

# Putting My Ideals Into Action

## What the New York Bar Foundation Means To Me

By Lauren J. Wachtler, board member and co-chair of the Development Committee

Three years ago, when I saw Lesley Rosenthal's name come up on my phone, (even before she became President of the New York Bar Foundation) I picked it up and said what I usually say when Lesley calls: "The answer is No, what's the question?" I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to say "no" to Lesley (at least 100) and how many times I've succeeded (0). She asked if I would be interested in serving as a member of the Board of the Bar Foundation. And she said one thing which made all the difference in my decision to serve: "What makes me love serving on this board is handing a check to people who are doing good in the world and helping the underserved in our society." And so I said yes. And I have never regretted it for a minute.

As a member of the board, and more specifically of the Grants Committee of the foundation, I have had the privilege of reviewing grant requests from organizations throughout New York State whose missions are to provide legal services, legal education and opportunities for lawyers to offer legal support to minorities, veterans, children, the elderly, and immigrants. These organizations are the voices of those who cannot or are unable to speak for themselves, and a beacon to help them navigate a complicated and often foreign and unfamiliar legal system. Having learned about the existence and work of so many of these organizations who seek grants to continue their work, has been almost as gratifying as handing them the checks to enable them to continue their work.

As a member of the board I beam with pride at being a part of the success of our emergency campaigns—whether it has been in our efforts to raise funds to provide relief from natural disasters, or to protect children who have immigrated to this country and been wrenched from their homes and parents. There is not a single board or foundation staff member who has ever said "no" to any effort to help those in need. And it's contagious. The shared enthusiasm, passion to right wrongs, concern for those in need, and consistent willingness to help, has enabled the New York Bar Foundation to increase donations from those who have already given generously in the past, to those who share my and every board member's belief that you never miss the money you give to charity. When you see it in action, as I have, it is all the more gratifying.



In the past several years that I have been on the board, we have taken care to focus our efforts in addressing the most pressing need at a particular time – whether it be victims of domestic abuse, assisting returning veterans, or providing legal support to immigrants. Our commitment now has brought into focus the rule of law which is at the heart of our democracy. We have embarked on a strategic plan over the next three years, which will provide funds to increase and promote diversity initiatives through grants and fellowships and to educate the public as well as practitioners. We have expanded our mission to include educating the public as well as practitioners that it is not only the responsibility of our profession to help those in need, but that it is a privilege to be able to do so.

As part of the strategic plan, we have adopted the World Justice Project's definition of the 'rule of law,' which includes four universal principles:

- Accountability: that the government and private actors are accountable under the law;
- Just Laws: that the laws are clear and applied evenly to protect fundamental human rights;
- Open Government: the processes by which laws are enacted are accessible to all and fair; and
- Accessibility and impartiality: Justice is delivered in a timely manner by competent, ethical and independent representatives.

As a member of the board of the New York Bar Foundation, I am excited about embarking on this journey, and expanding the reach and impact of the foundation under the umbrella of the rule of law. And the next time Lesley calls I will most assuredly say "Yes. What's the question?"