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Pro Bono at BPP: An overview

Kara Irwin



Director of Pro Bono

There is a long tradition of pro bono at BPP's Law School among both staff and students. Our lecturers have advised at Law Centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux and have done pro bono work for organisations as diverse and global as the Maternity Alliance and the Centre for Victims of Torture in Nepal. Our students have been similarly dedicated to serving the community even at this early stage in their legal careers. Many have worked as administrative or legal assistants in Law Centres and CABx, as well as a number of other non-profit groups, such as the Independent Panel for Special Education Advice and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

In 2003, the School's administration decided to create a nexus for the pro bono work already taking place and to assist all those staff and students who were interested in pro bono, but did not know how to find such work. In January 2004, I began work as the full-time Director of Pro Bono, and shortly thereafter, on 24 March 2004, the School celebrated the launch of the BPP Pro Bono Centre (see the article about the launch later in this issue). The Centre's staff grew quickly with the addition of David Roberts, who works part-time as the Co-ordinator and Supervisor for the Centre's newly established BPP Legal Advice Clinic.

The Centre, located in BPP's Law School in Holborn, is open to students all week, including several evenings, and some weekends. The Centre houses a variety of student projects, in addition to hosting speakers and conducting research. Further details can be obtained from the Centre's brochure, available at the Law School reception or in the Centre.

While several of the Centre's activities are typical of many law schools, such as the BPP Legal Advice Clinic or our Streetlaw Project, much of the Centre's work is novel. For example, to our knowledge, the Centre is the only one in the UK able to offer assistance to all law students on each of the School's law courses in finding pro bono work. I offer individual meetings to all students to help each find a project or opportunity that matches his or her interests and availability. If none of the Centre's projects is appropriate, then I work with the student to find an internship at a non-profit organisation or a position assisting practicing lawyers with their pro bono work, or, for many of the part-time students who work in a law firm or large company, to develop a pro bono project in-house at their jobs. Also innovative are the Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing Project and the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Project (please see our brochure for details).

One of the Centre's aims is to ensure that as many students as possible leave BPP with the knowledge and confidence to start their own pro bono projects in their future careers. Therefore, students are involved at all levels of the Centre's operation. For example, I have taken on fourteen students as Centre Volunteers, assisting with all tasks from administration to research and marketing. Each of the Centre's projects has at least

two Student Directors, who manage the projects' day-to-day work, disseminating information to members, arranging meetings, and drafting correspondence. All students are encouraged to start new projects, using the Centre's Guidelines for Starting a New Pro Bono Project.

The Centre also works closely with the Law School's Career Services. I provide individual career counselling for students interested in a career in public service law or interning at a non-profit organisation. In addition, recent lectures sponsored or co-sponsored by the Centre's Speaker Series include one on how to find an internship either in the UK or anywhere in the world, and another hosting law firm Pro Bono Officers discussing how to incorporate pro bono into a training contract or traineeship.

The BPP Pro Bono Centre is dedicated to ensuring that no BPP law student leaves BPP without an understanding of the importance of pro bono in a legal career, starting from the very beginning of law school. It is our belief that this is the most significant contribution a law school can make to invest in the future of an ethical and compassionate legal profession.

Kara sits in the Pro Bono Centre and is available on 0207 430 5677 or at karairwin@bpp.com.



BPP Legal Advice Clinic Takes Off

“The invaluable input from external solicitors, who practice at Coudert Brothers and Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw, ensures that the advice is of a full professional standard.”



David Roberts

Legal Advice Clinic Co-ordinator

On 31st March, the Law School opened its free advice clinic to the public. This builds on a tradition of informal pro bono work by BPP staff and students and is one of many projects initiated under the BPP Pro Bono Centre, which opened earlier this year. Some of the Centre's other projects include a Human Rights Unit, Citizenship Foundation projects, a Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing Project, Streetlaw, a Mediation Friends Project and an Intellectual Property Pro Bono Project.

The BPP Legal Advice Clinic (BLAC) ran on a pilot basis on Wednesday evenings between 31st March and 12th May, offering legal advice on housing, employment, family and consumer law issues. Student Advisers, who were selected in early March and underwent substantive and practical training through the end of March,

interview clients in teams of two, with one GDL student working with either a BVC or LPC student. After the client interview, the Student Adviser teams meet with BLAC Supervisors and then carry out legal research and draft letters of advice, thus developing a range of practical skills.

