

# Public Service and Summer Associates: A Q&A with Caroline Menes, Legal Recruiting Officer

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***Wendy Dessy, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility: What role does public service play in Proskauer's summer program?***

*Caroline:* Proskauer has a longstanding tradition of public service, and I'm proud to call it a big part of our summer program. After Hurricane Katrina, we sent summer associates from every office to New Orleans to help with the clean-up. We worked with Habitat for Humanity to build houses for those who lost their homes. Proskauer has an office in New Orleans. It was very important for us to support our colleagues and their surrounding community during that critical time, and we went back to New Orleans for three years. That is just my favorite example, but every year all of our summer associates are encouraged to get involved in some form of public service.

***Wendy: Do you provide pro bono opportunities for summer associates?***

*Caroline:* Pro bono is an important part of Proskauer's culture. Summer associates have advocated for domestic violence survivors seeking orders of protection in New York City family courts alongside attorneys from Sanctuary for Families, and they have drafted petitions to seal the decades-old criminal records of low-income New Yorkers as a means of removing barriers to employment and housing. One summer associate teamed up with a Proskauer attorney to help an immigrant survivor of domestic violence petition for her child to obtain a visa in the hope of reuniting in the United States after three years of separation. Another summer associate assisted in drafting a film production contract for the Universal Hip Hop Museum.

***Wendy: Having public service coordinated by the firm provides the summer associates an opportunity to give back while receiving public interest experience. This sounds like a wonderful opportunity.***

*Caroline:* As summer associates, their roles on matters or cases can be somewhat limited given the short length of time they are here. Through discrete pro bono matters, we are able to provide them with an opportunity to take on a greater role. For example, in New York Family Court, law students can appear in court as long as they are with a supervising attorney. This results in a great experience and close client contact with a profound impact.

**Wendy: Tell me your thoughts about public service. Why is it important to you?**

*Caroline:* As a child of immigrants, I feel incredibly fortunate that my parents were able to provide me with access to the best educational institutions in the country. Education is an equalizer, and I work hard both in and out of the office to inform and enrich others who are less fortunate. It is my responsibility to make sure others are given similar access to the education I had. This drives my passion for giving back.

**Wendy: Was there a turning point for you where you knew you were going to dial up your involvement with something/someone?**

*Caroline:* Several years ago, you brought in Deo Niyizonkiza, the founder of Village Health Works, and our client, Jeff Kaplan, from Deerfield Capital. Jeff spoke about his role as a partner at Deerfield and how as a member of the Executive Committee of The Deerfield Foundation he was able to connect his work to his passion for philanthropy and giving back to vulnerable populations. Supporting healthcare services to underserved children and funding other charitable healthcare research and development was a game-changer for him. After the presentation, I spoke with him and he challenged me to find my passion and make a difference. He made me promise to let him know once I figured out what I wanted to do and a few months later, I did.

**Wendy: What has been your most meaningful pro bono or volunteer experience at the firm and why?**

*Caroline:* My time has been split between two key areas: gun safety and education. Gun violence is at the center of so many problems in this country. I joined the group Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and I feel deep pride and camaraderie when working with them to help establish common sense gun reforms. I also participate on many career panels hosted at the firm for teens and college students from low-income communities. As a child of immigrants, I did not always know the simple rules of etiquette needed for success. I enjoy sharing best practices for interviewing so that students are not considered 'rough around the edges' or 'unpolished' and they can operate on a level playing field.

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