

Volunteers Make the Difference in More Ways Than One

According to the journal "[Giving and Volunteering in America](#)" 84% of households that donate to charities had at least one member who served as a volunteer. And those households with volunteer members donate 2.5 times more money than households with no volunteer members. According to Thomas McKee of Volunteer Power, "In the new reality, money follows involvement. Where else would people rather give than to the organizations with which they feel most connected?"

As further evidence of this phenomenon, the [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) cites a study from late 2009 done by Harris Interactive showing people donate 10 times more money to organizations if they have volunteered with them in the past year.

There is however a catch to all this goodness. Americans want to give back, they recognize that volunteering boosts happiness and those who work on issues of importance to them tend to be happier, healthier and live longer. But many are wary of non-profits that are too much like big businesses, want to see immediate results from their efforts and want to make sure their skills are taken advantage of and used.

The good news for those giving skeptics is that Memphis Area Legal Services is an organization that needs and makes use of both volunteers and the money they donate. And, we are a small enough entity that we don't look at all like the 'big business' non-profits. The impact of a giver's donations is immediately felt in our budget and our financials are not only transparent but clean-never an exception. Our biggest budget item is much like other public interest law firms in that our human capital gets the biggest piece of the budget pie. Our staff is our greatest asset and most of the funds we get go to their salaries. It is the dedication of the staff to our clients and access to justice that drives our success and makes Memphis Area Legal Services a great organization to give to and volunteer for.

Over the years, we have had thousands of cases handled by our volunteer attorneys and law students. Part of the success of MALS has been our ability to work closely with volunteers, to develop meaningful volunteer opportunities and to make use of the skills and talents of members of the legal profession. Volunteers get a chance to get into General Sessions Court if that is where their passion lies. If they love working with the senior citizens, we frequently use volunteers to do outreach to our senior centers and nursing homes. For those who are working parents, taking a few hours on a Saturday morning is a great way to do some volunteer work, do a good deed, and make it home in time for the kids' soccer game.

We have been fortunate to have many student and paralegal volunteers as well. The paralegals have proved to be invaluable assets in organizing and running the many clinics we hold. The students have proven their worth to us time and again doing everything from rewriting our brochures to mobilizing for TennCare outreach to the many hours of research and writing they donate every day.

Donating to legal services brings immediate relief to people in our community through resolution of legal disputes, protection of rights and property and access to valuable information about

responsibilities. Legal representation helps bring funds into our community in the form of food stamps, unemployment compensation, relief from bad loans and overbearing creditors. It protects the most vulnerable from physical and financial abuse and can be the only thing keeping people off the streets at night.

The money you give and the time you donate to MALS are among the most valuable things you can do to help those of limited means. The impact is significant to our community, but it's also a benefit to you. One of the best ways to make yourself happy is to make some else happy. And as one of our clients put it after one of the legal clinics:

I was very pleased with the two attorneys, they were very knowledgeable and helped me understand the things I needed to do; even the bad things that could happen in my case. I say to them "Keep up the good work." They will be an asset to the public in a good way. Thanks guys and girls!

A couple of attorneys made a big difference in the life of one person. And you can, too.