During the pilot phase, BLAC's Student Advisers provided letters of advice to 29 clients. The Student Advisers have encountered a number of significantly factually and legally complex issues, and all of our clients have received detailed advice, free of charge. Some Student Advisers have met with quite difficult clients, and are to be commended in handling the clients with respect and professionalism. Other Student Advisers have received kind letters of thanks from clients, one of whom congratulated the Advisers on their "manner and friendly attitude" and noted that "we need such caring people like yourselves in the community who take an interest in listening to people's problems."

The Student Advisers are fully supervised by members of the Law School's staff, who have given their time to the project. The invaluable input from external solicitors, who practice at Coudert Brothers and Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw, ensures that the advice is of a full professional standard.

The BPP Legal Advice Clinic is a forum in which the Student Advisers apply the substantive legal knowledge and skills training they have received in client interviewing, legal research and drafting. At the same time, and perhaps most importantly, much-needed invaluable advice is provided to the BLAC's clients.

David sits in the Pro Bono Centre and is available on 020 7430 5668 or at davidroberts@bpp.com. BLAC ran on a pilot basis from 31 March to 12 May. It will run on a smaller scale in a summer session from 9 June to 28 July with the same Student Advisers. BLAC will next be recruiting Student Advisers in September 2004.

“I have experienced my fullest exposure to practice as a barrister to date... applying my legal skills to make a meaningful contribution to the community.”

Pro Bono Insider Column

Each issue, the Newsletter features one student's inside look at his/her participation in a different pro bono project.

By Christina Lyons, BVC, FT and BLAC Student Adviser

I applied to be a Student Adviser for the BPP Legal Advice Clinic (BLAC) because I was keen to assist people directly in understanding and enforcing their rights, and in doing so benefit by enhancing the skills I developed on the BVC. After undertaking the requisite training, I met with clients and was given the opportunity to practice my conferencing, legal research and drafting skills.

The highlight of my pro bono experience was representing one of my BLAC clients in the Central London County Court. Although

normally BLAC Student Advisers' services to clients are limited to a letter of advice, due to the exigent circumstances of my client's case, my BLAC Supervisors agreed that it would be appropriate for me to provide additional assistance to my client in this instance. He had applied to the Court to set aside default judgment.

In preparation for the hearing, I drafted a skeleton argument and witness statement and submitted copies to the court and opposing counsel. I had not expected to participate in the hearing and was therefore amazed when the District Judge, understanding that I am a BVC student, requested that I speak on my client's behalf. Initially, I felt a sense of trepidation, but this soon passed and I was able to persuade the Court to set aside

the judgment. As my client had failed to enter a defence, the question of costs arose and I was presented with the opponent's legal costs schedule, which I was given 40 minutes to examine before making submissions. Fortunately, I convinced the District Judge to reduce the costs by 55%. As I left the County Court that day, I felt a tremendous sense of satisfaction having used my advocacy skills to help my client in a tangible way.

I feel extremely fortunate to be a Student Adviser at BLAC. I have experienced my fullest exposure to practice as a barrister to date, and for the first time I am applying my legal skills to make a meaningful contribution to the community.

First of its Kind – the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Project

By Mohummad Mia, LPC, PT

I have been interested in pro bono work for some time, however due to my commitments between work and study, I had found it very difficult to participate in pro bono work. I have been asked to write this article for the BPP Pro Bono Centre Newsletter – now I could go on and say how pro bono has changed my life, but the skeptics out there will just ignore it so I won't say that, but what I will say is that....

When I found out that BPP had opened a Pro Bono Centre, I was eager to find out what opportunities they had for part-time students. To my relief I found the Centre not only has projects in which I could give hours which were suitable to me, but also a particular initiative which I felt I could participate in. This initiative is called the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Project, and I was one of only four students that attended the first meeting. That was in the beginning of January, and since then the project has developed very quickly with the positive help and support we receive from the Centre to help develop, promote

and bring focus to the Project. The Project is particularly exciting because it is unique - as far as we know, this is the only IP pro bono project in the UK.

