

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

[inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([00:07](#)):

Hi, this is Caroline Heller, chair of Greenberg sharks global pro bono program. I'd like to welcome you today to Greenberg Traurig pro bono podcast. Good in practice, you may know that Greenberg charg has offices throughout the United States and around the world. One of those offices is in Mexico city and they have an incredible pro bono program. They've been awarded for their pro bono work on many occasions over the past few years. For example, in 2019, they were awarded with the pro bono program of the year award at chambers and partners, diversity and inclusion, Latin America awards. In 2020, they received Latin lawyers, pro bono law firm of the year award. And later in 2020, they were recognized at a virtual ceremony hosted by Appleseed foundation, Mexico and the United States agency for international development to celebrate the end of their four year joint pro bono program dedicated to strengthening Mexican civic organizations.

Speaker 2 ([01:06](#)):

In addition to these awards, Greenburg chard was the first law firm in Mexico to sign a collaboration agreement with Mexico city's human rights commission and with the United nations high commissioner for refugees among its many important pro bono efforts. The Greenberg char team has handled almost 70 cases pro bono from the United nations high commissioner for refugees to achieve the recognition of the refugee status of central American and African migrants. My guest today from the Mexico city office is Elba Gutierrez, who is the pro bono counsel in that office. And she's going to tell us a little bit more about the Mexico city's amazing pro bono program.

Speaker 3 ([01:48](#)):

Can you tell us a little bit about your position at the Mexico city office and how you came into that position?

Speaker 4 ([01:56](#)):

Sure. Um, well, the Mexico's, uh, office decided in 2017 to open up a more structured program to develop the persona work that would, that we were doing. And actually it's funny because I used to be an antitrust associates before this, and I used to do a couple, you know, um, antitrust cases basically for enterprises and monopolies and stuff, but I had been, always been devoted to the human rights thing. So once we ended up that chapter of being an outrageous associate and I actually created from Greenberg, uh, big [inaudible] a shareholder in the Mexican office actually say, okay, we need to structure more the efforts that we are having here, maybe someone with that perspective in human rights, but who has also been working at the office previously might be the correct person to do so. So they hired me back, but only in this position as for one a coordinator, which is why I, my only job is devoted to pro bono and it divides into two bigs. First on one hand needs to develop the whole structure, uh, to get cases for every lawyer to be happy in the office and to actually do something and to develop all these kinds of alliances with other NGOs, um, governmental entities and international organizations. And on the other hand to handle cases that might be new for the firm or for the office such as the refugee cases. So that's how the pro bono program actually got more institutionalized in the Mexican office.

Speaker 3 ([03:26](#)):

And can you tell us a little bit about pro bono in Mexico? Cause you and I had talked about how in the United States, it's fairly easy to find a pro bono program. You simply connect with an organization and they can usually refer a case to you. Tell us how it's a little different and why having a dedicated pro bono coordinator in Mexico city office is so important. Well

Speaker 4 ([03:47](#)):

In Mexico pro-bono is not mandatory for lawyers, which is a big challenge because you know, they are not actually forced to do something, but on the other hand there, the truth is that in Mexico, as well as along Latin America, the economic and social disparity is so big that it reflects on the justice system. At the end of the day, having the right to access justice is not a right, but it's more a privilege. So it becomes more these professional and ethical obligation, you know, to, to the, both some of the legal talent to start to correct that situation. The thing is because here is not mandatory, but we have this social situation, there are more opportunities like organically to actually get to these vulnerable people. Um, the thing is that you actually need to create an instructor. So having a pro bono coordinator on the, the boat to actually create those opportunities and to connect the needs with the people cook and provide the legal assistance is key in Northern to keep developing the pro bono in the country.

Speaker 4 ([04:48](#)):

I think some effort had been done not only by GT, but from other firms I'm from other clearing houses here in the country, which is a certain to give some results. So people start to talk more about pro bono and all these, you know, drug cognitions in chambers and lucky lawyer and other kind of rankings that we have going on around the profession are quite useful because then the small firms start to say, Hey, I have the capacity. I have the time or have the resources. So maybe I can do something similar. So is this kind of domino and mirror effect, some people see what you are doing and then they get inspired and they start to see that. I realize that they can also help in doing, to change the things out there.

Speaker 3 ([05:30](#)):

Oh, but how big is the Mexico city office, approximately how many attorneys are there and what are their practice areas?

