

# Pro Bono Work: Just Do It!

By Alice B. Miller

A recent posting on Black Star Rising was riveting. The article, "Pro Bono Photography, Karma and Me," by Kansas City-based commercial photographer Aaron Lindberg (www.aaronlindberg.com and www.photokidblog.com), recalled the business impact of his first pro bono project, a photo shoot for a neighborhood women's

shelter, Hope House (hopehouse.net).

Lindberg, a lifestyle and commercial photographer who earned his stripes early on at a newspaper and ad agency, confides, "Eight months ago, if you had told me I'd be volunteering to do a full-day photo shoot and a half day of editing for free, I would have laughed and called you crazy. Things

are different now. I've become a believer in pro bono karma."

Karma or coincidence, Lindberg recently booked a paid assignment that grew out of his Hope House project. I asked Lindberg to walk us through that first pro bono experience and how it has transformed his business, marketing and personal perspective.

**An Altered Business Model.** "I had never considered donating my time and energy, especially for such a large photo shoot," says Lindberg. "Then in year-end 2008, I was contacted for a bid to shoot photos for a prospective client's marketing program. The prospect expected the shoot to require a full day. When I visited the organization's website prior to submitting an estimate, I learned that Hope House is Missouri's largest domestic violence shelter. After thinking it through, I informed them I would shoot the project free of charge. My business perspective had changed."



This image depicts a child victim of human trafficking being forced to work and do chores.

**All-Volunteer Shoot.** Lindberg met with the folks at Hope House to learn more about what they do to help some 10,000 abuse victims every year. He found it difficult to listen to the stories and was anxious about what he'd see at the shoot. The full-day photo session and his role in creating the images were eye-opening.

"More than 30 volunteers donated their time and energy to this large-scale, multi-site, full-day photo session," says Lindberg. "We set up the shots, taking care to make them as realistic as possible. We shot scenes depicting a sexual assault victim meeting with a nurse, a homeless person receiving an AIDS test, human trafficking in the forms of prostitution and child labor, and some shots inside a chapel. It was difficult to deal with these realities, but the stories need to be told. I hope that what we did will raise awareness and ultimately help these people."



This setup shows a young woman sold into prostitution looking for her next customer.

**Spreading the Message Online.** Following the shoot and as soon as the client received the photos, Lindberg posted a few images on his blog along with some of his thoughts on the shoot.

"Within a few days of the Hope House shoot, I received a ton of site visits and a few comments from my blog post," he says. "There was something powerful going on with the images. Posting to my blog and sending out the information in a monthly newsletter were great vehicles for getting the word out. The best part of the shoot for me was that I donated my time and energy to a worthy cause in my own way."



This photo depicts a sexual assault victim with nurses and an individual providing support and counseling.

**Creating Marketing Buzz.** Pro bono images, such as Lindberg's grainy black-and-white reality images, often generate buzz because people are immediately drawn to the editorial look of the events depicted.

"The black-and-white images are shocking to look at," says Lindberg. "They grab your attention and make you want to know what is happening to the subject. The Hope House project has shined a lot of light on my business and I am very thankful for that. In fact, a few days after the images circulated through Hope House, I received a phone call and booked a magazine cover shoot with a different branch of the organization. Landing a paying shoot from the work was a big plus. I am very proud that I was able to do this photo shoot and help out in my way. I would love to do more in the future."



This photo was set up to show what a victim of a sexual assault might go through at the hospital after an attack. The nurses work together to cultivate specimens from the victim, which will go to the police.

**Win-Win Business Builder.** Pro bono assignments are win-win projects. Clients are grateful that the work is donated, allowing them to allocate limited funds to other necessities. And photographers gain opportunities to give back to their communities, while simultaneously enhancing their business profiles.

"Ultimately, I chose to do the job, not only to give to a local charity, but because I liked the idea of contributing my professional skills to a worthy cause," says Lindberg. "As of right now, I am trying to keep my head above water and continue to grow my business. If other local charities were to contact me, I would be happy to listen to what they had in mind."

Lindberg's advice: "Do it! You can't go wrong accepting pro bono projects. Imagine someone seeing the images you shot realizing that a loved one is in trouble. Or someone reaching out to a lost friend or a stranger in need. Such results are exhilarating after long, emotionally draining shoots. There is no down side to pro bono work."

Alice B. Miller is the owner of Plum Communications Inc. (www.plumcomm.com), a Long Island, NY-based editorial services and marketing-communications company that supports the photo industry. Formerly editor of Studio Photography magazine, Alice has a growing clientele that includes photographers, manufacturers, publications and associations. She is the director of public relations for the International Photographic Council and an advisory board member of NyghtFalcon photography studios.



This photo depicts a woman, the victim of human trafficking, "beaten" into working and doing chores.