

### Just One Moment, Just One Kid

Chuck Zauzig, VTLA President



Photo by Bob Morecock

On a rocky dust-choked road in rural Central America a young boy around six years old navigates down the road past the huts of his neighbors. The boy shares the road with unattended livestock, oxen-drawn carts, and many others walking or on bicycles carrying their loads. Poverty is a way of life and there are very few possessions for the families living there.

But on this day the boy is greeted by a Jeep full of foreigners who stop, greet the boy and hand him a baseball. A simple gesture, which brings immediate joy that radiates across the boy's face. The foreigners are from the U.S., from Virginia, some from the ranks of the VTLA. The day just got better and the Jeep full of good will and surfboards races off to the morning's destination.

A sage said, "Giving is the noble expression of the benevolence of the mighty. Even dust, given in childlike innocence, is a good gift. No gift that is given in good faith to a worthy recipient can be called small; its effect is so great." *Jatakamala* 3.23 The scene above is played out every trip to the Pacific coasts of Mexico, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua by this band of my very good friends.[1] Baseballs, soccer balls, t-shirts, stickers - all small things, small gestures of giving—but the effect is always the same.

We all know that in our own hometowns there are children who are in great need - from basic physical needs like clothes and food to basic emotional needs like attention and compassion. It has been reported that of the 35.2 million American young people ages 10 to 18, one out of 4 lives with only one parent; one out of 10 was born to teen parents; one out of 5 lives in poverty; one out of 10 will not finish high school.[2] There are children who need advocates in the school system to ensure proper placement for learning disabilities. There are children who need to learn to read. There are children who simply need sound guidance.

Trial lawyers long have had a tradition of transcending serving their individual clients and extending their passion and talents into the communities where they live or to those where extraordinary events have sent us or simply where we were needed most. Sometimes it has been a nationwide call to service such as Trial Lawyers Care where families of 9-11 victims were represented without any fees charged. Sometimes it is a statewide effort such as VTLA's long lived bicycle helmet program, where kids are given new helmets to help prevent serious brain injuries. But frankly the moment in time where just one kid gets a hand from one of us, will be the moment remembered best.

This year VTLA has created a program called "Just One Kid" to give our members a network of a few programs designed to assist children in need.

- **Virginia Mentoring Partnership** trains and places mentors for children. The influence on these young people includes enhancing social skills and emotional

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#### CLE

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well-being to improving cognitive skills. The mentoring can take as little time as a lunch hour.

- **First Book** is a program to give children from low income families the opportunity to own and read first new books. A simple donation of books has made a demonstrable improvement in these children's literacy rate.
- **Comfort Zone Camp** is the nation's largest independent bereavement camp, located in Richmond, which offers a helping hand to kids experiencing the tremendous grief of losing a loved one. Research has shown kids who can effectively process their grief build more successful lives. Since grief knows no boundaries, children come from all backgrounds and attend free of charge. Volunteers are matched with a child for the weekend.

"Just One Kid" was designed to make it easy for our trial lawyers to connect to these children in need but it is not the only way. Many of you are already involved in your communities in similar projects, and that is something we are very much interested in hearing. Shortly "Just One Kid" will be on our website with links to these programs as well as a way of telling the story of how you helped a child in need.

A moment of time surely is the currency of reaching these kids. The means are as variable as the giver's imagination. There is no set path-no correct path-no single method. There is the simple choice of reaching out to help or choosing not to help.

Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is therefore not an act but a habit." Trial lawyers have tremendous talents and skills to share beyond the courtroom. We need to re-commit and make a habit of humanity. Trial lawyers are constantly being portrayed as greedy and only caring about money. Someday when such a sneering remark is made, there will be a mother or a father or a child who will speak with conviction that the trial lawyer they know helps people without asking for anything in return. The trial lawyer they know reached out to their family and made a difference for their child. Someday those that have learned the truth about trial lawyers will be sitting on our juries.

[1] Although others sometimes join these trips, the "core" remains as J. Breit, R. Morecock, A. Beasley and J. Lake.

[2] Statistics from Virginia Mentoring Partnership.

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