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The Pro Bono Centre – An Update

By Kara Irwin, Director of Pro Bono

The Pro Bono Centre now has ten permanent projects involving over 1,200 of our students in events, meetings, presentations, lectures, training sessions, research, drafting and representation on a daily basis in both London and Leeds. Fourteen law firms now have formal arrangements with the Centre supervising students on various projects, and many additional solicitors and barristers contribute to our work on an individual basis. With the Law in the Community Assistance requirement on the BVC, pro bono is integrating a clinical and professional ethics element into our provision of legal education. The Centre continues to work closely with Careers to help students find internships and careers in the non-profit sector from as near as the AIRE Centre to as far away as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

One of our fastest growing projects this year has been Streetlaw. Based on the philosophies of the US-based Street Law Program, our Streetlaw Project provides education and information about the law, democracy and human rights to citizens who may otherwise not have access to such legal knowledge. The project started up at the end of last academic year under the co-ordination of Student Directors

Charlotte Johnson (now FT LPC) and Helen Mulligan (now FT LPC). Within a few short months, the two had developed two presentations and had organised law students to deliver them in a number of secondary schools around London.

This year, the Project has grown tremendously, expanding to other audiences:

- Under the direction of Jo Sutherland (PT GDL), the prisons scheme is now up and running at Pentonville Prison, with students delivering presentations on discrimination and legal disclosure to inmates;
- The homeless team has prepared a presentation for delivery at London shelters;
- The secondary schools project has long standing connections with many schools across London, including the government flagship school Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney and has been working with law firm Mayer Brown Rowe & Maw LLP at Morpeth School in Bethnal Green;
- Leeds Student Directors Ruth Meehan (Leeds GDL) and Thomas Lillie (Leeds GDL) and their team are winning rave reviews from secondary schools in Leeds;
- Managed by Jennifer Robertson-Jones (FT LPC), the

primary schools project has developed links with many London schools and is working with Shearman & Sterling at Wellington Primary School in Tower Hamlets;

- The excluded pupils project, under Sarah Dowler (FT LPC) is currently working with Southwark Council and has run sessions at the Damilola Taylor Leisure Centre in Peckham and at Millwall F.C. on topics ranging from the youth justice system to young people's employment and consumer rights;
- Eve Macatonia (FT BVC) and a team of students from the Intellectual Property Pro Bono Group have delivered a presentation on copyright to music students at the London College of Contemporary Music and the Guitar Institute; and
- In Leeds a team of students delivered a presentation on the Mental Capacity Bill to members of Speak Up, an advocacy group for learning disabled people.

Please read on in this issue for information on the upcoming National Pro Bono Week and updates on volunteer projects in Leeds, a recent panel on in-house pro bono, and one student's work on a professional negligence case.

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

In-house Pro Bono

By Mark Hammond (FT LPC)

A literal analysis of the words "corporate pro bono" suggests to most people a contradiction in terms, but thanks to the commitment of in-house solicitors at Vodafone, Lloyds and Capgemini, who came to speak at a panel event at BPP in February, this is beginning to change.

These companies are part of a growing number of corporations in both the UK and America that are now doing pro bono work in their in-house legal departments.

The way that it works with Lloyds, Capgemini and Vodafone is that the Solicitors Pro Bono Group, a small London-based charity, provides them with the majority of their pro bono work and the in-house solicitors do the work in addition to their regular work load.

What makes such commitment so admirable is that unlike doing pro bono work at a firm where the time spent working on pro bono cases can count towards solicitors' billable hours, when it is done in-house there are no billable hours quotas to meet,

and all pro bono work must be done on top of their regular workloads for the company.

So why do it? Solicitors do it partly because doing pro bono work in-house can be counted towards any appraisal reports that are done, and partly because doing pro bono work in-house provides solicitors with an excellent opportunity to solve legal problems that they normally wouldn't be asked to solve in their regular line of work.

Corporations support it because it is a good way of growing their

goodwill and demonstrating that their policy of corporate social responsibility is more than mere window dressing.

That said, the big question that most students had of the panelists is whether in-house counsel offer training contracts. Most companies don't offer a training contract directly, but there is a way around this problem. If you're prepared to work as a paralegal in-house you may be offered a training contract once you've impressed the team.