Speaker 4 ([05:36](#)):

We have 85 lawyer right now. Uh, the practices are quite corporative, you know, corporate law, financial banking, antitrust tax litigation and their gym. Uh, so yeah, it's, it's quite interesting because all these practices, which are more devoted to, you know, enterprises and the corporate life are getting to the human rights necessities. And the magic of this program is that this sophisticated and really talented lawyers who are really good at what they do for enterprises, I realizing that their talent can be also used for common people, for people that otherwise we'll never get a lawyer to represent them before a court or to help them through their processes or, you know, and they also start to realize that things in the country are not as they see them in their daily lives. That Mexico is many Mexico's at the same time and that the privileges and the bubble that we have is something really particular. And it's not something that everyone shares here. So they have the opportunity to actually help people. And that's also why they have become so engaged on the program. You know, they can see the direct effect upon the life of someone else.

Speaker 3 ([06:51](#)):

So on that, can you tell us a little bit about the organizations that you work with in the Mexico city office and the types of pro bono cases that the attorneys are taking?

Speaker 4 ([07:00](#)):

Sure. Uh, we have three main types of alliances. The first one are NGOs, because of course they are the first ones in the bottom line of these issues. The second one are international organizations, mainly the UN bodies that are working here in Mexico. We are working with a farm for a population of the us. We're working with a urinary CR and there were a few cases. And with UNICEF, for children, um, in the third place we're working with governmental entities, mainly with the human rights commissions. We have a federal one, the national, um, we have the Mexico city. So those are our three alliances right now and how the projects are divided are in three main topics. The first one is what we have been calling the corporate pro bono work, which is, you know, this assistance for the NGOs or moral persons who are already helping other people in vulnerable situations, uh, shelters and yours, grassroots effort, uh, collectives.

Speaker 4 ([08:03](#)):

Um, they need some structure in their capacities in order to keep working. So we're offering them legal advice, not only because it helped to the work, but also because we think that this help to stronger their rule of law in the country, which is also a big challenge, uh, on second place we have what is impact litigation, which is my personal favorites, uh, which is representing people directly before federal cards, mainly true the battle trial, which is the way in Mexico that we have to defend human rights. Uh, the thing here is that every case that we take, we try to make them an impact litigation because we want to get precedence. And those presents can be afterwards, be used by other attorneys here in the country. So basically the commitment here is that not only we have the capacity to get, uh, for example, to get a case to Supreme court or to take so many cases at the same time, but also that we have the resources and the talent to start to open up the path in the present way for other lawyers to get their cases there.

Speaker 4 ([09:07](#)):

Um, the latest is what we have in calling projects and activities, which is mainly something that doesn't need a representation before the court, or either a corporate advice, but you're still needing a lawyer. So for example, for the last three years, every month, we have been holding a seminar that we have been calling law for non-lawyers, which aims to empower legally people. So basically we do, I don't know, simple topics like how to review your labor contract. Why does it have to have, and which are the breaches that maybe the employers can do in the contracts and stuff. So people after the seminar can have the ability to actually review by themselves, the contract and any other capacities, you know, uh, under that umbrella, we have also provide, uh, assistance to the national commission of human rights on the subject of prior and free consultation for indigenous people, uh, with having also developing handbooks, uh, in Alliance with Appleseed, Mexico, and the us aid and the cooperation from the American government for NGOs, uh, how to manage a legal issues. So all of these three topics then arrange a lot of other topics. You know, for example, you can be representing some refugee before the card, and also you can be helping as human trafficking NGO in the corporate weight. So it's a mix of the waste that we are working on. Also the topics that we are covering,

Speaker 3 ([10:38](#)):

Is there a particular case when you talk about the impact litigation, is there a particular case that you can think of that left an impression upon you and the other attorneys who were working on them? Like a success story? Sure,

Speaker 4 ([10:51](#)):

Sure, sure. Sure. In 2017, we have this huge earthquake here in Mexico and eat, you know, really hurt some infant, a structure of buildings and mainly for governmental buildings. So Camara, which is a refugee agency in Mexico, eh, the building was declared not useful and Kamar decided to freeze all the procedures. So all the refugees in Mexico applying for their asylum procedure were just waiting indefinitely in Mexico. The law says that if you are applying for asylum, you have to wait only 45 days in order to get a resolution. So it was like, you know, really clear the time that you had to wait, but because they freeze this procedure, the people was just like in this limbo, you know, they didn't have the certainty of what was going to happen or whether they will be one day recognized or not as refugees and stuff.

