



pro bono
students
canada

réseau national
d'étudiant(e)s
pro bono



“ Law students have endless energy; they’re very smart and they’re eager to apply the theory and knowledge they learn in law school to real life issues. Through their work, they have helped many people who otherwise would have been denied access to the justice system. For the lawyers who work with these students, it is profoundly energizing to see what some of the best and brightest students across the country can achieve.



How did you get involved with PBSC?

I became Managing Partner for Ontario at McCarthy Tétrault LLP in 2002. Sometime after that PBSC approached me looking for a law firm partner. I thought it was a terrific idea. I’m a strong supporter of pro bono, and I understood that law students were looking to make a contribution of some kind. I knew how important this was.

What did your involvement look like at the time, and how has it changed?

I assisted in securing a financial commitment from the Firm to provide a solid basis of funding for PBSC. It wasn’t a hard sell – my colleagues were all impressed with the PBSC model. We thought it was a terrific way to help law students gain some leadership and skills that would be helpful in their careers. It was also very energizing for our lawyers to get involved in PBSC projects and work with some of the best and brightest students at law schools across the country. McCarthy Tétrault continues to serve as PBSC’s National Law Firm Partner, so I’m pleased to see that the partnership continues to thrive. Under Nikki Gersh bain’s leadership, there has been a real maturing of the relationship. I’m amazed by the kind of work I’m seeing coming out of PBSC, and proud to have been there early on to provide some support.

How would you describe the contributions law students make toward filling the access to justice vacuum in Canada?

Important! Law students are chomping at the bit to apply the theory and knowledge they acquire in class. They have endless energy, are very smart and really want to make a difference. To be a law student and meet a real client, understand their problem, and try to deliver a solution, these are the building blocks of a lawyer’s career. That students can do this right from the start of law school through a program like PBSC is remarkable.

Who bears the brunt of what the Chief Justice of Canada has called an access to justice crisis?

The public. We have a very old system that is ill-adapted to the kinds of issues that come up today. It has to be a shared burden. There is a lack of government funding, and Legal Aid is inadequate. Legal services are expensive, and law firms are stepping up with organized pro bono programs, but we have to do more to reassure lawyers that if they do pro bono work they’ll get credit and won’t be punished for it.

Is there anything you’d like to add?

I’d like to congratulate PBSC on driving the very important issues of pro bono and access to justice, and becoming a real force to be reckoned with over the last 20 years! PBSC is a well-oiled machine that benefits so many people across the country.

Kirby Chown,
Former Ontario Regional Managing Partner, McCarthy Tétrault LLP