

CHRISTOPHER J. DICKSON

Christopher J. Dickson with Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft has been a volunteer attorney with the MCB Pro Bono for Nonprofits program since 2010. Through this initiative, non-profit charitable organizations engaged in community, social and/or economic development are matched with volunteer business lawyers having special skills and legal expertise in a wide range of transactional matters. Volunteer lawyers offer legal services relating to contracts, tax exemption, real estate, banking, incorporation, trademarks, employment and many other areas of business law.

Chanell Ketchmore, Executive Director and Founder of Ketchmore Kids, the nonprofit Chris assisted, said Chris “was very knowledgeable and he kept me in the loop throughout the entire process. Things were expedited in a timely manner and the overall experience of working with Chris was absolutely wonderful.”

If you would like to volunteer with the Pro Bono for Nonprofits program or participate in any other MCB pro bono initiatives, please contact Heather Blackley, Director of Lawyer Volunteer and Community Services at 704/375-8624 x115 or hblackley@meckbar.org.

MCB: Current Employer / number of years with current employer:

CJD: Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft / 3 years

MCB: Area of Practice / Expertise?

CJD: Commercial Real Estate Finance

MCB: Law School / Law School Graduation Year?

CJD: New York University, 2009

MCB: What type of pro bono work do you prefer?

CJD: My pro bono experience in Charlotte has primarily been with helping charitable organizations obtain their 501(c)(3) tax designation so that people who donate to the

charity are able to claim an income deduction for the donation. It is always very refreshing to clients who are so enthusiastic about their volunteer work and helps to renew your passion for the same.

MCB: What pro bono work have you provided to Ketchmore Kids?

CJD: Ketchmore Kids is really a unique organization. The founder, Chanell Ketchmore, has been a long-standing fan and creator of hip-hop music and wanted to find ways to promote the celebration of hip-hop culture and use the music and culture to promote social awareness. She’s currently pursuing her PhD in Psychology and has been involved in research regarding the impact on music-based rehabilitation programs to reduce recidivism among juvenile defenders. At the time that we initially met, she had already developed a pretty strong infrastructure of donors and volunteers. She was really just looking for someone to help guide her through the application process and give her the best chance at receiving the designation.

MCB: How many pro bono cases do you typically handle at one time?

CJD: It varies. I have had up to three at a time, but my work demands can be sporadic and I try not to put myself in a position where I won’t be able to give our pro bono clients the attention that they deserve. The one upside to the 501(c)(3) application process is that most of the work is front-loaded. Once the application is submitted, it’s really just a lot of waiting.

MCB: How do you prepare for handling such cases?

CJD: I am fortunate to have access to one of our partners in our New York office, David Miller, who is truly an expert on all things tax-related. He has helped literally hundreds (I honestly would not be surprised if someone told me the count was at 1,000 at this point) of organizations get 501(c)(3) tax status so he

has been a tremendous help in the process. Other than working with him, the typical preparation is mostly an interview with the client to get a detailed understanding of the inner workings



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of their organization, examples of events they have put on in the past, and their plans for the future of the organization, including getting an understanding on the ultimate “end goal” of the group.

MCB: Did you participate in any particular training so that you could handle these cases / issues?

CJD: Most of the training has been “on the job” training, but as I mentioned above, having David Miller’s ear available is an invaluable resource.

MCB: What is the best advice you’ve received during your legal career?

CJD: Treat everyone with whom you work with respect.

MCB: What advice would you give others?

CJD: Don’t be afraid to ask questions. The most invaluable training I’ve received has come from conversations with my colleagues. There are a lot of things that books cannot teach.

MCB: What is the most challenging part of your career?

CJD: Finding a way to balance the demands of the profession with your personal life. It can be difficult enough balancing client work, pro bono work/volunteering, and keeping abreast of all of the most recent developments in our particular field.

MCB: What is your favorite part of your current job?

CJD: Closing a deal for a client still retains the same level of excitement it had for me as when I started work here. There’s something very satisfying about working on a transaction start-to-finish, and successfully guiding your client to the end of the deal. **MCB**