There are now well over 30 student members of the Project. We meet a couple of times a month, invite speakers, and take on IP pro bono assignments from firms and non-profit organisations. I have just been staffed on one of the Project's first assignments, in which four BPP law students are providing research assistance on a pro bono matter to the partner in charge of the Intellectual Property department at Feagre Benson Hobson & Audley.

Faegre Benson Hobson & Audley have asked a group of us to help them research Binding Corporate Rules (BCR's). The four members of the team are researching different Codes of Practices/BCR's across the world, with specific reference to the enforceability of such rules. For example a company may decide to bind itself through a Code of Practice, but how would an individual be able to enforce such a code, considering that the majority of Codes in existence are not statute-based. This

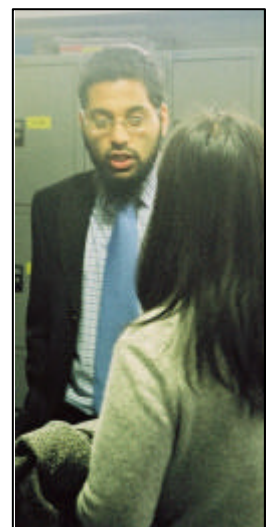
raises many interesting questions such as whether the Code is membership-based? Or is there a BCR/ Code of Practice somewhere out there, which is not statute-based but is now perceived as such?? – If you have any ideas please get in touch!!!!

So far the group has been doing research for just over three weeks, the amount of research to be done is immense, the workload is massive, but ultimately it's great fun and I enjoy it. This project has allowed me to gain a view of the legal profession specifically in regard to Intellectual Property, and I now feel this is definitely the area of law I wish to practice in the future.

So if there is any of you out there that wish to get involved with a special type of Pro Bono work just drop me an email and I will let you know when the next meeting is.

If you are interested in getting involved in the IP Pro Bono Project, please email Mohummad at miam@bpplaw.co.uk.

“The Project is particularly exciting because it is unique - as far as we know, this is the only IP pro bono project in the UK.”



What are you doing this summer? Pro Bono and Career Development

By Patrick Stone GDL, FT

One of the aims of the BPP Pro Bono Centre is to provide students with practical legal experience that will assist them in their future careers. To assist this process further, the Centre has teamed up with Samantha Gray and the Careers Department to encourage students to consider a range of vacation opportunities that may be available to them.

On Friday 12th March 2004, Kara and Samantha presented a lecture entitled 'What are you Doing Over the Summer?' The lecture was divided into two parts, with Samantha focusing on paid

placements, and Kara focusing on unpaid internships in both the UK and abroad.

The lectures gave practical advice, informing students of the benefits that such placements would offer, and the different types of internships that are available. Also detailed was information on how to find a placement that suits the individual and how to apply to different organisations.

On 1st April, the BPP Speaker Series hosted Suzie Turner, Pro Bono Partner at Dechert LLP, who spoke about how pro bono is organised and run at large law

firms. She and Kara Irwin then held an open discussion with students on how to incorporate pro bono into a training contract and how to gain contacts at firms through involvement in pro bono work.

The BPP Pro Bono Centre is committed to working with the Careers Department and will continue to inform students of future pro bono events. More information is available on the Careers section of the Student Intranet, where notes to the 12th March lecture can be found. Video copies of that lecture are available from the front desk in the library.

“The lectures gave practical advice, informing students of the benefits that such placements would offer.”



Should pro bono be a mandatory part of your legal education? Should it be integrated with your coursework? How should it be assessed?

Take a break from revising to come have a say in the future of legal education in Britain. To celebrate National Pro Bono Week (week of 7 June), the BPP Pro Bono Centre is hosting the following event to which all students are welcome:

Panel Discussion on Pro Bono and Legal Education

Tuesday 8 June, 6.30pm, BPP Law School, lecture theatre

Moderator:

Kara Irwin, Director of Pro Bono, BPP Law School

Panellists:

Chris Maguire, Senior Education Officer, Bar Council

Richard Grimes, Director of Pro Bono Services and Clinical Education, The College of Law

Sue Bucknall, Executive Director, Solicitors Pro Bono Group

Hugh Brayne, Clinical Legal Education Consultant

Followed by a wine reception.

