

# GlaxoSmithKline Attorneys Seek to Build Healthy Communities Through Pro Bono Work

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By **Kibkabe Araya** | August 25, 2020 at 11:00 AM



Glaxosmithkline pharmaceuticals headquarters in Brentford, west London

The multinational pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline saw its global pro bono program volunteers increase to 49 legal department members in 2019, a 77% increase from the prior year.

From its inception in 2005, the U.S. pro bono program started with around 10 volunteers, including co-founder Andrew Boczkowski, assistant general counsel and pro bono committee chair at GSK in Philadelphia. Twelve years later, the program decided to expand to its global offices in London, where the company is headquartered, and Singapore. But one obstacle stood in the

way that thwarts many global corporate legal departments' volunteer efforts: pro bono malpractice insurance.

Boczkowski said the malpractice insurance was necessary for attorneys to be comfortable to take on certain cases wherever they were located. The company purchased the insurance as well as updated its pro bono work website and created a presence on Facebook for co-workers interested in the pro bono program. This helped get the word out on the program and its mission to attract more volunteers to help more clients.

“In the 2005 time frame, there was some interest in doing this with a U.S.-only policy that was created and a handful of U.S. lawyers who took some cases,” Boczkowski said. “What we really tried to do over the past two years was review that policy and make a concerted effort to really drive participation in the program like never before. The key to doing that was to increase participation in the U.S. but also make the program more inclusive and global in nature.”

In Philadelphia, Boczkowski manages the volunteers who facilitate bi-monthly legal clinics for homeless men through Saint John's Hospice, steps away from the city's convention center. Since 2015, the company has helped the nonprofit's clientele with legal issues ranging from Social Security disability claims to immigration. Boczkowski discovered the nonprofit in 2015 after it received the company's GSK IMPACT Award that distributes \$40,000 grants to winners.

“The **Homeless Advocacy Project** was one of the groups that got one of these \$40,000 grants. I happened to be in the office the day that they were having the ceremony in our lobby,” he said. “I basically walked up to the executive director, congratulated them, [and said,] ‘It's great that the company is giving you money, but we have a legal department with willing participants hopefully. What can we do to help?’ And out of that, we came up with a project where

we would staff one of the homeless shelters in Philadelphia with a legal clinic that would run every other month.”

Usually, six to seven GSK attorneys coordinate staffing the legal clinic and taking on cases. Local law firms Dechert and Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg also have assisted with the clinic.

Another stateside highlight in 2019 featured the pro bono volunteers in the Research Triangle Park office who helped 90 North Carolinians restore their drivers’ licenses. Under North Carolina law, one could lose their drivers’ license over failing to appear in court to resolve a traffic ticket or failing to pay traffic or criminal court debt, regardless if it’s a first offense.

Across the pond, the U.K. pro bono participants also went through the company to see which nonprofits they already had relationships with to find groups needing legal assistance. One partner is WellChild, a charity dedicated to helping seriously ill children. Singapore began its pilot pro bono program last year and partnered with the Law Society of Singapore Pro Bono Services to advise nongovernmental organizations that serve migrant workers.

With such exponential growth in 2019, Boczkowski said he believes the pro bono program will match last year’s success despite the novel coronavirus pandemic. The legal department is still offering pro bono assistance to its partners. For example, he said GSK attorneys are handling a Social Security case for the **Homeless Advocacy Project**.

“A lot of things froze when the pandemic hit, then courts closed and then the agencies that take volunteers for their cases had their financial issues to worry about,” he said. “As the spring went on, the legal need increased, so we’re trying to participate in projects where we can work remotely.”

He added the GSK pro bono program writes up a report at the end of every year, but participating attorneys are still looking for opportunities to give back while remaining at a safe distance.