Speaker 4 ([11:44](#)):

So we started this litigation against that, uh, decision, and we got, uh, the fella cards to get opened up again. So bracing west council, and then refugees, not only Mexico city, but in general in the country, we're able to keep going with their procedures. So this was quite amazing because we got something that was not only for our single case, but in general for the refugees here in Mexico. Um, I mean it wasn't the gear that we open up the program. So I think it was quite a milestone for us because it was a big story showing us that yeah, there was not only this thing and it's like over men or against a bad decision that we could lead to gait, but also, so that passion actually gets results. You know, like it wasn't, maybe I lose battle from the beginning because there was no present about something like this.

Speaker 4 ([12:38](#)):

Um, we still got it. So people got really inspired by this and they started to, you know, get more engaged and more commitment to their cases in programming. I was previous to the Mexicans, the Mexico city earthquake. So basically what we did in Wahaca was to represent a family of women of indigenous women, because this is, uh, one of the standard sense, all men to the us, you know, for money, their, their house was demolished. And it was not demolished because of the Arabic, but because the government just got there and say, okay, this half has to be demolished because it, because some structural damage, um, that the government or any of these people never told them what was going on or explain them in their language. What what's happening in Mexico is Spanish is not the only official language, but also all the indigenous languages are recognized.

Speaker 4 ([13:27](#)):

So if you're an indigenous person, you have the right to have information in your own language. So that was the first bridge. They got their house in college and no one explained them what was going on. I know I wanted to keep them impression because of that. So we represented that family and we actually got their operation back city because it's where we are based on it's easier to work when the earthquake happened. The next day we organize a campaign together in C2 advice to people. So basically it was super amazing because attorneys from GT were, you know, like wearing helmets and boots. And they were just sitting down with people in, you know, these complex of buildings that have been demolished and explaining them what was going on, what they could do, what happened with the, for example, the documents that they'd lost or how the insurance could work.

Speaker 4 ([14:19](#)):

And that word kept going. Um, we actually got many, many people. We became like this hub for other attorneys to join the efforts. And we ended up not only coordinating the work done by the GD lawyers, but also by solo practitioners or small law firms that wanted also to help Insitu afterwards. We also do cases to represent in order to get reparations. Um, yeah, it became like this general lawyering effort, you know, around the city. Um, it was quite inspiring, you know, because it was a really huge earthquake and it was quite traumatizing for everyone. But again, lawyers realized that their legal talent is not all the contracts or litigation, but they can also help to shape the life of people who is suffering by some other situation.

Speaker 3 ([15:09](#)):

And right now the entire world is facing another serious event. That's causing a lot of suffering, which is the COVID-19 pandemic. And I understand that the Mexico city office has burned proactive in doing outreach to try to help its own communities who are affected by this crisis. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Speaker 4 ([15:28](#)):

Sure. Uh, we participated in a coordinated effort with so many other firms and also some clearing houses, such as opposite, uh, central [inaudible] of the Mexican bar. Uh, we designed it, this legal guide, which is basically a booklet of question and answers of legal topics that might be affected by COVID-19. So for example, there are the questions about insurance, how it's going to work or labor rights or human rights regarding human mobility. So basically we designing this set of questions. There were answered by lawyers in many, many, many offices, and we collaborated with that. From there, we are designing some seminars also to be done, uh, to webinars, to some, a small enterprises that may be facing some challenges, you know, like this kind of clinics for a small business, but more like webinars per month. Uh, we are also working in some litigations in Alliance with the American university in order to get the immigration detention centers, some basic rules for how the decision is being helped, because as you know, any detention center right now is also facing the challenge of how to Supreme, the contagious and stuff. So those are the three main actions that we've been working on right now, because also it's quite limited. You know, we have to be quite creative right now because the courts close up and also some institutions and stuff. So we have to find the ways to actually reach people and to answer them questions. So they can be also more proactive with their own business and with their own lives and with their own rights.

Speaker 3 ([17:09](#)):

And if you were to tell, let's say you were talking to a young associate who wasn't sure about whether or not they should take a pro bono case. What would you tell someone about the importance of pro bono?

