



Volunteer Attorney: Tanya O'Neill

Attorney Tanya O'Neill is a volunteer attorney with the MVLC at the Milwaukee Justice Center. This past summer, Tanya met with a client who was in the midst of a small claims action in Milwaukee County. Tanya provided legal advice to the client regarding the small claims case and instructed the client to return to the MVLC at a later date so further advice could be provided. Tanya returned to the MVLC the following week and provided further advice to the client. The client's legal issue continued to significantly develop and resulted in Foley & Lardner LLP taking on the client's case as a pro bono matter. Tanya, and several of her colleagues, continue to put in a great deal of effort to help this client and his legal issues.

Please describe your educational background prior to law school.

I attended UW-Green Bay, where I majored in Political Science and double minored in Business and Environmental Science.

Why did you decide to go to law school?

I always had a plan to be an environmental attorney. Drake University had a very strong environmental studies program, so I attended law school there.

What was your favorite class in law school? In which class did you learn the most?

My favorite class in law school was environmental law practicum. The class was divided into agency, business, and public interest groups to negotiate and resolve various fact patterns.

What are your main legal practice areas?

I am a partner at Foley & Lardner where I have been focusing on environmental law for over 20 years, including environmental insurance.

When did you begin volunteering at the MVLC?

I began volunteering at the MVLC in 2015 after attending a training at Foley & Lardner by Angela Schultz and Mary Ferwerda. I was very skeptical about my ability to help those at the clinic since I didn't think many environmental issues would be in the clinic, but the students and staff at the clinic are incredibly helpful and I have learned so much.

What is your favorite part about volunteering?

I love helping people, and really, that is what a lawyer does, we help people with a problem, resolve a dispute, or accomplish a goal.

What advice would you give to current law students?

Find an area of the law you are passionate about, get lots of different experiences through internships, clerkships and volunteering. Volunteering at the Milwaukee Justice Center will provide you with exposure to so many areas of the law.

Why do you think pro bono work is important?

It is very important to help others and give back to the community. As lawyers, we are so fortunate and uniquely qualified to help people based on our education and skill set.

What do you like to do in your spare time? What are some of your hobbies and interests?

I am a mom to two teenage boys, so in what little spare time I have, I spend it with my family, attending their sports and school events, or traveling and scrapbooking those events and trips.