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 Nina Skomorowski (FT BVC)

What pro bono work have you done?

I have been working on a professional negligence along with two other students. Together we have been working with Lewis Silken, under one of the supervision of one of their partners, in a claim against a solicitor regarding negligent advice that he gave to one of his Clients. The claim is for a substantial amount, but the Client cannot afford the legal fees involved in bringing a claim. Our job was to read all the correspondence involved and then together compile a letter of claim.

What legal skills/ knowledge did you use in doing this work?

The first thing that we looked at was the Solicitor's Code of Conduct to establish in what ways the Solicitor had breached this. Some of these were quite obvious; for example, breach of confidentiality, but some were more complex. We then looked at all the areas where the Solicitor had dispensed advice and had to ascertain whether this advice was correct. This meant researching areas of law that I was not familiar with, such as licensing laws, and becoming reacquainted with other areas, such as beneficial interests in property. It was also necessary to look at procedural matters, such as how to apply for licenses and when decisions of local councils should be appealed.

One of the key skills that we

utilised was the ability to sift through masses of correspondence (spanning nearly 4 years) and pick out what was relevant and helpful to our case. It was also necessary to use legal research skills to study the various areas of law. We had a meeting with the Client as well, to ask him further questions, and that gave us all an opportunity to put our conference skills into good use. However, I have also had to use my written skills to help write the letter of claim, which was really helpful as it taught me how to be concise and accurate.

How did conducting this work contribute to your understanding of the law?

I think it contributed massively in two distinct ways. The first way it broadened my understanding is by helping me to become familiar with a specialist area of law that otherwise I would have had no knowledge of. Professional negligence is quite complicated but very interesting and appears to involve slightly different skills than other types of negligence claim. It is essential to be able to link the negligent advice with clear financial loss, so assessing quantum is a key part of the claim. I feel like I have grasped an area of law that has the potential to be very helpful throughout my career.

The second way that this work contributed to my understanding of law was that it showed what a massive impact, both financially and emotionally, legal matters can have on an individual's life. The Client we worked with is an elderly gentleman who simply would not be able to pursue this claim if he had to pay the legal costs of Solicitors and yet he has a strong claim for a substantial

amount of money. When we met him in the conference, he was so clearly grateful for the work we had done and thanked us all over and over again.

What supervision did you receive and was it helpful?

An associate in Lewis Silken who was very kind and very supportive supervised us. She arranged for us to have a room where we could look over the papers and kept in touch via email. There was also a partner who overlooked the entire claim and we would all report to her once in a while. She edited our letter of claim and took on the responsibility of the more difficult parts of the law. It was very helpful; they were both approachable and flexible. I do not think the supervision could have been any better.

How do you see the work fitting in to your overall legal education?

It has really enhanced it and I am glad I did it, even though at times it was quite difficult. It helps with so many things - we had to work as a team, and yet research as individuals. I had to get to grips with the Solicitor's Code of Conduct and I now understand how a firm works, all of which I think has had a positive, practical effect on my education.

Has the work changed your views?

Yes - I would like to go into the area of professional negligence!

"...it broadened my understanding by helping me to become familiar with a specialist area of law that otherwise I would have had no knowledge of."



Leeds Volunteers!

Through the Leeds Cares Project at the BPP Pro Bono Centre, Leeds, students volunteer their time and non-legal services on a variety of charity projects.

By Vicky Houghton (LPC Leeds)

The Leeds Cares' first challenge kicked off on 26 January 2005, when Laura Hawksorth, Rebecca Barlow, Rachael Swann, Rekha Bouri, Lisa Conway, Michelle Mullin, Alexander Goldingham and I spent the day painting and decorating corridors at Ladybeck House.

Ladybeck House is an English Churches Housing Group scheme that provides direct access to short-stay accommodation for single homeless people aged 16 to 65. Staff provide the residents with

emotional and practical support, helping them to develop life skills and live in a dignified manner.

The painting began at 10am. It took a full morning to complete one corridor – much longer than expected! The cavalry arrived in the afternoon, and by 5.30pm the second and third corridors on the top floor were finished.

