

# Pro Bono Spotlight

## Ashley Campbell

BY ERIK LINDAHL

Domestic violence permeates our society, causing its victims unspeakable physical and psychological damage. Domestic violence victims often feel as though they are trapped in an endless cycle; tension builds,



Ashley Campbell

violence erupts and the violence is followed by a period of reconciliation. Many victims, perhaps at the suggestion of their abuser, erroneously believe that they are dependent on their abuser and will not leave. Rarely will the cycle end without outside intervention.

In many situations, a victim's greatest protection is no thicker than a sheet of paper. Chapter 50B of the North Carolina General Statutes outlines what is required to seek and obtain a domestic violence protective order. Abusers who fail to comply with domestic violence protective orders can be criminally prosecuted. Even though these orders can be instrumental in protecting victims from their abusers, many victims cannot or will not seek these orders on their own. They need an advocate who can be their voice in one of countless 50B hearings taking place across our state. Ashley Campbell has answered the call and become such an advocate.

Ashley Campbell is a third-year associate at Ragsdale Liggett PLLC, specializing in litigation, lobbying and government relations. After graduating from the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) in 2003, Campbell took a job with Legal Aid in Gaston County. During her second day on the job, Campbell was called upon to handle her first 50B hearing. It would soon become her specialty at the office and roughly half of her work load. Campbell attributes her early success to Ted Fillette, her office mentor. Fillette instilled in her a passion for seeking equal justice for low income clients, which remains with Campbell now that she has moved to private practice.

After leaving Legal Aid, Campbell worked for the State Legislator for a little over a year. Afterward, she joined her current firm in Raleigh. Almost immediately, she sought out

the local Legal Aid office to volunteer her time to combat domestic violence, and discovered Project Together, a project headed by Legal Aid's managing attorney, Suzanne Chester. Through the project, Legal Aid maintains a list of attorneys willing to handle 50B hearings. Once trained, the volunteer attorneys are assigned cases that have been screened by Legal Aid attorneys to ensure that particular victims are given to volunteer attorneys with an appropriate amount of experience.

Over the past year, Campbell has handled roughly five hearings. She describes the work as a "win-win" for litigators in the private sector. Project Together allows attorneys to give time to a good cause while providing invaluable courtroom exposure for a young civil litigator who might otherwise rarely see a courtroom. Campbell's firm "has been very supportive of my efforts to pursue pro bono activities."

Although never a victim herself, Campbell has been around those whose lives have been deeply affected by domestic violence. Through her life experience, she has found domestic violence to be "much more pervasive than people think it is." For her, being a voice for victims who are trying to break the cycle of violence can be truly rewarding.

The work is not without its challenges. Psychological symptoms, such as battered woman syndrome, can make it difficult to work with victims. Campbell has handled cases where victims decide not to seek a pro-

protective order despite significant evidence suggesting that an order would be in their best interest. Those situations must be handled with care and it is important that the pro bono attorney not get frustrated or angry. Campbell understands the importance of respecting her client's decisions while making efforts to help those victims in other ways. Further complicating things, some victims lack transportation and regular means of communication.

Although Campbell has experience related to her pro bono that helps her overcome its challenges, she maintains that prior legal aid or family law experience is not necessary for attorneys interested in handling 50B hearings. The ins-and-outs of these hearings can be taught fairly quickly. The only qualification for prospective volunteer attorneys is a sincere desire to advocate for domestic violence victims in their effort to seek protection and peace of mind.

As of the date of this article, domestic violence has claimed 94 lives in North Carolina in 2008. If you are looking for pro bono opportunities, please consider volunteering your talents to help victims of domestic violence. Contact your local Legal Aid office or the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence to find pro bono opportunities in your area. ■

ERIK LINDAHL IS AN ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY FOR MECKLENBURG COUNTY.

## Patron:

(pā'trən) *n.* [ME *patroun* < L, *patronus*, a protector, defender]

**1:** A Bar Association member who, through generous contributions, makes it possible for the NCBA Foundation to continue and expand its educational and research programs **2:** a saint **3:** a very fine lawyer and human being.

NORTH CAROLINA  
FOUNDATION  
BAR ASSOCIATION

For more information on the NCBA Foundation Patron Campaign, call 1-800-662-7407, or in Wake County, at 677-0561. Visit our Web site at <http://www.ncbar.org/patronDonateNow>.