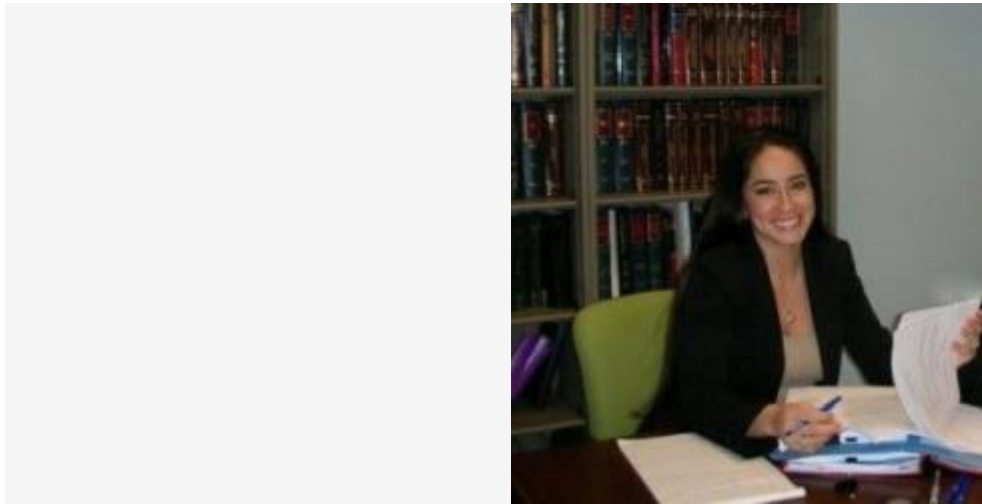


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Pro bono spotlight: Attorneys help human trafficking survivors



Andrea Reyes

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By Kathy Para, The JBA Pro Bono Committee chair

According to the World Relief Jacksonville website, human trafficking is modern-day slavery.

Victims of human trafficking are young children, teenagers, men and women.

Victims are subjected to force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor.

After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world — and it is the fastest growing.

Many victims of human trafficking are forced to work in prostitution or the sex entertainment industry.

But trafficking also occurs in forms of labor exploitation, such as domestic servitude, restaurant work, janitorial work, sweatshop factory work and migrant agricultural work.

In recent years, local attorneys have stepped up to assist the efforts in Northeast Florida to combat local effects of the global industry of human trafficking.

Working with the city's Human Rights Commission, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Florida Coastal School of Law, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, World Relief Jacksonville and other organizations, members of The

Jacksonville Bar Association Human Rights Committee saw a need to join the collaboration and coordinate civil legal representation for survivors.

Leaders in this effort include Crystal Freed, Andrea Reyes and Yaima Coto.

They answered questions about the project, “Attorneys for Human Trafficking Survivors.”

Why did you form the Attorneys for Human Trafficking Survivors?

Jacksonville is considered one of the top areas in our region for the human trafficking trade.

It’s very difficult to identify the cases, as victims are very afraid.

However, law enforcement officers, social service providers and even members of the public are becoming better able to identify possible victims and safely intervene.

We are ready to identify civil actions and provide legal assistance as needed.

It’s important to note, if any attorney wants to take these cases, fees are available under the applicable statute.

What are the goals of the group/committee?

We are a multifaceted collaborative organization committed to providing comprehensive pro-bono legal services to human trafficking survivors.

It’s our goal to help survivors become as whole as possible again — a process that is neither fast nor easy.

We screen them to determine what kind of legal issues they have and to connect them with the appropriate pro bono attorney to help them resolve those legal issues.

Can you describe a case in which you’ve been able to provide assistance?

Through the collaborative screening process of a Florida Coastal School of Law clinic and Attorneys for Human Trafficking Survivors, we were able to identify the legal needs of a client who was the victim of labor trafficking.

He’s being represented by pro-bono attorneys Tad Delegal and James Poindexter of Delegal Law Office, pursuing both employment and civil claims.

We have also assigned cases to Crystal Freed, BeJae Shelton, Lisa DiFranza, Leslie Goller, Andrea Reyes, Millie Kanyar and Yaima Coto.

The cases range from domestic minor sex trafficking survivor representation to expungment and criminal defense claims against victims.

How do survivors find their way to the committee?

Survivors looking for immigration help may contact Florida Coastal School of Law at (904) 680-7782.

The Interviewing and Counseling Clinic screens for human trafficking survivors and then refers them to the attorney pro bono group.

Survivors also may contact the program by calling the JBA's Lawyer Referral line at (904) 399-5780.

How can other pro bono attorneys get involved?

Please attend the JBA's Human Rights Committee meetings.

Go to the JBA website or the Daily Record calendar in Monday's Bar Bulletin for dates and times.

Meetings are usually held at the JBA office. We need you and would value your support of these very vulnerable people.

What support resources are available to pro bono attorneys who would like to join your efforts?

We have a network of attorneys from whom you can learn when taking on these cases.

You also will have access to databases of cases and forms that could be used depending on the case.

Lastly, the camaraderie built between you and the team of attorneys engaged in this work is an added bonus that challenge you to find anywhere else.

What are the names of your firms and in what areas of law do you practice?

Coto: I practice family law at the firm of Harris, Guidi, Rosner, Dunlap & Rahaim.

Freed: The Freed Firm, where I practice pro bono representation for human trafficking survivors.

Reyes: I run Reyes Legal, where we exclusively practice immigration law. We do humanitarian immigration law, family-based petitions, and deportation/removal defense.

The complexities of assisting survivors of human trafficking are many.

Coto, Freed and Reyes continue to define and overcome these complexities to help ensure that survivors have opportunities for healthy, full lives free of oppression.

Their message to survivors: Help and safety are available.

Their message to traffickers: Your trade won't be tolerated in Northeast Florida.

Our appreciation and accolades are extended to Coto, Freed and Reyes and to the many pro bono attorneys who

have already joined the effort.

Attorneys interested in pro bono opportunities in the 4th Judicial Circuit are encouraged to contact Para at kathy.para@jaxlegalaid.org.