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## How Can Lawyers Help?

*Prerequisite pro bono hours for Bar admission*

In the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis and our nation's decision to assist more than 25,000 of those in need, many lawyers are considering what they can do to help.

Canada prides itself on its policies of inclusion and assistance. It is now a leader on the world stage as a result of its stance during the refugee crisis, in stark contrast to its fellow North American counterpart. In what she calls the “resetting” of Canada, Audrey Macklin, Professor of Law and Chair in Human Rights Law at the University of Toronto, suggests that our position and initiatives in the settlement of Syrian refugees signifies “a moment of reclamation of a particular narrative of Canada” as a society of immigrants.

However, “resetting” Canada requires a little more than Mr. Trudeau's airplanes on steroids. The nation is responsible for those who it voluntarily transplants onto Canadian soil. Their resettlement process can certainly benefit from the assistance of already-settled members of Canadian society. If we can accept that Canada is a country that assists those seeking asylum within its borders, then what can lawyers offer toward this endeavour?

As individuals, lawyers in BC can donate, volunteer, and even sponsor refugees. But how can the legal profession, as a collective community, assist those in need:

to resettle, seek asylum or otherwise? Are there changes that local law societies can implement so as to encourage or incentivize their members to lend a hand?

I think the answer is mandatory pro bono hours as a prerequisite for Bar admission.

Currently, there are no minimum pro bono requirements for BC lawyers. Understandably so. Perhaps the most valuable asset for legal professionals is time. This asset is difficult to come by – considering all the various demands of practice, professional development, personal health and family life. But do BC lawyers have little time to spare due to these amaranthine demands, or does the



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normative understanding of legal practice have something to do with it?

The State of New York requires, *inter alia*, that students of law complete at least 50 hours of pro bono work before they are called to the Bar. As a result, law schools in surrounding areas have established

tremendous pro bono organizations that provide substantial legal services in their communities. These law students are undoubtedly busy, but their institutions take the pro bono requirement into account and make room for its compliance. If in order to become or remain licensed, each and every law student and practitioner in BC must meet minimum pro bono requirements, then one is perhaps likely to witness normative and attitudinal changes toward this work.

If a new requirement for minimum pro bono contributions is too onerous for practising lawyers or their employers, then one option is to require students of law to satisfy a pro bono requirement before they are called. Students may wish to have the freedom of completing these hours at any point during their

legal education or articling period. Alternatively, these hours may be completed as a part of the Professional Legal Training Program (“PLTC”), to ensure homogeneity among all BC Bar members, irrespective of where they received their legal education.

The BC legal profession offers a number of pro bono programs through the work of admirable volunteers. However, if the legal community – as a self-proclaimed helping profession – wishes to involve many more of its members, it needs a prescribed milieu shift.

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