

# ATJ PRO BONO CHAMPION

## RICARDO M. ADOBBATI

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*For more than 15 years, Ricardo M. Adobbati has represented individuals in court-appointed guardianships as attorney ad litem for the Cameron County district and county courts. He regularly works pro bono divorce proceedings through the Community Justice Program, a joint project of the Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Inc. and the Cameron County Bar Association. Adobbati has also represented indigent criminal defendants as a Criminal Justice Act panel attorney for the U.S. District Courts' Southern District of Texas.*

### **You are heavily involved in pro bono cases. How did you get started in that work?**

I got started because some of the judges just called my name out in court and asked for me to help, to be honest with you. I was happy to help. I also got involved with the Cameron County Bar Association and the pro bono divorce clinic. We handle a lot of divorces for people who are estranged from their spouses and cannot afford to go through the actual, traditional ways. The courts were nice enough to set up, once a month, a clinic where the potential divorcées come to a location and a district judge gives his or her time to grant the divorce after the pleadings are filed and the requisite time has passed.

### **Why is doing pro bono work important to you?**

I feel lack of money can get in the way of people getting justice and access to the courts system. Doing pro bono work lets me give people that opportunity—maybe not to the extent that we'd like everyone to have access, but certainly one by one we can help these people.

### **Tell us about the programs you're involved with.**

Primarily divorce and guardianship proceedings, which, since they are civil by nature, have no requirement by law that they be appointed counsel. It's a sense of fulfillment because many of these people have wills, or perhaps property that they inherited, and they can't get it in their names because they can't afford to make the payments to hire an attorney or even the filing fees for getting the work done.



### **As a sole practitioner, how do you find time for so much pro bono work?**

We can all find some time. It's just a matter of coordinating your day.

### **Is it difficult?**

Sometimes. Luckily, the courts give us some flexibility, and we know way ahead of time when there are going to be hearings on these pro bono cases so that we can schedule them around the typical work that we handle.

### **What's the most rewarding thing about what you do?**

The smile and thanks that I get after the proceedings are done. Many of these people have been carrying these problems around for a long time, whether it's a spouse who's been married yet separated for many years, or a person who needed to have a guardianship appointment for an older parent. The fact that we get it done, really, that's when we see the satisfaction that they've been able to finally get on with their lives. **TBJ**