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The BPP Pro Bono Centre – An update

By Kara Irwin, Director of Pro Bono

Welcome to the second issue of the BPP Pro Bono Centre Newsletter! A lot has happened since our first issue during last academic year. In London, the Centre has acquired additional office space, equipment and staff. Just before term started, we moved down to an area in the 4th floor common room in the Holborn building, which we share with the Careers department. David Roberts, the BPP Legal Advice Clinic Co-ordinator, and I have offices here, and we've now got four dedicated computers and a printer for use by students working on pro bono projects. Our staff has also increased with the very valuable addition over the summer of Kirsty Waterhouse, Administrative Assistant to both the Pro Bono Centre and Careers, who also sits in the Pro Bono Centre. Beverley Reid, an employment solicitor, will also be working with us in the Legal Advice Clinic on a part-time basis on secondment from the Camden Tribunal Unit.

We've also expanded nationally with the opening of BPP Law School in Leeds.

The Pro Bono Centre in Leeds is managed on a day-to-day basis by a team of lecturers, each supervising one of the projects. We've been fortunate to recruit Lydia Haines to work with us on a part-time basis developing the BPP Legal Advice Clinic in Leeds. The Clinic has 20 student advisers, led by a Management Committee of five students, who have already started advising several consumer and employment clients. They also accept family and immigration matters. Other projects currently underway in Leeds include the Human Rights Unit, Leeds Cares, the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Group, and Streetlaw. Information on contacting these groups is included in this issue.

In London, we've started two new projects – the Legal Translation Services Project, in which our law students fluent in foreign languages will start interpreting at local law centres for non-English speaking clients, and the Environmental Law Pro Bono Group, described in an article later in this issue.

Projects continuing from last year have expanded – the Human Rights Unit now has over 600 members; the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Group has about 300 members; law students in our Citizenship Foundation and Streetlaw projects are working with pupils in schools all around London; our law students are now assisting in Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing projects at Hackney Law Centre with Faegre Benson Hobson Audley LLP and Debevoise & Plimpton (see the article later in this issue), at Tooting Law Centre with Norton Rose, at Brent Citizens Advice Bureau with Clyde & Co, and at North Kensington Law Centre with Dechert LLP.

It's terrific to see the number of BPP students now involved in pro bono and their enthusiasm for and commitment to the work they're doing. I encourage you to read the rest of this issue to get a sense of how various individual students are contributing to our projects and what they get out of the projects!

Kara can be reached on 0207 430 5677 or at karairwin@bpp.com.

BPP Legal Advice Clinic Expansion

By David Roberts, Legal Advice Clinic Co-ordinator

Following its pilot this March-May 2004 (and some work over the summer) we launched a bigger and better BPP Legal Advice Clinic in October with a new intake of students. Legal and Skills training occurred in early and mid-October, and the first Clinic evening session occurred on the 20th October. The Clinic has run on Wednesday nights since then.

In terms of the numbers of students and supervisors, BLAC has grown to about three times its original size! We now have about 92 LPC/BVC students and

25 GDL students working in the Clinic (there were 39 students altogether in the pilot).

To cope with increased demand, BPP lecturer Michael Lermer started working in the Clinic on a part-time basis helping us with housing and property matters. Additionally, we are pleased to announce that we have been able to secure the services of a part-time employment lawyer, Beverly Reid, who has just started working in the Clinic on Thursdays, on secondment from the Camden Tribunal Unit. We also have an additional twelve volunteer supervisors from various law firms (including Collyer Bristow, Coudert

Brothers, Levines, Russell-Cooke and Wallace LLP) and BPP staff, which brings the total number of volunteer supervisors to twenty. We are enormously grateful for all of their assistance!

BLAC has eight students placed in the legal department of Shelter doing paralegal work to assist the homeless and others with housing problems. BLAC will also be working in conjunction with another Pro Bono Centre project, Streetlaw, to provide advice to the homeless.

Although the primary extent of legal services that we provide is a one-off letter of advice, we now also provide an advocacy service

for clients with hearings before the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. BLAC Student Advisers have so far represented seven clients before the Tribunal. There are further tribunal dates booked.

It is anticipated that BLAC will provide legal services to well over 200 clients this academic year.

David runs the BPP Legal Advice Clinic and is generally in the office on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. He can be reached on 0207 430 5668 or at davidroberts@bpp.com.

Working at the RCJ's Personal Support Unit

By Alison Lambert (PT BVC)

I am currently in the second year of the part-time BVC and began my PSU training in May 2004. I was part of the inaugural group of students to be trained as a volunteer for the PSU and took over as Student Director in September 2004. We have just trained a new batch of 29 students, of whom about half are active volunteers working in the unit on two days each month.

