

# BAR BULLETIN



This is a reprint from the King County Bar Association Bar Bulletin  
September 2018

## *Volunteering To Aid Asylum Seekers*

**By Joan Tierney**

Responding to the recent horrendous events at our southern border, I decided to return to my roots as a pro bono lawyer after 10 years as an administrative law judge.

I changed my bar status from “Judicial” to “Active,” but like many non-immigration lawyers I lacked the immigration law experience to be of service to those seeking asylum or separated from their children while immigrating.

I contacted various groups to volunteer and received an email from KCBA Trustee Tahmina Watson telling me about her latest project, WIDEN, which is devoted to assisting asylum seekers. Her model was to recruit and match two non-immigration lawyers with an experienced immigration lawyer.

This was exactly the model I was looking for, so I volunteered for WIDEN’s pilot program, Case 001, with “Team Lourdes,” consisting of: Lourdes Fuentes, renowned immigration lawyer; Shelly Garzon, experienced lawyer and principal; and myself, a former ALJ.

Our client was a Honduran woman seeking asylum in the U.S. to escape from domestic violence in her home country. She had been detained in the Regional Immigration Detention facility in Tacoma and was separated from her young son who was living with relatives in the Midwest.

Within a matter of days, we were provided an asylum training webinar, Fuentes secured a bond hearing date, and the steep learning curve began. Under Fuentes’s guidance: Garzon drafted the declaration; I set out to find an immigration lawyer in the Midwest to take on our client’s asylum case; Fuentes represented our client at the bond hearing; and Watson secured the bond money, housing and travel expenses.

With just two phone calls, Ashley Huebner of Heartland Alliance agreed to provide, not only legal services, but housing assistance for the client and her son, and a monthly stipend from Lawyer Moms, the nationwide group founded by WIDEN co-founder Erin Albanese. Catholic Charities stepped up to offer its assistance, ensuring our client would receive legal, social and economic assistance, thus strengthening her request for bond.

Through participation in this team effort, I learned so much about community and the overwhelming goodness of women and men of conscience. The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) provided policy updates and bond money, the ACLU kept us up to date on pertinent asylum and immigration issues, the Advocates for Immigration provided backpacks containing toiletries, Lawyer Moms provided plane tickets and support at our client’s destination city, and volunteers provided

housing and transportation through the Greater Seattle Church Council.

WIDEN is specifically seeking to enlist the aid of experienced attorneys and former judges, with or without immigration law experience. If you want to help, please go to [www.widenlaw.org](http://www.widenlaw.org) to volunteer or donate.

You can also aid this effort by joining Lawyer Moms at <https://www.facebook.com/lawyer moms of america/> or by donating your extra airline miles and hotel vouchers or donating to the Bond Fund through NWIRP at <https://www.nwirp.org/> or the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) at <https://actionnetwork.org/groups/raices-refugee-and-immigrant-center-for-education-and-legal-services>.

I am grateful to Tahmina Watson for her vision; WIDEN co-founders Erin Albanese, Jay Gairson and Takao Yamada; and My Legal Team 001 members Lourdes Fuentes and Shelly Garzon. ■

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*Hon. Joan Tierney, administrative law judge (ret.), has served as a KCBA trustee, CLS co-chair, YLD Deskbook contributor, and KCBA pro bono attorney for its Housing Justice Project and Volunteer Legal Services. She is a former president of Washington Women Lawyers and is currently a WIDEN pro bono attorney.*