



## What happened in 2024 and what's to come in 2025.

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded of the transformative impact of pro bono legal work. The dedication of Crowley's attorneys, staff, and community partners to take our clients' life stories and frame them into solvable legal issues is profound. Through that dedication, the firm is able to help hundreds of clients and their families every year, providing access to justice where it otherwise would wane.

It is a point of pride and distinction that Crowley's pro bono program is entrusted to artist-attorneys. Senior Pro Bono Counsel Morgan Dake had a career as a professional dancer and continues to work with a local dance collective. Pro Bono Counsel Brittney Mada is a photographer whose practice includes portrait work with Crowley families being regular subjects. As artist-attorneys, we intake complex, voluminous information, distill it into something distinct, and then re-animate what started as a person's story into their "case." It is a repetitive ebb and flow of consumption, deconstruction, and reimagining.

*"While skillful legal analysis and narrative are essential skills for advocacy, effective advocacy requires more than the ability to associate facts with legal elements and to recount appealing stories. Lawyers must also be able to pluck vivid images out of their witnesses' minds and present them to the fact finder." - James Parry Eyster.*

And this process is indicative of all legal practice. While not all artists are lawyers, most lawyers, be it out and open or lurking, are artists.

For **litigators**, the major events in the life of a case are words of wonder: discovery, findings, decrees. Litigators have an omnipresent contemplation tending to the performance, toward the stage, the audience, the courtroom. Litigators are responsible

for conjuring images of a time and place they never saw about people they barely know.

For **legal writers**, words are intended to come to life. Briefs, contracts, titles, and mechanizing documents alike need to be not only precise and durable, but also effective and accessible. Through labor, the final words are a sufficient guide through whatever future conflicts will arise.

As we transition into 2025, we look forward to continuing to bring our clients' stories to life, ensuring not only access to justice but recognition of their dignity in the process.

*Sincerely,*

*Morgan and Brittney*

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## APPEARING TRENDS

Our pro bono team has been busy providing critical support across a variety of cases. From families experiencing turmoil to veterans seeking benefits, Crowley's attorney volunteers are making a tangible difference in the lives of those who need us most.

### Immigration

Pro bono immigration practice continues to diversify with an influx of country-based specialty petitions from Ukraine, Venezuela, and ongoing matters from Afghanistan. These build on our knowledge of situation-based petitions such as VAWA petitions and U-Visas. Our attorneys are actively involved in immigration matters across our three states.

### Veterans Affairs

The Crowley "V.A. Claims Club" has grown in its membership as interest in benefit and claim reviews continue to come in both as billable and pro bono work. There is an appetite for more direct referrals from Veteran Treatment Courts and that is likely to continue to develop.



### Guardians ad Litem

Guardian ad litem ("GAL") attorney investigators are being sought at a high rate. These requests often come directly from judges who find themselves presiding over cases for which they would like more insight prior to making big decisions about a family dynamic.

### Nonprofit Support

While our nonprofit attorneys specialize in formation, we have many other attorneys advising nonprofits in our community on everything from bylaw reviews to employment matters.

### Family Law

Informal Domestic Relations Trials ("IDRTs") were introduced as a distinct courtroom format for those involved with family conflict to interface with the judiciary in Montana as of October 2023. The IDRT model reduces the rigidity of the formulaic aspects of a hearing or trial that often leaves pro se litigants feeling unheard or disregarded. The IDRT model encourages more organic communications like that of a conversation. The judges have the responsibility to control the flow and order of the conversation allowing for direct testimony, cross examination, and the introduction of evidence to occur effectively. We see IDRTs benefitting families who must proceed through the court process having only received limited scope advice from our attorneys.

### QDROs and Interpersonal Contracts

Transactional specialty cases are presenting themselves through financially precise Qualified Domestic Relations Order ("QDRO") drafting requests. QDROs allow separated couples to equitably share in retirement earnings that may be right around the corner or decades away from being accessed. Additionally, contract dispute conflict mitigation has resulted in the return of essential funds to clients, the wrongful taking of which created acute financial vulnerability to those with narrow margins of personal budgeting.

## A SNAPSHOT OF OUR PRO BONO IMPACT IN NUMBERS

Crowley's firm members continue a high level of participation in pro bono matters, maximizing the firm's impact:



**401** DIRECT CALLS  
FOR ASSISTANCE



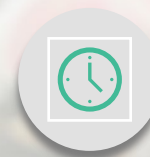
**106** NEW MATTERS  
OPENED



**114** FIRM MEMBER  
VOLUNTEERS



**181** DISTINCT PRO  
BONO MATTERS  
CONTINUED



**7,000** HOURS  
DONATED

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: LOGAN CALDWELL

We are always grateful for the dedicated volunteers who lend their time, expertise, and passion to our cause. This year, we are proud to shine a spotlight on **Logan Caldwell**, an associate in our Bismarck office and a member of our Commercial Litigation and Natural Resources & Environmental Law practice groups. Logan has volunteered countless hours assisting clients in need of legal representation in guardianship, immigration, and family law proceedings. Logan regularly serves as guardian ad litem in the South Central Judicial District and has been instrumental in maintaining Crowley's support for Legal Services of North Dakota through mentorship and attending LSND's first annual pro bono summit.



Logan recently assisted a Montana client to reopen and amend a 2015 North Dakota divorce settlement intended to provide our client all but a small amount of her ex-husband's Wyoming retirement account. The ex-husband is in prison for a heinous crime and so the division of the retirement account was intended to be a windfall for our client. Nearly a decade after the family trauma, our client finally submitted a Qualified Domestic Relations Order only to learn that the original order lacked clarity and could significantly limit how much of the retirement our client would be able to collect. We were able to work with the employer and our client to draft a proposed QDRO that was consistent with the spirit of the original order but accounted for the full retirement profile. Logan drafted the necessary documents to reopen the dissolution, pleading both newly discovered information and ambiguity, and the Court signed off on the amended QDRO. The case was a great demonstration of the firm's ability to coordinate a tri-state response to a limited, but incredibly important, transactional issue.

## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: TAX LIABILITY

**Jared LeFevre** is a partner in Crowley Fleck's Tax, Trusts & Estates, and Creditor's Rights practice groups. Jared's tax practice focuses on representing taxpayers in federal and state taxation audit and controversy matters before the state taxing authorities and the Internal Revenue Service. Jared has experience representing oil, gas, energy, and natural resource companies in tax controversy matters.

Jared is also a repeat pro bono champion. Beyond his support for Crowley's inhouse pro bono program, Jared's contributions through direct client representation are beyond compare. He routinely takes pro bono cases, refers pro bono cases to other attorneys, and supervises and consults with associates on their own pro bono matters. For many years, Jared has advocated for a low-income tax clinic in Montana. In 2023, when efforts to establish such a program failed to take root, he coordinated a work around with Wyoming's low-income tax clinic to serve Montana residents through an intake with Montana Legal Services Association.

Putting a plan into action, Jared and Crowley paralegal Erin Verdoni recently worked on behalf of a client to obtain non-collectible status with the IRS and Montana Department of Revenue for an outstanding income tax liability owed. The client is a disabled Vietnam veteran, over the age of 65, and on limited income. Upon his wife's death in April 2021, the client learned about many years of taxes that were not paid to both agencies. Jared and Erin represented their client to help him take the next step in straightening out the balances due and owing to the IRS and Montana Department of Revenue and to place him in non-collectible status.

Jared's willingness to cultivate pro bono opportunities within his practice area permeates throughout the legal community as he creates more opportunities for other attorneys to direct their own unique talents to those in need as well. Jared was recognized by the Yellowstone Area Bar Association for his pro bono work, with local attorneys and judges awarding him the 2024 Pro Bono Award.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: SERVICE IS SERVICE

Paralegal **Tamara Melia-Woodward** works primarily with the firm's Banking, Finance, and Creditor's Rights practice group, where her tracking services have built her a reputation for being able to find anyone, anywhere. This niche practice has proven invaluable to pro bono matters as well—where we often find ourselves looking for parties, witnesses, and interested persons who do not want to be found.

## LEGACY WORK

### Working with adults and elders

Adult guardianships based on incapacity come to us in a variety of ways. A primary referral avenue is our tri-state regions' legal services organizations ("LSOs"). Montana has a single legal service organization; North Dakota has one primary legal service organization with a secondary serving only tribal communities, and Wyoming has two legal service organizations. Those LSOs work hard to build their own programs and systems supported by their staff attorneys, state bar membership, and screening some referrals to private firms like ours.

Additionally, our pro bono program had a founding role and maintains ongoing involvement with Big Sky Senior Services' Yellowstone County Guardianship Council ("YCGC"). Through YCGC, our program initiates a petition approximately every other month at minimum. These consistent, uncontested petitions keep a presence before our local judiciary and connected to the cohort of guardianship-related professionals in our region.

## WHAT HAS US FIRED UP!

**North Dakota Pro Bono Summit 2024** – Crowley Fleck, PLLP co-sponsored and attended Legal Services of North Dakota's ("LSND") Pro Bono Summit 2024. Justice Douglas Bahr of North Dakota's Supreme Court and North Dakota's State Bar President, Tony Weiler, came to offer their perspective and insights. Pro bono participation in North Dakota looks to be a priority across the state as stakeholders, including our program, explore new technology innovations, different models of unbundling legal services, and contemplating avenues of *pro se* empowerment.

**YABA Family Law Project ("FLP")** – For this past year, the pro bono program has been the steward of the Yellowstone Area Bar Association's Family Law Project, a Billings-based family law clinic administered in partnership with the Thirteenth Judicial District Court Judges and Montana Legal Services Association. The tri-partnership model of local bar leadership, legal aid, and the judiciary is a clinical model that may be exported into other communities so they can implement similarly structured legal clinics.

**Montana Pro Bono Academy**, a project of Montana Legal Services -- Pro bono work in Montana will have a new training platform to assist in building their own capacity and foundational knowledge in common and substantive areas of law that those eligible for pro bono services may face financial disputes, end of life planning, poverty law, the ethics of pro bono practice, and more! Through online instructive training modules, volunteers will learn from experts in their respective specialty areas who may even be willing and available to connect for mentorship-style opportunities.

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Theresa is the child of divorce with parents who care deeply for her. Being raised and living in a rural community allowed Theresa to become an adult while receiving uninterrupted continuity of care from her parents and providers even though as an adult, now age 22, parents are not presumed to have permissions to be included in medical appointments, financial institutions, etc. Community support and familiarity created pathways and opportunities for Theresa. Theresa's local library created a job just for her, and Theresa fills her days working and training her mustangs and dogs.

All the while, Theresa was an incapacitated adult with cerebellar hyperplasia, cognitive delay, and vision limitations. The small-town protective features buoyed Theresa's adult-like participation, but, through Crowley's assistance, Theresa's mom became established as her guardian, committing to the role of caregiver and fiduciary beyond that of a parental relationship alone. Theresa's parents were not in alignment about what the process of establishing a guardianship meant for Theresa's life, liberty, and independence. Through consultation, negotiation, and ultimately, a stipulation, the high-conflict exes united for their daughter.

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For more information about our program, visit our website at:

<https://crowleyfleck.com/practice-areas/pro-bono/>