Speaker 4 ([17:20](#)):

Well, on one hand that you will see direct results. Something that happens usually in commercial or big cases is that you are assigned this bowl. Associate never see what happens at the end, because he's so big that the thing, and there are so many people in both that you may never see what happens. And so in the first place, you will see directly the effect of your work, the responsibility that you have with your clients on the second one is that you will learn. You will learn a lot. Um, as a young associate, I think is the most precious time in your career to actually open up, uh, to be, you know, willing to see what else is there not to only focus in one practice or, you know, to be the specialist right now, because maybe

that is not your passion. Um, pro bono is a great way to actually learn something else, to get involved in some topics that you may have never been interested in. Um, lastly, the fact that you will be teaming up with some people that you might have never talked with in your office, you know, it's also a great way to, to make, uh, new colleagues, to make friends even, and to start to see how to get involved with more people in your practice, in your office and meet your practice. So it's a way for everyone, the client is happy. You are happy. Everyone is happy at the end.

Speaker 3 ([18:37](#)):

So I know in my role of approving all of the pro bono projects around the firm, I see pro bono projects coming in from the Mexico city office, daily. Many of them, can you tell us a little bit about what is the percentage of attorneys in the Mexico city office who participate in pro bono work? I ground now

Speaker 4 ([18:55](#)):

Is at 87%. Everyone is doing something. Yeah. It's, it's really, yeah, I'm really glad because at the end, the success of this of this program is not the structure of having a pro bono coordinator, but it's the fact that lawyers are quite passionate and committed. Um, they are quite hard workers, you know? Um, so yeah, almost everyone is doing something, uh, they are happy with it. That's pretty fantastic.

Speaker 3 ([19:25](#)):

So we talked a little bit about in the beginning, why pro bono work was important to your community, to the community surrounding the Mexico city office in Mexico city, the disparity between the folks who are doing well and the folks who are not, can you tell us personally, why is this rule important to you? What made you decide that this was the type of role you wanted to come back to as opposed to doing antitrust at another firm?

Speaker 4 ([19:55](#)):

I think that the fact that we are connecting two different worlds, you know, like these really privileged and sophisticated really, and lawyers with vulnerable people is a sign of how we can commit in our own topics to make a social change, how we can donate our talent, any talent, etc. I mean, we're talking right now about legal talent, but it can be any kind of professional talent to overcome this kind of challenges that as a society we have. So of course the support from the firm and the commitment also from the shareholders in Mexico city office has to be key because that's the thing that also allows attorneys to actually get involved, you know, to feel the freedom, to actually spend time and research, um, to educate themselves in order to get this done. So, yeah, the thing is that we are not only using the law for something specifically, but we also creating this pedagogical program, you know, like education among folks, because it's not only about the lawyers getting to know these other realities, but also people to get to know that they are lawyers and that the law is not this horrific thing really complex, that they are also subjects who can be also being exercised as rights.

Speaker 4 ([21:08](#)):

And they have the tools and the people around them to actually get there.

Speaker 3 ([21:12](#)):

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But you have a law degree, you go do anything with it. Why is why is helping people who are less fortunate? Why is connecting the talented lawyers in the Mexico city office with less fortunate people? Why does that drive you? Why does that move you?

Speaker 4 ([21:28](#)):

Well, I think in Mexico, some of her programs are covered. Symbol angles are facing challenges with financing or how the governmental entities are not having the capacity. So for me, it's opened up a new way through the private initiative to actually get something done on one hand, um, on the other is the fact that I think I have become the bridge among these two, two worlds at the end. You know, I stood in a public university, which in Mexico means that you might be allocate in some sort of jobs. Um, somehow I ended up in this firm, which is quite different from whatever my university will have prepare me for. Um, I really think that also overcoming the social distance and this economic gap and stuff at the end is also helping to create other kinds of opportunities. This is a beginning from bigger change, um, from bigger opportunities for people in general, to do whatever they want with their lives. And right now they are being held back by the fact that they are not in a position of power or in a position to exercise fully their rights. We are creating something for the future and something that is going to last in more and more people as far as we reach them.

Speaker 2 ([22:44](#)):

Thanks for joining us. And I hope you tune in next week for another pro bono

Speaker 1 ([22:48](#)):

Story. [inaudible].