The highlight of the day was a staff member's comments; she was gobsmacked by how much brighter and cleaner the hostel looked. It made the hard work all worthwhile.

All in all the painting challenge went extremely well even though it was particularly hard work. We certainly all ached a bit the following day! The walls looked great, which was great news for the residents. Our team's comments on the day:

- "The challenge was a success. It was a great feeling to do something good for the community and to know that all our efforts were appreciated."

- "I was shattered afterwards but it was really worth it, I really felt as if we have done something to help."

- "What a sense of achievement I've got from doing something to help the hostel."

By Shiraz Sethi (LPC Leeds)

Two months of planning, rigorous security checks and regulatory requirements finally came to fruition on the 20th April 2005, when we finally volunteered on our first project for Barnados, the charity that works with vulnerable children and young people.

I am the Student Director of the Leeds Cares Pro Bono Project, and I worked with fellow students Sanjeet Plaha, Hannah Robinson and Sarwet Shaheen to clean and re-organise a families' living room and lounge. The room was in a terrible condition. We cleared out the room completely, then cleaned, organised and decorated it, transforming it into a family room/ bedroom.

It was very gratifying to see the amazing transformation that had taken place in the space of 4 hours. Upon our departure, a family member said, "Wow what a transformation – you can actually see the floor!" I am sure all of the volunteers agree that this was time well spent. It allowed us to appreciate life and our own family and homes. Words cannot describe the joy and happiness that we saw on the faces of the family - just that was worth all of our efforts.

Human Rights Unit Update

By Hamza Drabu (FT GDL), HRU Student Director 2005-6

A sampling of some of the HRU's successes this academic year:

Research:

- In the weekly Liberty Letters Clinic, BPP students reply to some of the thousands of requests for help and information that Liberty receives each year. Liberty solicitors then edit the letters before sending them out. To date, we have drafted 250 replies for Liberty.

- We have conducted extensive research projects for Reprieve. These include a project concerning the creation and constitution of the Iraqi Special Tribunals, and the interim authorities in Iraq. Another dealt with the human rights situation in Guantanamo Bay and was compiled by over 60 students.

- 15 students contributed research to Reprieve/Justice in Exile's work on the recent Channel 4 "torture season", in particular the programme *Is Torture a Good Idea?* Students worked on research into 10 different jurisdictions' definitions of 'mental competency', presenting detailed reports to Reprieve, which will use the research in conjunction with the South Carolina Center for Capital Litigation.

- A team of four students recently prepared an amicus curiae brief for the Brazilian human rights organisation, Terra de Direitos and the Robert F Kennedy Memorial Human Rights Center in Washington, DC. A full brief will be presented to the Inter American Commission of Human Rights. This has been a massive project, involving research and application of multi-jurisdictional case law and comparative work between the Inter American,

African and European Courts of Human Rights.

Events:

- Dr Philip Tahmindjis of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute came to BPP in November to discuss the HRI's work in jurisdictions around the world, including the work they are doing to rebuild the legal profession in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as work in East Timor and southern Africa.

- We welcomed Shami Chakrabati, Director of Liberty, to talk to a crowded lecture theatre in January, soon after the Law Lords' ruling regarding detention without trial.

- A team within the Unit organised a terrifically successful fundraiser for Liberty and Make Poverty History at Turnmills nightclub, Farringdon in April. Over 600 people attended this

event, including BPP students, trainees at various firms and members of Lawyers for Liberty.

- The Unit organised a debate on the merits of the Human Rights Act in April, chaired by James Welch, Legal Director of Liberty and judged by representatives from Allen & Overy and the Bar Council.

- In May, the Unit hosted an Amicus event in which Juan Melendez gave a detailed account of his 18 years on death row in Florida, only to later be proven innocent by evidence that had been withheld by prosecutors during his trial. This was followed by a screening of *Deadline*, a documentary about the death penalty moratorium in Illinois.

If you are interested in joining the Human Rights Unit, send an email with your contact details to humanrights@bpplaw.co.uk.

National Pro Bono Week 2005 starts 6th June!