The general bank of PSU volunteers consists of people from all walks of life, many of whom are retired from their varied careers in teaching, the army and the police force to name a few. Training law students presented a new challenge for both the PSU and the pre-existing volunteers. At the present time BPP is the only law school involved in this project.

The PSU exists to support anyone in need of emotional or

moral support who is going through the legal system at the RCJ. The volunteers are not allowed to give legal advice, no matter how tempting it is when you know the answer! Most of the clients are litigants in person, although it is common for their relatives or friends to come along to support them, and the volunteer ends up supporting all of them. The cases are many and varied, ranging from bankruptcy proceedings, housing and immigration to family cases, which can be very fraught and emotional.

Many clients are going through the appeals system and often need help filing their bundles or finding the correct office to pay fees. The role of the volunteer is challenging and the need to be versatile, supportive and to think on your feet is essential. I have learnt about civil procedure through helping clients, and have even had to address a High Court judge (at his request of course). At times clients are aggressive

and emotional, at times hysterical and sobbing, and many have mental health issues. The PSU has helped me to deal with all these types of people, and every volunteer day I learn something new or face a situation I have never dealt with before. Above all, most of the clients are exceedingly grateful for the help and support they have received, and there is great satisfaction in helping in some way to ease the stress and frustration of a court appearance.

Alison is the Student Director of the PSU Volunteering Project. If you are on the BVC course and are interested in volunteering for the PSU you can contact her at psu@bpplaw.co.uk. Students are expected to volunteer for 2 days per month and we are hoping to train new volunteers after Christmas.

“The role of the volunteer is challenging and the need to be versatile, supportive and to think on your feet is essential.”

BVC Students Already Training the Next Generation of Barristers

By Dave Hover (FT BVC)

Once upon a time, my English teacher at school asked me if I would like to play the role of a barrister in an upcoming school's Mock Trial competition. Armed with the odd episode of Kavanagh QC, I thought I'd give it a go. A few months, three rounds and a close second place in the national final later, and I was hooked on a career at the Bar.

A little over seven years passed, and I stood in Kara Irwin's office with an ill-thought-out question about pro bono. Our conversation turned to one of the pro bono Centre's new projects, helping with the Citizenship Foundation's Mock Trial Competition, and foolishly I mentioned that I had once competed in it. Kara was looking for a Student Director for the project. Go figure...

The Citizenship Foundation was set up in 1989 as an independent charity to empower

individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law, democracy and society. One of their initiatives for young people is the National Mock Trial Competition, in which students age 14-18 take on the roles of the court personnel in a series of mock trials. Some students are the barristers, others act as the witnesses, and others are the court staff and the jury. Students are marked on how they perform their roles in a head-to-head trial against another team.

The problem the schools face is that the average schoolteacher has very little (if any) knowledge of the law or the court system. The Citizenship Foundation tries to get practising barristers involved to help train the teams, but the number of barristers who can spare free time during a school day is about as high as the number of teachers who know anything about law. That's where BPP students come in. We can go along to the schools and give them a few tips on how to improve their performances.

We (hopefully) know something about what happens in court during a trial and have some rudimentary knowledge of advocacy, and pass this on to the students.

Why might you want to get involved with this project? The main reason would be to bring the law to life for younger people. Many of them will, like me, know little about the law other than the inaccurate portrayals on TV. BPP students can not only teach them something about the law, but can also answer questions about what law school is like and how you get to become a barrister that there is no-one else to ask. And for me, it was a great chance to go back to where my legal career began and to give something back and help the next generation of Kavanaghs on their way.

Dave is the project's Student Director. If you are on the BVC course and are interested in joining this project, please send an email to mocktrials@bpplaw.co.uk.



Introducing the Environmental Law Pro Bono Group

By Kelly Brinkler (FT GDL)

The Environmental Law Pro Bono Group is the first of its kind at BPP, having just started this year, and is also thought to be the first group of its kind in the UK. The Group's aims are to promote interested students' understanding of the field of environmental law, while assisting the legal work of environmental organisations.

Currently the Group has 145 members and is targeting experts

in various areas of environmental law to continue its Speaker Series. The Speaker Series aims to educate our membership and cater for a diverse range of interests within the environmental field. The Series was kindly kick-started by Paul Stookes, Chief Executive of the Environmental Law Foundation, with his talk to a roomful of enthusiastic students on 10th November. Our Group hopes to work closely with Paul and ELF in the future with three potential

research projects in the pipelines. We plan to provide a valuable resource for groups like ELF where time and resources are often in short supply. Our Group is also working closely alongside BPP's Human Rights Unit, as many of the issues we look at have a strong link with social equality issues.