Have you got a great idea for a new pro bono project?

See Kara Irwin for Guidelines on Starting a Pro Bono Project.

Law Firm Pro Bono: A Student View

By Louise Gibson, LPC, FT

I am a student on the Legal Practice Course (LPC) at BPP Law School. For the last six months, I have been involved in the Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing Project under the BPP Pro Bono Centre. I work as a student assistant to the solicitors at Steptoe & Johnson, helping them staff a Legal Advice Centre at St Hilda's Community Centre in East London.

Through this project, I have helped members of an under-privileged Bangladeshi community with their legal problems. The range of cases that I have been involved in is tremendous. For example, in one day I dealt with a case concerning an 83 year old man who had been defrauded out of thousands of pounds, one dealing with a man who had been illegally forced to pay hundreds of pounds to Bailiffs and another concerning a problem with insurance claims. In particular I have been privileged to be part of a case that has now been resolved. The case involved a family of five who were living in impoverished and overcrowded conditions. All three of the children suffer from severe medical illnesses and

wanted to appeal to the local council for re-housing on medical grounds. Having been given inaccurate information and negligently advised by a number of different centres, the family came to St Hilda's for advice. I was able to ascertain what needed to be done to apply for re-housing and was able to complete the application and then chase it up over the weeks. I have now heard that the family have been given greater housing priority. The family just need to bid for a house and they should be able to move to a much bigger and better property that will better suit their needs. The problems that the clients face at St Hilda's are not always legally technical, though they can often be. Regardless of the client's legal or practical concerns, the impact on their lives that the Centre provides by helping them with their needs is invaluable.

This project not only helps the community, but is a benefit to all those involved in the project. The S&J lawyers often comment on how rewarding St Hilda's Legal Advice Centre is on a personal level. Working so closely with them, I have seen how their St Hilda's work gives them a great sense of personal and professional satisfaction, and I have come to appreciate the

relevance of pro bono work in any legal career.

For a student helper, like myself, the experience is invaluable. I have had the opportunity to interview real clients and complete research tasks into interesting areas of law. Much of the work of the student assistant is in the follow up work, which includes research, letter writing and telephoning. All of these activities help to develop key skills that are essential to a legal career and a great help to completing the academic training on the LPC. In fact, this work has allowed me to put into practice much of what I have learned on the LPC, especially in the context of drafting letters of advice. The project is a great learning tool that has given me the chance to develop skills that I may not have otherwise exercised until starting a training contract.

I was very pleased that the law school provided me with this opportunity through the BPP Pro Bono Centre, and, as a result of my involvement, I would encourage all law students to start getting involved in pro bono at the very start of their legal careers.

BPP Pro Bono Centre Launch Event

By Suzanne Consentino, LPC, PT

On 24th March, the BPP Pro Bono Centre was officially launched. The ceremony was held at the Law School in the lecture theatre and common area. The special guest speaker was Lord Phillips of Sudbury, who is President of the Solicitors Pro Bono Group, which he initiated in 1996. His speech was centred on the idea that in a society like ours, where everything becomes more complex, lawyers are necessary to help people to find their way through this complexity. The very importance of lawyers' role also confers them the duty to help and assist those in need. In Lord Phillips' view, we all have a duty to be engaged in some sort of pro bono work.

The evening was also marked by the signing of the Joint Protocol for Pro Bono Legal Work by Peter Crisp, Chief Executive of BPP Law School. BPP Law School was the first large institution to sign the Joint Protocol after its official endorsement by the Law Society. The evening was very well attended by both students and members of the legal profession, who had an opportunity to meet and make contact during the wine reception, which followed the signing ceremony and Lord Phillips' keynote speech.

This successful ceremony was a reward for all those who have been involved in pro bono at BPP Law School and an encouragement for those who

are not yet involved to come and join us. The aim of the BPP Pro Bono Centre is to give every student an opportunity to do some sort of legal work on a voluntary basis. We are offering a variety of projects for you to join and are always looking for new initiatives!



Lord Phillips of Sudbury