The Pro Bono Centre will be hosting the following NPBW event:

PRACTITIONERS AND LAW STUDENTS: MODELS FOR JOINT PRO BONO PROVISION

Wednesday, 8th June 2005
12 noon until 2pm
BPP Law School, Holborn
68-70 Red Lion Street

Featuring a panel session followed by a lunch reception - all welcome

A new model of pro bono provision is emerging in which practitioners and law students team up to provide pro bono legal services. This model benefits everyone

involved: the students' assistance makes pro bono provision less time-consuming and more practical for practitioners; firms enhance their reputation among law students and the wider community; students gain practical legal experience as well as contact with practising solicitors and a model for how to incorporate pro bono into a legal career; and most importantly, the public benefits from the increased availability of pro bono legal services.

At this event, we will share three models of practitioner-law student joint pro bono projects and discuss

the practical considerations in structuring each.

Chaired by **Kara Irwin**, Director of Pro Bono at BPP Law School

Panelists include:

• **Robert Bond**, partner at Faegre & Benson. A team of our students, together with and supervised by Faegre solicitors, run a legal advice session at Hackney Law Centre; Robert has also taken on small teams of our students to assist him and others in work for their firm's pro bono clients.

• **Julie Dickins**, partner at Mayer Brown Rowe & Maw. A team of her

solicitors and our students provide joint Streetlaw presentations to a secondary school in Tower Hamlets.

• **Suzie Turner**, pro bono partner at Dechert LLP. Our students shadow Dechert solicitors on a rota at North Kensington Law Centre.

RSVP – Angela Lunn
admin@probonouk.net

Go to the link at www.probonouk.net for more information and a list of NPBW events.

Law firms, chambers, law schools and the legal professional bodies all come together during the week to support and promote the provision of pro bono legal services. Please see a list of the week's events at www.probonouk.net, which also includes information on how to join any of the events that are open to the public. In particular, please note that the BPP Pro Bono Centre will be involved with or hosting the following events during the week:

- **Monday 6th June, 6pm, Law Society** - NPBW Launch takes place at the Law Society, including screening a video "Make a Difference", which features students from our Streetlaw - Prisons group and our Liberty Letters Clinic.
- **Monday 6th June, 5.30pm, Milwall Football Club Community Centre** - Our Streetlaw project is delivering an interactive presentation on youth crime to the Centre's youth group.
- **Tuesday 7th June, 6pm, Law Society** - Kara Irwin, Director of Pro Bono is on a panel of speakers discussing "Pro Bono: The International Dimension".
- **Wednesday 8th June, 9.30am, Trinity School** - Our Streetlaw project is delivering an interactive presentation on the law to secondary school pupils in Woodford, Essex.
- **Wednesday 8th June, 12 noon, BPP Holborn** - Kara is chairing a panel of speakers discussing "Practitioners and Law Students - Models for Joint Pro Bono Provision" - see above for more information on this event.
- **Wednesday 8th June, 3pm, Portcullis House, Westminster** - Kara and several of the Centre's Student Directors are manning a BPP Pro Bono Centre stall at a reception for Members of Parliament, hosted by the Attorney General and Solicitor General.
- **Thursday 9th June, 12.30pm, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP** - Kara and the Liberty Letters Clinic Student Directors are delivering a training session to Weil's lawyers to get them involved in our Clinic.
- **Thursday 9th June, evening, Law Society** – Kara, Sarah Dowler and Helen Mulligan (both FT LPC, Streetlaw Student Directors) are representing the BPP Pro Bono Centre at the Solicitors Pro Bono Group Annual Awards Ball.
- **Friday 10th June, 10am-3pm, Law Society** - Kara and a team of Streetlaw students are helping run a workshop "Pro Bono as Public Legal Education".

Pro Bono Centre Summer Plans

The Pro Bono Centre will remain open all summer. Most projects will continue over the summer, but on a reduced basis with those students who are available. If you wish to remain on the emailing list for your project, please make sure that you email the project with a non-BPP email address, as almost all BPP student accounts will be shut down as of 1st July (except part time students' accounts). Students who are leaving BPP in June may remain on the projects' emailing lists, but from September priority for all pro bono opportunities will be given to then-current BPP students.