With a successful start to our Speaker Series, potential research projects already

developing and the strong support from Paul at ELF, we hope to continue to develop our group and expand our potential as a resource in Environmental Law.

Kelly is one of the Groups three student directors, along with Margaret Walker (FT GDL) and Julian Balson (FT GDL).

If you are interested in joining the Group, please email them at enviro@bpplaw.co.uk.

What is a Mediation Friend?

*In BPP's innovative Mediation Friends Project, BPP law students assist otherwise unrepresented parties to mediation. The Mediation Friend meets with clients prior to the mediation to assist their preparation and then accompanies clients throughout the mediation, providing emotional and practical support. The following is a case report by Mediation Friend **Emma Brownlow-Smith** (FT GDL), followed by feedback from the case's mediator.*

The Dispute

Couple H's house, along with two other houses, had been flooded repeatedly over the past seven years, and 2004 saw the worst yet. The Housing Association decided that the other two properties had sustained a higher level of damage and accordingly they received a higher level of compensation than Couple H. Couple H felt that although they didn't suffer quite as much damage, they were equally inconvenienced and wanted better compensation.

Initial Client Contact

Before meeting them, I telephoned both the couple and the mediator, introducing myself and explaining my role. I got the impression that the couple were pleased that I would be there to support them, particularly as they were feeling rather nervous and were grateful for any extra help or support. It was also reassuring for me to talk to the mediator and improve my understanding prior to the day of the mediation.

The Mediation – Initial Meeting

On the day itself, I met with Couple H half an hour before the mediation started. We talked

over their situation and what was really worrying them. There were a lot of issues and worries, and I tried to reassure them and get them to focus on what they wanted to say in the opening session, as well as gaining as full an understanding as possible of the mediation process. The mediator also came to talk to them, to explain what was about to happen and to answer any questions. I was asked to give some legal advice, but quickly explained that I was not qualified and that my training was in mediation!

The First Joint Session

Having heard their side of the dispute, I did find myself wanting to fight their corner, as it were. I made an effort to give impartial advice and help them to understand the other side of the dispute, as ultimately mediation is based on negotiation and give and take. This was made easier after the opening session, where it became obvious that the other side was amenable and also wanted to come to an agreement. This initial session was instrumental for setting the ground rules and establishing the key aspects of the dispute as well as allowing the couple to vent a few frustrations. I believe everyone came out after the hour feeling positive and that an agreement was achievable.

Private Sessions

The subsequent private session saw us focussing on the specific points that could be resolved on the day as there were a lot of other wider issues that could not be sorted out in one day of discussions. The mediator was instrumental here in identifying the key areas where an agreement could be reached. We were then left to discuss and refine these points. I took each of

the four key points in turn and got Couple H to discuss both their aspirations and what they thought that they could achieve. I was also keen to help them to see both sides of the dispute, thus getting them to appreciate and understand that what they initially thought that they were entitled to may not be realistically achievable. I found that I had to work at keeping them on track; however, as they were keen to achieve a positive outcome, they were easily steered back on course. As a result, by the second private session with the mediator, we were able to present her with a list of concise, clear points that the couple felt could be addressed. The next time we saw her, she brought an offer from the other side, an offer that the couple were pleased to accept. The offer was marginally lower than what they had initially hoped for, but they saw the futility of spending the rest of the afternoon "arguing over a paltry 10%".

Conclusion - The Agreement

The agreement reached was simple and clear – something that all sides could understand and implement. This was not the end of the situation; after all, the present issue was symptomatic of an ongoing massive structural problem that is currently being investigated. What was especially heartening was the goodwill that both sides had – paving the way for improved communication.

My Role

I believe as a Mediation Friend, I was able to give some needed support. I was able to help Couple H to focus on the real and achievable issues by both being a sounding board, listening to their complaints

and "advising" them accordingly. They did appear to appreciate my involvement, especially when the mediator was not with us and they were unsure as to what to do. I did find it was a question of playing it by ear – contributing where I thought necessary and listening as much as possible. Above all, it was reassuring for them to have someone there who was undoubtedly on their side and supporting them on a day that was the culmination of seven years of distress and misunderstandings.

The Mediator's Feedback

"I felt comfortable leaving Emma with Couple H and felt confident that she would help them focus on the various tasks (prioritising needs) I set them in between our sessions. Sure enough, Couple H said that Emma had been of great assistance in helping keeping them focussed on the specific issues they'd been asked to consider. As issues with the property had been rumbling on for 7 years or more, there was plenty of scope for discussions to wander into the 'and another thing..' territory and Emma I'm sure did sterling work on keeping them focussed.

