

60 SECONDS

HEENA MUSABJI

MARRIED FOR 13 YEARS TO ARIS, A RADIOLOGIST • MOM TO AMAAN, 9, SABIL, 6, AND ZAHRA, 4 • GREW UP IN ALBANY, N.Y. • MEMBER OF HINSDALE JUNIOR WOMAN'S CLUB • ENJOYS BIKING WITH HER FAMILY

Heena Musabji wishes the Pro Bono Network had existed nine years ago when she had her first son.

Before his birth, while she was studying law, she dreamt of working for the United Nations.

"That was my passion, human rights law," she said. "Once I had Amaan, he became my passion."

Instead of pursuing her dream of working in The Hague, she found herself looking for part-time work so she could spend more time with her baby boy.

"Sometimes I found myself staying up all night working so I could be around during the day. I feel like if I had something like the network, it would have made it easier for me to be practicing law and going into a career when I was ready," she said.

When Musabji was pregnant with her third child, she learned about a group of attorney moms who provided pro bono legal work to clients in need. But the volunteer work carried the typical evening and weekend hours associated with a full-time job.

"I wanted to have dinner with my family and I wanted to be at every soccer game," Musabji said.

So she and a group of nine other moms sat around a kitchen table three years ago and started talking about creating a network that would allow attorney moms to volunteer their time while their kids were in school.

"That's how the idea was born," she said. "Since then it has blossomed and grown to over 100 attorneys."

Rather than seeking out and vetting their own clients, network leaders decided to partner with other nonprofit organizations.



Since 2011 the Pro Bono Network Heena Musabji helped establish has donated 3,000 legal hours worth \$500,000 to clients in need. (Jim Slonoff photo)

"We sought out the legal aid agencies that had been around for a while and knew what they were doing and already had great programs in place but didn't have enough staff to meet all the legal needs."

Volunteers can contribute as much or as little time as they like. Moms of older children might be interested in going downtown and getting back into a courtroom. Others with little ones might want to help without leaving their house — or their pajamas, Musabji said.

"It's really up to you what's convenient to you and what you like doing," she said.

And the volunteer attorneys always work in pairs so there is a backup in the event a child gets sick.

"You can't find something like that in your traditional setting," she said.

Musabji, who moved to Hinsdale shortly after starting the network, is passionate about its impact.

"When I look at how many people we've been able to help, how many of these people who had been waiting in line for legal representation and wouldn't have gotten an attorney to help them with their problem if we had not been there, that is huge," she said.

She is working now to bring more opportunities to DuPage County and sign up more volunteers.

As much help as the network offers individuals who need assistance, Musabji knows it also serves a need for volunteers.

"Some of the attorneys have said, 'I didn't know I needed this until I started doing this.'"

— by Pamela Lannom

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