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## The DOVE Project: A New Lawyer's Perspective

By: **Kristen Blanchette**

The stakes are high. Real people are involved and you are retained to represent them. Unlike in law school, there is no textbook that you can read or discussion you can have to find the answer to this one.

As a new lawyer, the thought of messing up when another person's livelihood is on the line is terrifying. But the only way to overcome this fear is to have confidence in your abilities and trust your judgment.

I would like to share my experience with the DOVE Project and offer my perspective. I hope this encourages new lawyers to participate in a program that has so many benefits and rewards.

### From Start to Finish

The DOVE Project is a program that provides assistance to low-income people who are victims of domestic violence. I learned about the DOVE Project while I was a student at the UNH School of Law through the Daniel Webster Program. Webster Scholars are trained to be DOVE attorneys as part of their two-year curriculum. Although my 2010 graduating class did not participate in the training program, I developed an interest and became certified independently.

When I started as an associate at the law firm of Devine, Millimet & Branch in Manchester, I was encouraged to continue my participation in the DOVE Project. I received my first phone call from the crisis center on a Friday afternoon with news that a victim needed to be represented at a Final Order of Protection hearing. The crisis advocate explained that the hearing was scheduled in three days.

As I began reviewing the information for this case, I immediately felt overwhelmed. Many questions started racing through my head: "How will I prepare for a case in three days? What are my ethical obligations? Will the client trust me? What legal arguments will I have to make?"

In a short period of time, I had to contact the client, research the law and prepare to represent this client at the hearing. This situation became very real for me when my client and I walked into the courthouse. I could see the panic in her face. At that moment, all my concerns did not matter – my focus was on my client. My job was to reassure her and earn her trust.

We walked into the courtroom that day and my client gained the courage to testify against the perpetrator. At the conclusion of the hearing, my client graciously praised me for the services I had rendered to her. She said to me, "I could not have done this alone."

Two weeks later, I received a letter from the court—the Final Order of Protection was granted! I instantly felt a sense of relief and satisfaction. I picked up the phone to relay the good news to my client. I will never forget her response to me. She said, "I feel safe. You helped protect my family and me. I cannot thank you enough."

### Benefits and Rewards

This experience was a very positive one for me. In addition to receiving a favorable result, I practiced my advocacy skills in the courtroom and explored a different area of the law. This case also forced me to develop my own strategy for defending against the opposing party. I had to overcome any fear that I had and learn to trust my judgment. In conclusion, the DOVE Project not only helped the client succeed in her case, but also helped me start my career in the practice of law.

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*Kristen Blanchette is an attorney with Devine, Millimet & Branch in Manchester. She became a member of the NH Bar in 2010.*



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New Hampshire Bar Association  
2 Pillsbury Street, Suite 300, Concord NH 03301  
phone: (603) 224-6942 fax: (603) 224-2910  
email: [NHBAinfo@nhbar.org](mailto:NHBAinfo@nhbar.org)  
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