I know that Couple H were very appreciative of her presence and support."

If you are interested in joining the Mediation Friends Project, please send an email to mediation@bpplaw.co.uk. Please note, however, that we have already run Mediation Friends training session and do not yet have plans for another.

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 Sahar Farishta (FT LPC)

The Pro Bono centre at BPP has a commendable reputation both with the students that have worked with it last year and those that are new. It provides students with various opportunities to become involved in the practical field of what they are studying as well as giving something back to society.

I was selected to participate in the Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing Project, working alongside students from BPP and solicitors from Faegre

Benson Hobson Audley LLP and Debevoise & Plimpton LLP for the Hackney Law Centre. The project started in early October and has been a great success so far. It involves providing people with free legal advice after an interview (conducted by the students and supervised by the solicitors). The students write a letter of advice following the facts gathered from the interview. The letter is screened by the supervising solicitor and forwarded to the Hackney Law Centre to send to the clients.

My personal feelings about the project are very positive. It has allowed me to experience a practical side of what I have learnt so far in the classroom,

consequently adding a new dimension to my perception of law in practice. It has also helped me grow as a law student at BPP. This is because the work involves interviewing skills, practical legal research as well as legal writing and a general ability to interact with clients professionally. I must admit, I felt quite reassured on the day of my interview mock exam when I realised I had already conducted a real life interview with an actual client!

Naturally, most students considering involvement in pro bono projects worry about the balance between workload from studying and pro bono work. My advice, as clichéd as it may sound, would be: where there is a will there is a way!

The simple key to being involved in such projects is organisation and time management. In return, the experience and the satisfaction one achieves from helping people and contributing to the community is simply priceless.

If you are interested in being on the list of students emailed with all Law Firm Pro Bono Shadowing opportunities, please email your contact details to the Pro Bono Assistant, Kirsty Waterhouse, at kirstywaterhouse@bpp.com. Please note that most firms prefer to recruit LPC or BVC students for these projects.

Project Details - London

Most of our projects now have their own email addresses, run by each project's Student Directors. If you would like to join the following projects, please do so by emailing your contact details to the addresses below. You'll then be added to the distribution list and receive emails letting you know of upcoming events, speakers and projects.

Project	Email Address	Student Directors
Citizenship Foundation Projects (BVC only)	mocktrials@bpplaw.co.uk	Dave Hover (FT BVC)
Human Rights Unit	humanrights@bpplaw.co.uk	Alistair Robertson (FT LPC)
Environmental Law Pro Bono Group	enviro@bpplaw.co.uk	Julian Balson (FT GDL), Kelly Brinkler (FT GDL), and Margaret Walker (FT GDL)
Intellectual Property Pro Bono Group	ipprobono@bpplaw.co.uk	Mohummad Mia (PT LPC) and Suwad Patankar (PT LPC)
Legal Translation Services Group	translation@bpplaw.co.uk	Leonora Riesenburger (FT BVC) and Charlie Wilson (FT BVC)
Mediation Friends Project	mediation@bpplaw.co.uk	Kenneth Pang (FT LPC)
Personal Support Unit Volunteering Project (BVC only)	psu@bpplaw.co.uk	Alison Lambert (PT BVC)
Streetlaw	streetlaw@bpplaw.co.uk	Charlotte Johnson (FT LPC) and Helen Mulligan (FT LPC)

Project Details – Leeds

Several of the projects in Leeds do not yet have project email addresses. Each, however, has one or more Student Director(s), whom you may contact for more information on the project at their email addresses below. Each project also has a staff contact. Claire Daniel (clairedaniel@bpp.com) is the general staff contact for Leeds pro bono enquiries.

Project	Student Director(s)	Email Address	Staff Contact
Human Rights Unit	Tom Ward (FT LPC)	wardt@bpplaw.co.uk	Jane Sendall
Intellectual Property Pro Bono Group	Katie Smith (FT GDL) and Thomas Crown (FT LPC)	LeedsIP@bpplaw.co.uk	Claire Daniel
Leeds Cares	Shiraz Sethi (FT LPC)	sethis@bpplaw.co.uk	Katie Jukes
Mediation Friends Project	Pearl Kuranchie (FT LPC)	kuranchiep@bpplaw.co.uk	Katie Jukes
Streetlaw	Ruth Meehan (FT GDL) and Thomas Lillie (FT GDL)	meehanr@bpplaw.co.uk and lilliet@bpplaw.co.uk	Yasmin Pitter

PRO BONO CENTRE
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