

By Elizabeth Calciano

# The Barristers Section Continues Its Work

## The personal and professional achievements of our volunteers inspire their successors

As this year's president of the Barristers Section of the Los Angeles County Bar Association, I want to welcome you to the oldest association for new and young lawyers in the country. Our purpose is to further the personal and professional development of our members, to promote public service projects, to improve the availability of legal services to the public, and to provide a forum for addressing legal and social issues of importance to our profession and community. If you are a member of the Association and are 36 years of age or younger or have practiced for 10 years or less, you are a member of the Barristers.

Those are the facts, but a better way to learn about the Barristers is with a story. One of our committees is the Children's Rights Committee, and one of its projects is the Kid's Court program. Kid's Court brings child witnesses of violent or sexual crimes to the courtroom on a Saturday before they have to testify and educates them in a comforting manner. The Children's Rights Committee recruits judges, district attorneys, victims' assistance advocates, and interpreters to volunteer, along with the members of the committee, to run these Saturday programs.

One recent Saturday a four-year-old girl arrived with her older siblings and her caregiver at the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Courts Building. I will call her Alice, although that is not her real name. Alice was scheduled to testify soon as an eyewitness at a murder trial, but on that day she was there for Kid's Court. Alice followed the balloon-lined path to the entrance. Cutout footprints and colorful posters showed her where to go. After receiving packets of crayons and coloring books about court and testifying, she was brought to a courtroom much like the one that she would be testifying in, except this courtroom was lined with teddy bears (courtesy of Comfort for Court Kids, Inc.) and there was a big stuffed gorilla in the center of the jury box (courtesy of the volunteer judge).

The district attorney and victim's assistance volunteers spoke to the children about the legal system, their role in it, and some simple ways to relieve their anxiety about testifying. (Nothing about the children's individual cases, however, was to be discussed.) All the judges who have volunteered for the program have been fabulous, but this judge had a particular gift for setting the children at ease. He spoke to them about court, then each child got a chance to sit in the witness box, be sworn in, and answer a few questions asked by the district attorney about the color of their hair or their best friend.

And then it was Alice's turn. She had watched her siblings go to the stand before her, and she had smiled and laughed. When she came to the stand, she had warmed up enough to respond to the simple questions about her favorite color and food. The judge talked to her lightly, and it was clear that she was much more at ease.

This was an amazing accomplishment. The volunteers did not know that Alice had a crucial role to play in the trial in which she would testify. The murder victim was Alice's mother. Only Alice had witnessed the murder. She had identified the alleged killer, but she had been unable to talk about the incident in any detail. After Kid's Court, she was finally able to talk about what she had seen.

Although improving a child's ability to be able to testify is part of the purpose of Kid's Court, it is not the main reason that the Children's Rights Committee started the Kid's Court program. The driving force for Kid's Court came from a young attorney volunteer from a Downtown law firm. This volunteer was a child when she watched as a close relative of hers, also a very young child, had to testify in a high-profile case. That close relative suffered because of the lack of care given to child witnesses at that time.

### Making a Difference

This story about Kid's Court shows what one determined volunteer can do when her efforts are combined with those of other volunteers and the Barristers. The presiding judge of criminal court, the district attorney's office, and our many volunteers saw the value of the program and threw their wholehearted support behind it. But it was only through the efforts of new and young attorneys with initiative, combined with the resources of the Association, that Kid's Court came to exist. I want to thank this past year's committee leadership—Barbara Bacon, Anna Strasburg, and Susan Skelding—for their efforts in continuing and building on Kid's Court.

There are many reasons to be involved in the Barristers, including opportunities for new and young lawyers to develop a professional reputation beyond their firm or agency. The Barristers provides a network of other new and young lawyers to learn about other job opportunities—and, in fact, many Barristers I know have found their next job through the contacts they made with other Barristers. The Barristers creates opportunities for new and young lawyers to develop leadership skills, to interact with judges, and to serve the community.

Kid's Court is just one project of one committee of the Barristers. This past year, Gillian Friedman led our Continuing Legal Education Committee in organizing three workshops on basic litigation skills. One associate from a major Downtown



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law firm who attended all three programs told us that the workshops had “completely changed” the way he felt about being an associate at a big firm, and he felt “indispensable” because of his new knowledge.

### More to Come

This year we plan to implement many new projects. We are working with the Association to bring the Nuts and Bolts of Litigation back, beginning in the late fall. This series of training programs gives new lawyers the opportunity to learn from “masters of the art of lawyering,” as Judge Lee Smalley Edmon put it when she inaugurated this program in her year as the Association’s president.

Our Community Outreach Committee also is expanding its efforts. In conjunction with the Association’s 125th anniversary, Community Law Day in May will be expanding to serve more community members with more Ask-A-Lawyer events. Further, in conjunction with Public Counsel, the Barristers is reinstating our Homeless Outreach Project, in which volunteer lawyers will assist homeless persons who are seeking a fresh start in life at the PATH Homeless facility in Hollywood. Also in partnership with Public Counsel, we are recruiting and holding trainings for Barristers to be guardians ad litem for youth in foster care. Guardians ad litem are greatly needed in order to make decisions for foster children in suits that have been brought on their behalf, because these children do not have parents who are able to do so.

In the coming year we plan to refocus our efforts on networking and professional development events to better serve our members. In addition to assisting with the Association’s career development seminars, we plan to sponsor networking events. We are reaching out to our many affiliates to cosponsor more programs together. There are many strong affiliates, and by doing programs together we believe we will serve new and young lawyers while improving the diversity of the Association. (If you are a leader of one of the Association’s affiliates, please contact me if you have a program that you believe would be worthwhile to sponsor together.)

Please visit the Barristers page of the Association Web site at [www.lacba.org](http://www.lacba.org) and read more. Barristers who provide their e-mail addresses to the Association will receive our e-newsletter, featuring a schedule of our activities and committee meetings. You may also contact me at [emcalciano@aol.com](mailto:emcalciano@aol.com) or use our online guide to receive more information. Feel free to tell me how we can be more responsive to new and young lawyers, and let me know if there is a program in which you believe the Barristers should be involved. ■

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