fixers. When we see a problem that is within our power to help, we step in and do what needs to get done. I think that's why we gravitated toward each other in law school.

West Virginia's YLS believes it is part of our mission to serve not only fellow young lawyers but also West Virginians. The YLS has a strong tradition of taking up volunteer causes or contributing to charities as a group, not for acknowledgment, but because it is the right thing to do. When I joined the YLS in 2013, we would take up a collection at each meeting and donate the money to a charity of the rotating members' districts. Under the direction of our past chairperson, Shannon Smith, we opted to coordinate our efforts more directly by donating

our money to one or two families each year at Christmas who needed food, clothing, necessities and toys.¹ When West Virginia was ravaged by floods two years ago, Matt Harvey and Jasmine Morton, our former chairpersons, spearheaded efforts to deliver relief supplies directly to flood victims on behalf of the Executive Committee. This spring, the YLS Executive Committee was made aware of a dire need for diapers and wipes for many West Virginia babies whose parents cannot afford the items not covered by WIC or EBT cards. So, at the State Bar Annual Meeting, the YLS collected and then distributed statewide a total of 7,068 diapers and 12,708 wipes. Lastly, the YLS joined forces with the West Virginia Women Attorneys to create care packages for The Bartlett House in Morgantown at the first West Virginia Women Attorneys' Conference.



One of the recent contributions made by the Young Lawyers Section included a statewide distribution of 7,068 diapers and 12,708 wipes to West Virginia babies whose parents cannot afford the items not covered by WIC or EBT cards.

At this point, most everyone reading this is probably thinking “that’s great,” but wondering what these service projects have to do with being a lawyer. Clearly, none of them are law related. We understand that. And, we respond simply by saying that service to others is an important part of the practice of law. When viewed through that lens, are our charitable efforts really that different? The YLS does not believe so. If we can solve a problem or fill a need, then we do.

And the YLS is not alone in our reasoning. In fact, it is generational. Millennials, those of us born between 1981 and 1996, value volunteering more than the generation before us.² According to an AP poll, millennials are more likely to volunteer than our parents’ generation was when they were our age.³ In fact, the dedication of millennials to serving their communities and causes they believe in is now changing the face of modern American workplaces. According to *Forbes*, if law firms want to retain young lawyers, they need to create and encourage opportunities for charitable giving in the workplace to causes important to their associates.⁴ As an employee of a large corporation, one of the perks I value most is that I have eight hours of paid volunteer time each year in addition to corporate matching of funds I donate through our company’s charitable database. As you can probably tell, volunteering in my community is important to me, and I am grateful for an employer who understands that.

I am proud to say that the YLS fits the stereotype of

millennials when it comes to serving West Virginia. We want to help those who live in our communities, and we use our position as an executive board to do so whenever we can, even if it has nothing to do with the law. Perhaps the YLS will lead by example for other lawyers to volunteer more. Maybe, as a generation, we can push our employers to be more socially-conscious and offer us the value of time and resources to volunteer for our passions or favorite causes. Finally, as if we needed another reason to be more generous, volunteering gives us a break from the hard work of being a lawyer, sets our problems in perspective, and gives us an outlet for creativity and kindness outside the courtroom. I encourage you to find a cause you are passionate about and spend some time supporting it. West Virginia needs all of us to help. **WVL**

Endnotes

1. Special thanks to former YLS member, Tim Litten, who headed up these efforts for the past two years.
2. Young Adult Americans Committed to Volunteering, Poll Finds, *The Washington Post*, Dec. 29, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/young-adult-americans-committed-to-volunteering-poll-finds/2014/12/29/571542ae-8fb9-11e4-ba53-a477d66580ed_story.html?utm_term=.c51b187d5cbb.
3. *Id.*
4. Sarah Landrum, Millennials Are Leading a Revolution in Corporate Volunteering Efforts, *Forbes Magazine*, Jul. 14, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahlandrum/2017/07/14/millennials-are-leading-a-revolution-in-corporate-volunteering-efforts/#2446bf495c07>.