



About Shannon Salter

Shannon is a member of the Farris litigation team. She assists senior counsel in a variety of matters before the British Columbia courts in the areas of civil and commercial litigation, and has represented clients at the Provincial Court of British Columbia.

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The work is its own reward: profile of a pro bono star



The Canadian Bar Association

Addendum magazine reporter Valerie Mutton, profiles Farris lawyer Shannon Salter and her rewarding pro bono work. Addendum is published by National magazine, the official magazine of the Canadian Bar Association.

When Shannon Salter joined the Vancouver firm of Farris, Vaughan, Wills & Murphy in 2006, after clerking with the Supreme Court of British Columbia, she had a goal in mind: to devote part of her practice to pro bono cases. While that may seem at first glance an unusual ambition for a former clerk, she says in fact many of her clerking colleagues felt the same way. “When you work so closely with the judges, you begin to see things from their point of view. You see not just the problems dealing with lay litigants themselves, but the pressure it puts on the court system, and how the judges feel the pressure to ensure lay litigants get a fair trial.”

She has taken her promise to heart, and has been recognized by Pro bono Law BC for her legal work, which has included helping a single mother avoid eviction, as well as completing a successful bail review for another client. She understands that these are frightening situations for her clients and finds providing her expertise to them gratifying. “You are dealing with the basic struggles of life — losing your house, losing your freedom.”

Salter says she feels an obligation to do pro bono work, as a recognition that she was able to go to law school and that taxpayers helped her achieve her goal. She is struck by the fact that

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rights mean nothing if you do not have the means to enforce them, and that lawyers who do pro bono work can help to make sure that everyone’s rights are meaningfully protected, including the indigent.

She highly recommends that young lawyers take on pro bono work when they can. Salter’s firm recognizes pro bono hours, which creates a firm culture where such work is valued. The firm also has a trial experience program, in partnership with the Salvation Army pro bono clinic, which Salter has found invaluable for developing trial skills. “It gives you the

kind of education you don’t usually get as a one-or-two-year call. By the time you are a fifth year associate, you are at ease in a courtroom and have experience.”

She says her favourite pro bono cases are the ones where the clients are organized and knowledgeable, but can’t go any farther because they lack the expertise to navigate the court system. “The times I feel most proud of being a lawyer are when I’m helping people who could not have helped themselves. You have an opportunity to make a huge difference to them.”